

Alabama Update - February 2006

The Mobile Register reports that 46 Alabama schools will be awarded technology grants under a program known as ACCESS (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide). Part of a \$3.4 million pilot study, ACCESS will offer electives, advanced courses, and ACT prep courses not always available in students' home schools. The 46 participating schools had to demonstrate, in their applications, how technology would be used to benefit their community. Funded by Federal technology funds, the largest grant -- \$389,000 -- went to Alma Bryant High School in Mobile County.

Title I Report reports that Alabama has been required by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to allow the transfer of students from low-performing Birmingham schools under the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The district had offered a tutoring option, but USED's ruling has required the district to notify parents of more than 5,000 students that they are eligible to transfer to another public school in Birmingham. The State asked USED to hold off its ruling for a year because of concern that the schools into which students might transfer could fail to meet AYP this year, but USED rejected the request.

Alaska Update - February 2006

The Juneau Empire reports that a bill is pending in the Alaska legislature that would cap student:teacher ratios in Grades 1-3 at 20:1. If passed, the requirement would become effective for Grade 1 by July 1, 2007; for Grade 2 by July 1, 2008; and for Grade 3 by July 1, 2009. District officials are prepared to argue that the bill should not be passed unless additional funds are made available.

The Anchorage Daily News reports that Alaska's projected \$1.2 billion budget surplus is likely to result in a \$90 million increase -- to \$980 million -- in K-12 education funding. However, most of the increase would go to higher retirement and transportation costs. Last year, the legislature created a public education fund for future education budgets and put \$400 million of last year's surplus in the fund. Governor Murkowski has proposed putting \$565 million of this year's expected surplus in the fund. This prefunding of K-12 education would help school districts with their budgeting. Currently, they establish budgets at the beginning of the school year, but do not know their exact funding level until the State budget is passed in the Spring.

Governor Frank Murkowski, in his State-of-the-State address and in an announcement the following day, called for higher State per-pupil funding and monetary rewards to school staff for improved student scores on State assessments. The Governor will ask the legislature to increase per-pupil spending in FY 2007 to \$5,352 per year -- a nine percent increase over FY 2006.

A number of bills are being considered by the legislature including one that would give a 50 percent increase in per-pupil State aid to schools that reduce their K-3 classes to 15 or fewer students. Another bill, introduced by the Governor, would provide cash bonuses of up to \$5,500 to staff at schools that show the greatest improvement in State test scores. It is estimated that the program would cost \$15.4 million if 25 percent of the State's schools reached the highest level of bonuses.

Arizona Update - February 2006

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Arizona funded new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appreciation of nearly \$18 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 18,000 children.

The Arizona Republic reports that the State's Charter School Board has added academic performance as a criterion in the charter schools' review process. State education officials are concerned about charter school performance. For example, only 36 percent of the tenth-graders in Arizona's 516 charter schools passed the math component of the State assessment last Spring compared with 73 percent at traditional public schools. The first listing of "failing" charter schools will come out this October.

On March 11-13, 2006, Arizona State University is sponsoring a Microcomputers in Education Conference (<http://mec.asu.edu>).

The Arizona Republic reports that ten Arizona school districts have collectively hired two Republican-affiliated lobbyists to represent their interests in the State legislature. The ten districts -- Cave Creek, Chandler, Deer Valley, Dysart, Fountain Hills, Gilbert, Glendale Elementary, Paradise Valley, Pendergast, and Scottsdale -- represent 20 percent of the State's enrollment. They hope to get a larger piece of Arizona's expected \$1 billion budget surplus.

Arkansas Update - February 2006

The Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators and the Arkansas Department of Education on February 27 to March 1, 2006, are sponsoring a Technology Information Conference for Administrative Leadership. For more information on the conference, go to: www.portical.org/ar_conference.html.

In 2003, the Special Education Unit of the Arkansas Department of Education received a five-year grant from the Federal office of Special Education Programs. Known as the Arkansas State Improvement Grant (SIG), the project focuses on developing and implementing positive behavioral support systems in Arkansas schools. As reported in Counterpoint, the SIG used Project Achieve, a nationally recognized school improvement program to train 36 District Leadership Teams (DLT) during 2004-05 and is providing technical assistance in 12 school districts and 25 schools this school year. In early 2006, more DLTs will be trained and more schools will receive technical assistance in the 2006-07 school year.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Arkansas funded new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of more than \$9 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 9,000 children.

California Update - February 2006

Education Daily reports that the California Department of Education and the State legislature have negotiated an agreement by which some special education high school students would be exempted from having to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to graduate. Waivers of the test requirement would be available only to students who: (a) have a current IEP; (b) are on track for 2006 graduation; (c) complete all other State and local graduation requirements; (d) have failed the CAHSEE at least twice (once in the last year); and (e) are certified as recipients of supplemental or remedial instruction in the language arts and math skills tested in the CAHSEE.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed to spend a total of \$26.3 billion over the next decade for school construction, including 40,000 new classrooms and the modernization of 140,000 existing classrooms. As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Governor's new operating budget includes \$4 billion more for education of which \$1.67 billion would go toward repayment of borrowed funds from prior years. The Governor wants the additional funding to be used for teacher training, vocational education, new art and music programs, and tutoring for the State's high school exit exam. The Superintendent of the Los Angeles school district has argued that the added money should be used to reduce class sizes, particularly in middle and high school mathematics. The Governor's address also noted that the State's Proposition 49 becomes effective, providing an additional \$428 million for afterschool programs.

The Association Press reports that the \$20 million in special funding to tutor students failing the California high school exit exam is not nearly enough. The funding was budgeted to provide \$600 for each of 33,300 eligible students; but it has been estimated that the number of students in need of the tutoring could be as high as 100,000. The special funding is now being allocated only to schools at which at least 28 percent of students in this year's senior class failed the exam. Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed increasing the total to \$40 million in next year's budget. State education officials say that other State sources could be used for such tutoring, including

\$52.6 million for tutoring special education students and \$165 million for a variety of secondary school programs that could be used for exit exam tutoring.

