

Alabama Update - March 2006

As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Governor Bob Riley, in his State-of-the-State address, indicated that Alabama has a record budget surplus. The Governor called for an increase of \$1 billion in education spending, bringing the State's total to \$5.7 billion. The increase would fund new textbooks, teacher training, and the Alabama Reading Initiative.

The Birmingham News reports that all new teachers in Alabama graduating after April 15, 2006, will be required to pass the Praxis II exam in order to qualify for a teaching license. Teacher testing in the State was stopped in the 1980s when prospective Black teachers filed a lawsuit claiming the tests at the time were racially biased.

Alaska Update - March 2006

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that Alaska plans to expand eligibility for its Alaska Scholars program; the program would provide students who graduate in the top 15 percent (vs. the current 10 percent) of their class free tuition at schools in the University of Alaska system. The plan has reduced the State's "brain drain" with 98 percent of Alaska Scholars remaining in the State. The State has also seen a closing of the achievement gap between native and non-native students and a successful beginning to a mentoring program for beginning teachers and principals.

Arizona Update - March 2006

As reported in The Arizona Republic, starting this year, seniors who score at the “exceeds standards” level on all three portions of the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) -- reading, writing, and mathematics -- will receive a tuition waiver -- worth about \$4,500 -- at one of the State universities. To date only about 2,200 of the State’s high school seniors have reached the required level, but large numbers of seniors have signed up to retake the AIMS this Spring. State officials are concerned about the universities’ budget implications if too many students “exceed standards.”

This year’s Class of 2006 is the first that must pass all three sections of the AIMS -- reading, writing, and mathematics -- to receive a high school diploma. The Arizona Daily Star reports that, starting in 2007 science will be added to the AIMS. The science component (mostly biology) will be administered at the fourth, eighth, and tenth grades next Spring on a pilot basis and become official in 2008. At least for now, the science component will not be a graduation requirement.

As reported in Education Week, starting on January 24, Arizona began incurring fines of \$500,000 per day for failing to meet a Federal court deadline to increase public school funding for English language learners. The fines increased to \$1 million a day in late February and will increase to \$2 million per day if no agreement is reached by the end of the current legislative session. The total pool from the ELL fines has reached nearly \$20 million.

California Update - March 2006

As reported by the Associated Press, an audit by the California State Auditor has found that the State exerts little oversight with respect to the \$4.5 million allocation each year for 30 centers to improve Indian education. Begun in 1974, the centers provide education resources for American Indian students and parents in 23 counties. The State's Department of Education did not start requesting performance data on the centers until January 2005. If not reauthorized by the legislature, the centers will expire at the end of this year.

According to Education Week, California's State Superintendent, Jack O'Connell, has called for expanded professional development programs for teachers in science, history, and the social sciences and has recommended spending \$53 million for academic coaches in all subject areas for low-performing schools.

The Los Angeles Times reports that, last year, only 47 percent of California's 1.3 million English language learners reached the "advanced" or "early advanced" proficiency levels at the California English Language Development Test, the same as the previous year. This marks the first year without an increase since 2001 when English fluency testing began.

As reported in the Contra Costa Times, State education officials have reached an agreement that would, only for the Class of 2006, exempt certain special education students from the requirement that they pass the California High School Exit Exam (CHSEE) in order to graduate. Under the agreement, to receive an exemption, special education students must: (a) take the CHSEE at least twice after tenth grade; (b) receive remediation; (c) have had an individualized education program (IEP) in place by July 1, 2005, and (d) meet all other graduation requirements. All cases in which special education seniors do not receive high school diplomas must be reviewed by the State. The agreement is the result of a settlement -- known as the Chapman settlement -- of a lawsuit filed by Disability Rights Advocates.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed a Strategic Growth Plan for California K-12 school facilities through the 2016-17 school year. Among the Plan's components are:

- Modernization -- \$3.3 billion for renovation of facilities that are at least 25 years old.
- Charter Schools -- \$1 billion to fund new charter school facilities in conjunction with local school districts.
- Career Technical Education (CTE) -- \$1 billion to upgrade existing CTE facilities in middle and high schools to build new CTE facilities, and to purchase equipment with a useful life of at least ten years.
- Small Schools -- \$500 million for the construction of high schools designed to serve 500 students or fewer.

Overall, the Governors 2006-07 budget proposal increases State K-12 funding by \$4 billion and brings per-pupil spending to about \$11,000.