A Republican California legislator has proposed to break up into smaller districts any school district with more than 500,000 students. Specifically aimed at Los Angeles Unified School District, the anticipated bill would subdivide LAUSD into at least 15 smaller districts of fewer than 50,000 students each.

Colorado Update - February 2006

The Denver Post reports that, as of this January, all students who fail to show up for classes will be considered “dropouts” unless there is written proof of transfer to another school. In the past, schools were able to classify as transfers students who left their schools even though they never enrolled elsewhere. In 2003, nearly 20 percent of the seniors in Colorado’s largest public high schools left school and the State’s student tracking system has been inconsistent in identifying transfers. It is expected that dropout rates for Colorado high schools will increase dramatically.

The Rocky Mountain News reports that a large fraction of Denver’s school teachers are opting to participate in the district’s merit pay plan called Professional Compensation System for Teachers -- known more commonly as ProComp. Through the end of December, about 500 teachers had accepted ProComp, nearly two-thirds of those who considered the option. Most of the acceptances are from elementary teachers, although 140 secondary teachers and 30 counselors and social workers have also agreed to work under ProComp.

Connecticut Update - February 2006

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Connecticut funded a small amount of new 21st Century Community Learning Center Programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of more than \$8 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 8,000 children.

According to the Hartford Courant, 109 of Connecticut's 169 local school boards have endorsed a legal challenge to the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) filed by the State's Attorney General. The lawsuit contends that NCLB's requirement for testing will unfairly cost states and localities hundred of millions of dollars.

Delaware Update - February 2006

As reported in Education Week, Governor Ruth Ann Minner's State-of-the-State address proposed to fund the second phase of the State's plan to implement full-day kindergarten Statewide by 2008. Last year, the legislature approved \$3 million for Phase I and \$13 million for construction of new kindergarten classrooms. The Governor also requested the addition of ten new mathematics specialists for middle schools, in addition to the 22 middle school math specialists funded (at \$13 million) in prior years.

The Delaware legislature has passed a bill that would release \$5 million in energy funding to the State's school districts and charter schools over the next two years. The State funds energy costs at a rate of \$1,862 per teaching unit (defined as a teacher and 16 students), only \$14 per unit more than in the 1982-83 school year. It is estimated that Delaware public schools had a \$7.7 million shortfall in State energy funding last year. About \$2.5 million would be distributed this fiscal year, with a like amount distributed in FY 2007 which begins on July 1, 2006.

Florida Update - February 2006

As reported in Education Daily, the Florida State Supreme Court has ruled that the State's Opportunity Scholarship program (OSP) is unconstitutional. The OSP, which has allowed failing students to attend private schools at State expense, will likely be discontinued after this school year. This year, it has provided about 700 students with an average of \$4,350 in tuition aid to attend private schools. The overturning of OSP may be precedent for elimination of Florida's McKay Scholarships, a voucher program that funds the attendance of disabled students at private schools.

Quality Counts, compiled by Education Week, has concluded that public schools in Florida tend to be the largest in the nation. Many educators believe this is detrimental to student performance. A State task force plans to recommend smaller middle and high schools and Florida's two largest school districts are leaning toward smaller learning environments. The State Superintendent, John Winn, has proposed allocating \$1.9 billion for school construction this year, but a much lower construction budget is expected to emerge from the legislature.

The Orlando Sentinel reports that Republicans in the Florida legislature are pushing for a Statewide referendum that would weaken the State's controversial class size limits but which would require school districts to allocate at least 65 percent of their operating budgets to classroom instruction. State education officials suggest that the current class size requirement, if not amended, would require the State to build 6,500 new classrooms this year at a cost of nearly \$2 billion. None of Florida's school districts currently spend the 65 percent on instruction; on average, they allocated 58.8 percent in 2002-03 (the last year data was available from the National Center for Education Statistics).

As reported in The Miami Herald, Governor Jeb Bush has proposed a \$237 million plan to recruit and retain teachers. Under the plan, nearly all of the State's 164,000 teachers would receive laptop computers -- at a cost of \$188 million -- paid for by revenues from Broward County's new slot machine casinos. The Governor's laptop plan, endorsed by the State's associations of school boards and district superintendents, would allow schools and districts that

have already purchased laptops for their teachers to use the money for hardware upgrades and software.

The Miami Herald reports that Florida's public school science curriculum, scheduled for 2007, will not be implemented until at least a year later. A review of the curriculum will begin in June 2007 and be completed in February 2008, with revised standards published in August 2008 and new textbooks introduced for the 2010-11 school year. Because of the delay, the debate over evolution will take place after Governor Bush leaves office.

In response to the universal preschool law that became effective last year, the number of accredited early childhood programs has grown to nearly 880, a 13 percent increase over the previous year. For example, enrollments in preschools operated by La Petite Academy has more than tripled in the past year. Florida-based Cambridge Education, Inc. currently operates four schools and expects to open six more in the near future.

As reported in The Orlando Ledger, the Florida legislature is considering adoption of a college-like credit system to replace the current high school grade promotion structure. Currently, nearly 30 percent of the State's entering high school freshmen do not graduate in four years. Under the proposed plan, students would be grouped, not according to the number of years in school, but by the number of credits earned.

Georgia Update - February 2006

The Atlanta Journal Constitution reports that Governor Sonny Perdue is seeking a law that would require schools to spend 65 percent of their funding “in the classroom.” The same approach has been taken in a number of other states including Florida where it has been criticized as a way to hide inadequate school funding. Under the Governor’s plan, “classroom” expenses would include teacher salaries, textbooks, field trips, etc. Librarians, principals, resource offers, counselors, etc. would not. Beginning in 2008 school districts not meeting the 65 percent mandate would have to raise their instructional spending by two percent each year until they reach the 65 percent level. Academically high-performing schools below the 65 percent mark could receive waivers.

Among the Governor’s other proposals is a plan to spend \$23 million in FY 2007 to raise Georgia’s high school graduation rates including the placement of a “completion counselor” in every high school. The Governor also proposed to allocate \$10 million to give every Georgia teacher a \$100 classroom gift card to be used for classroom supplies.

Hawaii Update - February 2006

The Honolulu Advertiser reports that a State task force has recommended the establishment of a new State authority to oversee early childhood education throughout Hawaii. The Early Learning Authority would eventually manage as much as \$160 million in early childhood funding, would guide a new institute to promote the training of preschool teachers, and would move Hawaii to universal preschool for four-year-olds. Currently, more than half of the State's three- and four-year-olds attend preschool and Governor Linda Lingle has allocated an additional \$5 million to provide preschool for 1,000 low-income children. Even if the legislature provides the \$60-475 million needed for universal preschool, the State does not have enough classroom capacity or qualified teachers.

Idaho Update - February 2006

In his final State-of-the-State address, Governor Dirk Kempthorne proposed an FY 2007 appropriation for K-12 public education of about \$1.05 billion -- a 4.9 percent increase over the previous year. The Governor's plan includes:

- \$27 million increase for teacher salaries;
- \$4.5 million for school construction and maintenance; and
- an increase to four and three years, respectively, of math and science as graduation requirements (the current requirement is two years for each).

As reported in Education Daily, Governor Kempthorne is proposing to allocate \$5 million for the establishment of a new community college system that would be housed in existing public secondary school buildings after regular school hours. The Governor argues that such a system could make more efficient use of school facilities that are generally idle after 3:00 P.M.

The Idaho Virtual Academy has been awarded accreditation for the 2005-06 school year by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS). A public virtual charter school, the Idaho Virtual Academy serves more than 1,800 K-9 students from all parts of the State. The NAAS is an accreditation organization covering the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.

The Idaho Statesman reports that an Idaho legislator is seeking to pass a bill that would lower the minimum age requirement for school attendance from five to four, thus permitting State funding of pre-kindergarten programs. Idaho is believed to be the only state which prohibits such State support.

Illinois Update - February 2006

The Chicago Tribune reports that Illinois will be making major changes to its State assessments for the first time in seven years. Under the State's 2002 reforms, students in grades 3-8 must be tested in reading and mathematics this year. Some questions will be revised and struggling students could receive an additional ten minutes to complete the exams. A new section will be added to allow student scores to be compared with students nationwide.

Lt. Governor Pat Quinn has proposed a program to provide every Illinois seventh-grader with a laptop computer beginning next Fall. The 169,000 students who receive the computers would be allowed to keep them throughout their high school years. Because of the volume purchase, State officials believe the computers can be acquired at a cost of \$300 per unit. Modeled after the Maine laptop program, the proposed I-Connect Computer Technology Act must be approved by the legislature and, when fully implemented, would cost \$50 million per year. The plan would be paid for by retaining a portion of the State sales tax that is now rebated to retailers.

As reported in the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago school district, in cooperation with the teachers union, has established a pilot teacher evaluation program in which skilled teachers mentor and evaluate their peers. Modeled after a peer review program in Toledo, the pilot project will begin with eight of Chicago's lowest-performing schools -- Attucks, Bass, Burke, Chalmers, Hamline, and Piccolo Elementary Schools and Richards and Wills High Schools. Under the current evaluation system, nearly all of the district's 20,600 teachers are rated "superior" or "excellent" making the ratings virtually meaningless. If the new system is successful, the district hopes to implement it systemwide, a process that would take many years and considerable expense.

The Chicago school district has approved Illinois' first virtual public school -- the Chicago Virtual Academy. Operated by K12, Inc., the Academy would serve as many as 600 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Under the plan, students would receive a loaned computer, free Internet access, and sufficient books and other materials for their online courses. The district believes it has addressed State concerns that students receive 300 minutes a day of verifiable instruction so that the district can receive State aid. The Academy would cost the

district \$5,075 per student and, because of Chicago's population density, students can see live faculty at least once a week.

Faced with a \$328 million budget deficit, Chicago Public Schools is hoping the Illinois legislature will approve a \$100 million increase in State funding for the district as asked for in the Governor's proposed budget. As reported by the Chicago Tribune, among other funding sources that district officials hope will help close the deficit are:

- approximately \$30 million from the Renaissance initiative to reform the district's lowest performing schools;
- \$30 million from local business donations;
- \$10 million from foundations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; and
- a \$55 million school property tax increase.

This still leaves a gap of more than \$150 million. The district is likely to eliminate 600 teaching jobs due to enrollment declines; to drop the 71 new reading coaches hired last year; to cut after-school programs by ten percent; to reduce administrative costs by \$50 million; and to dip into cash reserves.

Iowa Update - February 2006

Now in its second year, Iowa Learning Online is offering a growing number of high school classes that have particular benefit to students in small districts without the resources to provide the courses in their schools. As reported in The Des Moines Register, the number of courses offered by Iowa Learning Online has increased from three in June 2004 to 14 this semester. Enrollment in the program has also grown -- from 264 last year to 563 this year. State officials consider Iowa Learning Online (and its annual budget of \$600,000) to be one way for the State to help high school students meet the rigorous course guidelines scheduled to be effective by July 2009.

Counterpoint reports that Iowa has developed the Iowa Assistive Technology Text Reader Project to identify interventions that can close the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students. The project is investigating the impact text reader software with embedded study skills has on student achievement. Thus far, the project has shown positive outcomes in closing the achievement gap with reading fluency of disabled students improved at twice the expected rate and comprehension scores improved by an average of 13 percent.

The Iowa State legislature is wrangling over the amount of the funding increase for K-12 education. The Republican House has passed a four percent -- \$103 million -- increase, while the Democrat-controlled Senate is pushing for a six percent -- \$157 million -- hike.

Kansas Update - February 2006

New State Superintendent Bob Corkins has backed off his plan for a State-supported voucher system given vocal opposition from some members of the State School Board. On the other hand, he is pushing for legislation that would expand the number of charter schools in the State. Currently, charter schools are approved at the local school board level. The Superintendent's proposed legislation would offer a State charter approval process for applicants turned down at the local level.

An audit of the Kansas education system has determined that the State would have to more than double its K-12 budget next year to meet the State's higher student performance goals. As reported in Education Daily, the court-ordered audit found that the State's current K-12 budget of \$285 million must increase by \$316 million in 2006-07 to implement the education programs passed by the legislature or by \$399 million to meet the State's performance standards. The greatest share of this latter increase may be attributed to the costs of educating special needs students -- poor students (\$361 million) and special education students (\$75 million). Although the State's overall enrollment has declined by two percent since 1999-2000, the number of students in poverty has increased 26 percent, the number of special education students has increased 16 percent, and the number of English language learners has grown 27 percent. While rural schools will see little additional funding, larger Kansas school districts would get significant increases -- Kansas City (\$47 million), Shawnee Mission (\$21 million), Olathe (\$19 million), and Blue Valley (\$11 million).

The Kansas State School Board has made a number of recommendations including:

- voluntary full-day kindergarten at an estimated cost of \$77 million; the State currently only funds half-day programs;
- development of an additional Statewide database to track student progress (\$2.3 million);
- allowing charter school applicants, who have been turned down by local school boards, to appeal to the State;
- establishing a minimum funding level of \$5,600 for charter school students; currently, the State's 26 charter schools receive \$4,000 per student.

Kentucky Update - February 2006

The Louisville Courier-Journal reports that, under a proposed new plan, beginning with the Class of 2012, Kentucky high school students be required to take at least four years of mathematics -- including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II -- in order to graduate. Currently, they are required to take only three math credits -- Algebra I, Geometry, and an elective.

The Associated Press reports that Governor Ernie Fletcher, in his State-of-the-State address, made a number of education proposals, including:

- Raising teacher salaries;
- Increasing funding for preschool programs;
- More money for educational technology;
- More rigorous high school graduation requirements.

The Governor recommended new investments technology to track student performance but did not indicate the amount he would allocate.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Kentucky funded a small number of new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of more than \$13 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 13,000 children.

According to the Louisville Courier-Journal, the State has underfunded education by \$283 million over the past six years; the State spends an average of only about \$20 million a year for school technology. Governor Fletcher has proposed -- in his new budget -- to spend nearly \$70 million next year for upgrading classroom technology and establishing an online testing system. The Governor also proposed to add three days -- one for teacher training and two for instruction - - to the school year by 2008.

Maine Update - February 2006

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor John Baldacci proposed to spend an additional \$3 million for high-performing small schools, as well as an additional \$2 million for local/regional partnerships to provide academic support services in rural school districts. The Governor also called for a moratorium on the development of district-level assessments that the State had mandated.

In an effort to get more of Maine's high school students to seek postsecondary education, the State has decided to replace the Maine Education Assessment (MEA) beginning next Spring. The reading, writing, and mathematics sections of the MEA will be replaced by the traditional Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the MEA's science section will be replaced by a new "integrated science assessment" in the 2007-08 school year.

The Associated Press reports that Maine is planning to continue its ground-breaking laptop computer program beyond its original four years. The State education department will be soliciting bids for another four-year laptop program; if no satisfactory offers are made, the State could extend its existing \$37 million contract with Apple for one more year at a cost of \$8 million (or \$10 million if it replaces all of its existing iBooks with new machines).

Maryland Update - February 2006

As reported in the Baltimore Sun, there is a huge gap between the reading scores of Maryland's fourth-graders as reported in national assessments compared with the State tests used to measure compliance with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 32 percent of the State's fourth-grade students are proficient in reading; State assessments show 81 percent to be proficient. National education officials believe that states -- including Maryland -- have a strong incentive to lower their standards in order to meet the requirements of NCLB.

Education Week reports that Governor Robert Ehrlich plans to propose an FY 2007 K-12 education budget of \$4.5 billion, a \$462 million (11.3 percent) increase over the previous year. A law passed in 2002 required the State to provide \$1.1 billion in additional funds for Maryland's public schools through FY 2007; the Governor's proposal exceeds the mandate. Among the earmarks in the Governor's plan are \$2 million for a new math/science/technology academy and \$1.5 million to enhance services for autistic children and for a pilot screening program for autistic children.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Maryland funded new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of nearly \$13 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 13,000 children.

The Baltimore Sun reports that the Baltimore City school district is under continuing pressure from a U.S. District Court to provide make-up services for the district's special education students. The district was supposed to provide between 90,000 and 112,000 hours of supplemental services to 9,000 special education students last summer but failed to do so on the grounds that it did not have enough qualified staff. In the meantime, the district is appealing the court's ruling, enraging State officials that the district continues to pay legal fees while special education students are not being served.

As reported in the Washington Post, the Montgomery County school district has released its FY 2006 budget proposal of \$1.8 billion, a \$122 million (seven percent) increase over the previous year. The budget includes a \$28 million increase in spending for special education, expansion of full-day kindergarten, and the opening of five new schools for the 2006-07 school year. Also included are funds to help high school students who are struggling with the State's requirement that they pass High School Assessment exams in English, Algebra, Biology, and Government.

The Maryland Department of Education has granted appeals to six schools in Anne Arundel County for special education students who failed to meet standards last year on the Maryland School Assessment. As reported in the Baltimore Sun, the appeal covered English test results for students at Arundel, Glen Burnie, Northeast, North County, Old Mill, and South River High Schools and for geometry for students at Arundel and South River. Appeals are granted if districts demonstrate that a special education student has consistently performed below grade level but has received "recognized special education intervention programs."

Massachusetts Update - February 2006

As reported in Education Week, the Massachusetts legislature has approved an FY 2006 budget for K-12 education of \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$129 million (3.5 percent) over the previous year. The bulk of the K-12 money -- \$3.23 billion -- supports basic State aid (Chapter 70). Other components of the budget are \$25 million in grants to improve existing full-day kindergarten programs and \$5.5 million for intervention programs to assist low-performing districts and schools.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Mitt Romney outlined a school improvement plan that calls for:

- cash bonuses of up to \$15,000 for science and math teachers, AP teachers, and the most successful teachers based on student performance and principal review;
- recruitment of new math and science teachers;
- faster intervention in failing schools;
- mandatory parental-preparation classes for parents of students in failing schools.

The Boston Herald reports that the Massachusetts legislature is considering a college tuition plan that would require children of illegal immigrants to have lived in the State for three years, to be seeking permanent residency or citizenship status, and to have graduated from a Massachusetts high school in order to qualify for in-State college tuition. A recent report from the Massachusetts Taxpayers foundation suggests that the tuition plan would create \$5.7 million in new revenue by 2009.

Michigan Update - February 2006

As reported in Education Week, the Michigan legislature has approved a FY 2006 K-12 education budget that increases per-pupil aid from the planned \$6,700 to \$6,875 -- a 2.6 percent increase. The total K-12 budget of \$15.7 billion includes \$950 million for special education (a \$60 million increase) and \$314 million for academically at-risk children.

This past Fall, Wayne State University conducted a study of the benefits of online instruction, specifically the Michigan Virtual University. Among the study's recommendations are:

- Every high school students should be required to take at least one online course in order to graduate.
- Before new schools are approved, a technology impact statement should be written providing an assessment of how technology can reduce the need for the construction.
- An analysis should be conducted of every school that fails to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act to determine if e-learning should play a part in the school reform.
- Teachers should be required to pass an "integrating technology skills" assessment in order to be licensed.

The Afterschool Alliance reports that, in FY 2005, Michigan received a total 21st Century Community Learning Center appropriation of nearly \$31 million, all of which was used to fund continuation of existing projects serving about 31,000 children and youth. The State does not anticipate awarding any new 21st CCLC grants until FY 2008.

According to The Detroit News, Michigan is one of only seven states without significant high school graduation requirements. State legislators and education officials are debating a proposal from the State Board of Education that would strengthen graduation requirements including four years each of language arts and math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), three years each of science and social studies, and two credits in a foreign language. There is concern among lawmakers that the new standards will be too difficult for students and that the State will not have enough qualified teachers, particularly in mathematics and science.

A report from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools indicates that a State-imposed enrollment cap is severely limiting the growth of charter schools in Michigan, as well as in nine other states (Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island).

Minnesota Update - February 2006

The Star Tribune reports that Minnesota schools will receive more than \$55 million from the settlement of the nationwide class action suit against Microsoft. The money must be used for purchases of hardware, software, and staff training and must be spent by January 12, 2012. It must be used for new technology or software purchases and not to replace funding for existing programs or, for example, to add memory to existing computers. The University of Minnesota's Institute of Technology will receive \$5 million from the settlement. Vouchers based on percentages of poor students will be sent to a total of 467 districts and charter schools beginning in early February. The recipients of the largest vouchers will be St. Paul (\$6.3 million), Minneapolis (\$6.1 million), Anoka-Hennepin (\$2 million), Rochester (\$1 million), Duluth (\$882,000), and Bloomington (\$638,000).

Mississippi Update - February 2006

A bill is now being considered in the Mississippi State legislature to reduce the number of high school dropouts in the State -- currently 160,000. HB 214 directs the State Department of Education to establish a list of alternative courses that would allow students to receive a standard high school diploma. Unlike the program for college-bound students, the new program would be targeted at students headed for employment, the military, or two-year colleges.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Haley Barbour urged the legislature to support the education package -- known as UpGrade Education -- he proposed last year. The UpGrade Education plan included heavier teacher recruitment, performance pay, easing regulations for high-performing schools, and allowing high school students to take more college courses.

Missouri Update - February 2006

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Matt Blunt called for an increase in education spending by 4.4 percent (\$325 million). The additional money would fully fund the State school aid formula approved by the legislature last Spring which set the minimum funding level at \$6,117 per student. Among the initiatives proposed by the Governor, in addition to the \$167 million more for State formula aid, are:

- \$6.1 million to reimburse school districts for high-cost special education students;
- \$1.8 million for the State's A+ program which helps with community college tuition for certain students; and
- a plan, like those proposed in other states, to require that districts spend 65 percent of their budgets for instruction.

According to The Kansas City Star, Missouri has lowered the mastery levels required on the Missouri Assessment Program, thus allowing many more students to be rated in the top two levels -- "proficient" and "advanced." For example, last year about 17 percent of tenth-graders scored in the top two levels in math; this year 44 percent are projected to do so. The State will, however, use all new tests this Spring -- because of expanded testing requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act -- and will set new cut-off scores for the five achievement levels.

Montana Update - February 2006

Earlier in 2005, the Montana legislature passed a budget for K-12 education of \$1.2 billion for the 2006-07 biennium -- a \$70 million increase over the previous budget. As reported in Education Week, a ruling last March by the State's Supreme Court struck down Montana's current school aid structure. The legislature has passed a law revising the State's school aid formula. The new funding system is intended to improve the old system which was ruled "constitutionally deficient" by the State Supreme Court in November 2004.

New Hampshire Update - February 2006

Governor John Lynch has proposed that all students be required to attend school until they are 18 years old, rather than the current 16. As reported in Education Daily, the proposal has created considerable controversy. Some educators oppose keeping students in school when they don't want to be there. Others argue that schools with a range of programs, including vocational courses, would serve these potential dropouts well. Each year, approximately 2,500 students drop out of New Hampshire high schools.

Governor Lynch focused much of his State-of-the State address on dropout prevention, promising to hold a summit this Spring to consider alternative and vocational high schools, internships, and other strategies for keeping students in school.

The Boston Globe reports that the New Hampshire State legislature is considering a bill to require publicly funded kindergarten by next Fall. Only 15 of the State's school districts do not have public kindergarten but they are in the State's southern tier and account for 20 percent of New Hampshire's five-year-olds. The bill would cover some start-up costs including up to 75 percent reimbursement for classroom construction.

New Jersey Update - February 2006

Education Week reports that New Jersey's FY 2006 budget includes \$9.4 billion for K-12 education, a five percent increase over the previous year. The additional money will go for pension contributions, allotments for districts with growing enrollments, and the development of new tests to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, \$20 million in additional funds will be provided to five "Abbot rim" school districts, districts adjacent to the State's poorest (Abbott) districts.

The Newark Star Ledger reports that students with disabilities have shown continued improvement on State assessments. State assessment data show that 55 percent of fourth-graders in special education passed their State tests, as did almost half of eleventh-graders in special education -- up from 47 percent and 46 percent, respectively, in 2004.

New Mexico Update - February 2006

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Bill Richardson suggested that New Mexico could have a \$500 million budget surplus this year. The Governor proposed spending more than \$1 billion over the next four years for school construction and also proposed to replace the State's existing high school exit exam with one more aligned with college entrance requirements. The Governor highlighted an ambitious preschool package that would include doubling the State's appropriation for prekindergarten, beginning in FY 2007, to \$10 million per year. The added funds would allow up to 12 percent of the State's four-year-olds to have access to preschool. The preschool plan includes money for professional development, technical assistance, evaluation, and additional equipment and safety improvements in 72 preschool classrooms.

New York Update - February 2006

For the first time in more than 20 years, the New York legislature passed a budget before its March 31 deadline. The State's total K-12 education budget for FY 2006 is \$15.6 billion, an \$830 million (5.6 percent) increase over the previous year. In response to a number of financial scandals in schools, the legislature approved funds for the hiring of 84 new auditors that will allow the State to audit all of its 700 school districts every five years. The legislature also passed legislation requiring school board members to be trained in financial management.

Education Daily reports that New York State has expanded its testing regimen to comply with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Among the changes are:

- Testing in English and mathematics in all grades from third on up (as opposed to only fourth and eighth as in the past);
- State (rather than local) reading tests in the third grade;
- Essay questions on English tests at every grade;
- Science tests in the fourth and eighth grades;
- Social studies tests in fifth and eighth grades; and
- A test for English language learners (3.5 million tests at a cost of \$6.5 million).

The New York Times reports that Governor George Pataki, as part of his \$111 billion budget package, has proposed to provide some parents, in school districts that have low-performing schools, a \$500 tax credit for tutoring, afterschool programs, or private school tuition. The program would cost \$400 million and would be limited to families with incomes of less than \$90,000. Some educators have criticized the plan as “backdoor vouchers,” but the Governor believes that most recipients of the tax credit will remain in the public schools.

Governor George Pataki, in his final State-of-the-State address, said there should be a significant expansion of charter schools and math/science high schools in New York State. As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Governor also proposed new math and science summer

programs at community colleges and free tuition for high school graduates who pursue math or science degrees at State universities and who agree to teach in the State.

The Chancellor of New York City's schools announced a substantial reform package which includes an additional \$200 million in school funding and a stricter accountability system. As reported in Education Daily, the plan calls for an expansion of the City's two-year-old Autonomy Zone program from 60 to 210 schools -- providing greater budgetary autonomy for principals but holding them to higher performance standards. The plan differs from the Federal No Child Left Behind Act by giving schools credit for individual student progress. Beginning next Fall, standardized tests will be used to measure student progress and schools will be evaluated based on such value-added factors as professional development, parent involvement, safety, and leadership.

As reported in The New York Times, the State Board of Regents has approved four new charter schools for New York City:

- International Leadership Charter School (Bronx) -- requiring two foreign languages;
- Achievement First Endeavor Charter School (Brooklyn);
- Ross Global Charter School (Lower Manhattan); and
- Hyde Leadership Charter School (Upper Manhattan).

Because of a State law capping at 100 the number of charter schools allowed in the State, no additional charter schools can be authorized.

According to the Associated Press, a Brooklyn charter school is the only charter school operated by a local teachers union. The United Federal of Teachers Elementary Charter School currently serves 150 kindergarten and first grade students (who were selected by lottery), but plans to expand to more grades in the Fall. The success of the school will have an impact on the debate in the New York State legislature over limiting the number of charter schools in the State.

Ohio Update - February 2006

The teachers unions in Ohio have challenged the constitutionality of the State's \$445 million charter school program. The lawsuit claims that the 297 charter schools (which serve more than 66,000 students) are in violation of the State constitution because their operation falls outside the jurisdiction of elected school boards and are not part of a "common system of schools."

A new Ohio law requires the State's teacher training institutions to align their instruction with Ohio's academic standards. As reported in The Cleveland Plain Dealer, the law also requires teacher colleges to teach students "value added" analysis, a new student progress tracking system that the State will adopt in 2007. Although the effectiveness of "value added" analysis as a measure of student and teacher performance has been questioned, the State legislature has mandated its use as an accountability tool beginning in 2007.

A member of the Ohio State legislature has continued to push for an expansion of the State's existing autism scholarship program to cover all special education students. Known as the Special Education Scholarship Program, the law allows the State to provide funds for handicapped students to go to educational programs outside their home school or school district. Students with valid IEPs would be eligible to receive State funds in an amount equal to the lesser of the student's tuition or the basic State aid amount (currently \$5,169) plus a special education adjustment.

Education Week reports that, for FY 2006, Ohio's K-12 education budget is \$6.9 billion, a 2.8 percent increase over the previous year. K-12 spending is expected to go up another 2.8 percent to \$7.1 billion in FY 2007. Poverty-assistance State aid will increase by 16 percent (to \$381 million) in FY 2006 for class-size reduction, professional development, academic interventions, and full-day kindergarten programs. A new program -- funded at \$200,000 in FY 2006 and \$3.8 million in FY 2007 -- will establish a system of "value-added specialists" who will help school districts assess individual student progress.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Ohio funded three new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money, less than two percent of applicants. The State's total appropriation of nearly \$31 million -- down from \$33.5 million the previous year -- would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 31,000 children.

The Akron Beacon Journal also reports that 3,000 Ohio students have left public schools in high-performing districts to enroll in lower-performing charter schools -- most of them online charter schools. Online charters have grown markedly in recent years. In 2001, Ohio had only one online school serving about 2,200 students; in 2005, 46 online schools enrolled 17,000 students.

The Akron Beacon Journal reports that Ohio plans to implement a program -- called "Ohio Core" -- to prepare high school students better for college by requiring more science, mathematics, and foreign languages, beginning with this year's seventh-graders. Under the plan, admission into the State's four-year colleges would require four years of English, four years of math, three years of science (biology, chemistry, physics), and two years of a foreign language. Under the new criteria, more than a quarter of the 31,000 students admitted to Ohio colleges in 2003 would not have been eligible. High school graduates requiring remediation would be required to attend the State's two-year colleges.

Oregon Update - February 2006

As reported by the Associated Press, Oregon has been in the forefront of the states wishing to participate in the Federal pilot program to use a “growth model” to measure student progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Due on February 17, the State’s application for the pilot program is likely to result in a reduction in the number of Oregon schools -- 300 last year -- subject to Federal sanctions. The State already has in place some of the requirements for pilot participation -- specifically a Statewide database for tracking individual student progress -- and is currently establishing growth standards by which schools would be measured.

South Carolina Update - February 2006

Governor Mark Sanford has proposed to reallocate at least \$38 million from current State education programs into early childhood education. Among the cuts proposed are a reduction in teacher bonuses, consolidation of smaller school districts, and elimination of some programs (e.g., 4-H Agricultural & Natural Resources, School Leadership Executive Institute). In his State-of-the-State address, the Governor asked the legislature to develop new early childhood programs using “the private sector’s capacity.” The Governor also made a plea for the expansion of school choice and urged the legislature to establish a Statewide charter school district.

South Dakota Update - February 2006

Governor Mike Rounds has announced his 2010 Education Initiative which includes more than 50 elements, some of which would require immediate legislative approval. One would make kindergarten mandatory; another would require students to remain in school until age 18, rather than the current 16. As part of his earlier budget address, the Governor proposed to allocate \$1.3 million in State funds to help districts provide laptops to high school students.

Governor Rounds, in his State-of-the-State address, proposed 2.9 percent increase in education funding, the largest per-pupil increase in a decade (although the State's K-12 enrollment is actually declining). The Governor emphasized the State's participation in the Federal Reading First program and a State initiative to distribute books to children through the State's cooperative health clinics. Earlier, the Governor proposed a \$13 million program (over several years) to provide funds by which schools -- on a \$2 for \$1 in State money basis -- would acquire laptop computers. Next Fall there is expected to be a pilot program to provide laptops to all high school students in some districts.

Tennessee Update - February 2006

The Associated Press reports that Governor Phil Bredesen plans to provide about \$90 million more State funds through Tennessee's Basic Education Program in FY 2007, less than the \$150 sought by the State's urban counties. The Governor will also recommend an additional \$20 million for at-risk children and English language learners.

Historically, Tennessee's education funding is allocated to local school districts largely on a per-pupil basis. Pre-kindergarten students with special needs have not been included in these counts that determine State aid. A recent opinion by the State's Attorney General says that such students should be included. It is estimated that the addition to the State funding formula for these students will be \$18.5 million.

As reported in Education Week, the Hamilton County school district (Chattanooga) has been awarded a \$2.7 million grant to design online courses for students Statewide. Federally funded, the State-awarded grant will provide resources for the district to hire teachers to develop more virtual courses aligned with state academic standards, an initiative begun in 2002. The district has converted its entire summer school program to online courses. The new courses will be field-tested in seven other Tennessee school districts, each of which received a \$100,000 grant.

Texas Update - February 2006

Many schools in Texas school districts find they are losing textbooks because students don't return them when they leave the school. As reported in Education Daily, a number of districts -- including Dallas -- have begun collecting textbooks before the winter break and returning them when classes begin again in January. In Dallas, for example, an inventory a few years ago showed more than 150,000 missing books, at a cost of \$3.6 million.

The Dallas Morning News reports that James Leininger, a wealthy Republican campaign contributor, has been pushing the Texas legislature to enact a pilot voucher program that would allow low-income students to attend private schools at State expense. For a number of years, Leininger has funded a school choice program for low-income students in San Antonio; this year about 2,400 students have received \$1,000-a-year scholarships to private schools. He has vowed campaign support to candidates of either party who support his views on vouchers.

As reported in The Washington Post, January 24, Secretary Spellings has evidently decided not to sue the Texas Education Agency \$900,000 for non-compliance with USED current and proposed policies regarding alternative assessments in return for Texas using that money to "absorb huge increases [in costs] after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita." USED policies would allow up to three percent of students to take alternative and modified assessments that would be counted toward meeting AYP if they achieve proficiency levels. Texas proposed a testing cap at eight percent and subsequently reduced it to five percent.

The Houston school district has adopted a merit pay plan for its teachers. As reported by CNN, teachers could earn bonuses of \$1,000 if their schools are rated "acceptable" or higher and another \$1,000 based on their students' scores on the State assessment. Reading and math teachers could earn still another \$1,000 if their students perform well compared with other students in the district. The district expects to allocate \$14.5 million to the plan for the first year and increase the allocation by \$8 million per year for the next five years.

The Dallas Morning News reports that the superintendent of the Dallas school district has outlined an ambitious plan to improve Dallas schools. With an estimated cost of \$6 million - \$10 million per year, the plan includes a number of features including a common district-wide curriculum, deployment of math and science coaches, evaluation of principals based on how well they monitor instruction, and implementation of a fully-staffed district-wide bilingual program (last year, only a third of English language learners passed State assessments). A survey of teachers showed that 80 percent of respondents supported the superintendent's plan (except for the bilingual component).

Education Week reports that the U.S. Department of Justice has approved the annexation of the 2,700-student Wilmer-Hutchins school district into the Dallas Independent School District. Wilmer-Hutchins students are currently attending Dallas schools under contract.

Utah Update - February 2006

Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr., in his State-of-the-State address, called for a 5.5 percent increase in per-pupil spending -- Utah's \$5,067 per student is the lowest in the Nation. As reported in Education Week, the Governor proposed a \$7 million voluntary, full-day kindergarten program in Title I schools and promised to expand teacher training for teachers of science and mathematics in grades 4-6.

As reported in Education Week, Utah high school seniors, starting with the Class of 2006, would have been required to pass all three portions -- reading, writing, and mathematics -- of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test in order to receive a basic high school diploma. Those who failed the test three times would have received an "alternative completion" diploma. However, the State Board dropped the differentiating diplomas based on a ruling from the Utah Attorney General, so, at least for this year, seniors who fail the State assessment can receive a regular diploma. To date, 16 percent of the State's twelfth graders have not passed all portions of the test. The math component has been the most difficult with 36 percent of Black students, 37 percent of Hispanic students, 42 percent of English language learners, and 64 percent of special education students failing that portion of the test.

Virginia Update - February 2006

In his first speech to the State legislature, newly-inaugurated Governor Tim Kaine highlighted his campaign proposal for universal prekindergarten. Known as Start Strong, the pre-K initiative will be designed by a panel consisting of legislators, business leaders, parents, and early childhood education specialists. It is expected to cost about \$300 million in its first year.

Virginia's total FY appropriation under the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Center program was more than \$15 million. As reported by the Afterschool Alliance, the State funded some new 21st CCLC program and served a total of approximately 15,000 children and youth.

Washington Update - February 2006

Education Week reports that Governor Christine Gregoire has proposed a new State Department of Early Learning which would consolidate the State's six child care and early learning programs and develop a rating system for child care providers. The Governor's FY 2006 supplemental budget includes \$1.5 million to establish the new agency.

The Seattle Times reports that, according to State estimates, only 57 percent of Washington's tenth-grade students will pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). That leaves nearly 34,000 high schools who will need to retake and pass the test in order to graduate in 2008, the first year the WASL becomes a graduation requirement. The low expected pass rate has created a great deal of controversy. The State's teachers' union wants to eliminate the WASL as a requirement. The SEA is looking into alternative measures to be used as graduation requirements and the Governor has proposed allocating several millions of dollars for a summer school program to help students who fail the exam.

A strong supporter of the WASL, Governor Gregoire has had the State department of education develop two WASL alternatives -- a portfolio rubric and a grade-point average measurement tied to WASL scores -- for students who fail the WASL twice. The legislature is also considering a bill -- HB 2489 -- that would call for school districts to identify individual students' risk of not graduating on time and requiring at-risk students to attend summer school.

The recent Citizens' Report Card on Washington State Education raised a number of important critiques of the State's education system. Prepared by the League of Education Voters Foundation, the report found that:

- Nearly half of all eligible, low-income preschool-aged children are not participating in early childhood programs.
- Nearly 80 percent of students now pass the fourth-grade reading portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).
- Only about half of students pass the WASL's seventh-grade mathematics test.

- The graduation rate gap among races persists with 74 percent of White and 78 percent of Asian students graduating, compared with 54 percent of Black, 54 percent of Latino, and 47 percent of Native Americans.

Washington's total FY appropriation under the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Center program was more than \$13 million, most of which was used to continue existing projects. As reported by the Afterschool Alliance, the State funded some new 21st CCLC programs and served a total of approximately 15,000 children and youth.

Wisconsin Update - February 2006

Education Week reports that Wisconsin's K-12 education budget for the 2006-07 biennium is \$10.5 billion, a \$437 million increase over the previous two year period. The final budget came only after Governor James Doyle vetoed more than a hundred items in the total State budget passed by the legislature. Among the vetoes was the Governor's refusal to approve raising the enrollment cap on Milwaukee's voucher program from 14,700 students to 16,500 students (each voucher costs about \$6,000).

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Wisconsin received a total FY 2005 appropriation of more than \$12 million from the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Most of the money was used to fund existing projects but the State did fund some new projects. The State's 21st CCLC programs served about 12,000 children and youth Statewide.

On March 5-8, 2006, the Wisconsin Educational Media Association will be holding its Brainstorm Spring 2006 conference. For information on the conference, go to: www.wemaonline.org/ev.cf.2006.about.cfm.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor James Doyle discussed raising the enrollment cap for Milwaukee's voucher program, but suggested more accountability on the part of participating schools would be required. The Milwaukee program currently provides \$6,000-per-year vouchers to about 14,700 students.