The Los Angeles Times reports that the Los Angeles school district has proposed a number of approaches to reduce the number of dropouts in the district. Among the changes would be the requirement that struggling middle school students take additional classes -- before school, after school, or on Saturdays. Under the district's plan, these classes would begin next Fall in math and would expand to other core classes the following school year. The district would also establish new "algebra readiness" classes for eighth grade students and would reduce class sizes in Algebra by five students. The plan would also add one counselor to every middle and high school to help at-risk students. The dropout prevention plan is expected to cost at least \$21 million, the source of which has not been determined.

Colorado Update - March 2006

As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Governor Bill Owens has expressed frustration at the high number of Colorado students who are required to take remedial classes in college. He indicated that, later this year, the Colorado Education Alignment Center will publish a report on how the State can improve high school standards and ensure that all Colorado high school graduates have a meaningful diploma.

The Denver Post reports that Colorado, like 15-20 other states, is considering an initiative that would require school districts to spend 65 percent of their operating budgets in the classroom. Currently, only six Colorado districts reach that threshold. Expected to go before the voters this November, the initiative would shift an estimated \$485 million from administration to classroom instruction. Another piece of proposed legislation would require districts to spend 75 percent of operating costs on instructions, but those costs would include principals, counselors, and food service.

Connecticut Update - March 2006

A recent study of post-high school performance has shown that scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) are strong predictors of success in college. As cited in Education Week, the study -- "First Steps: An Evaluation of the Success of Connecticut Students Beyond High School" -- found that students who performed well on the CAPT took fewer remedial courses in college, passed more credits per semester, had higher grade point averages, and were more likely to earn their college degree than lower performers on the CAPT. The study also found that CAPT was as good (or better) a predictor of college success as the SAT.

The Hartford Courant reports that Connecticut will receive about \$178 million this year under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), about 25 percent more than it got in 2002 when NCLB was signed. Connecticut traditionally tests its students in grades 4, 6, and 8 but NCLB requires testing in Grades 3, 5, and 7 as well. The State argues that such an expansion of testing will cost millions of dollars more with little benefit. The U.S. Department counters that the additional expenses are the result of the State's decision to use more expensive testing and to include written answers and a writing section not required by NCLB.

In her State-of-the-State address, Governor Jodi Rell emphasized tax cuts and only modest increases in K-12 education funding. As reported in Education Week, the Governor would increase the \$105 million in grants to high-poverty school districts by \$3.5 million which would expand the number of preschool slots from 7,000 to 7,500. She also called for an increase in FY 2007 State funding for charter schools from \$23.8 million to \$25.6 million.

Florida Update - March 2006

Governor Jeb Bush has proposed a budget for 2006-07 that includes \$33 billion for public education. As reported in Education Daily, the proposed budget includes an overall increase of \$1.2 billion for K-12 schools. It also includes:

- a 19.7 percent increase in combined Federal and State reading initiatives (\$189.9 million);
- a 5.6 percent increase in the State prekindergarten program (\$387 million); and
- \$1.33 billion in workforce development funds to prepare Florida students for high-skill employment.

According to a recent poll by WPEC-TV News, principals in Florida schools are opposed to linking bonus payments to student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Eighty percent of surveyed principals opposed the linkage, but three-quarters of them agreed that the FCAT is helpful for developing strategies to improve student performance.

As required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), nearly 700 Florida schools are required to provide tutoring for students who are struggling to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) administered beginning in late February. Although a total of nearly 350,000 students in these schools are eligible for tutoring, only a small fraction have actually signed up. But even those have overwhelmed the system. Miami-Dade County, for example, is paying an average of \$1,359 to tutor 8,241 students but, as of February 1, only 12 of the 37 tutoring services were operational. There have been complaints that some school districts discouraged parents from requesting tutoring. In Orange County, only 831 out of 16,000 eligible children signed up.

According to officials who have seen preliminary test results in Florida, the number of schools across all districts next year that will be in corrective action for having failed to meet AYP four years in a row, will increase from 37 to between 900 and 1,000. These schools will be allowed to continue providing SES while they are in the process of developing an overall school improvement plan for more radical alternatives under reconstitution in the following year.

Florida is one of three states that has tentatively been allocated a four percent Title I increase for FY 2006 beginning next school year.

Governor Jeb Bush has proposed a plan to provide every one of Florida's teachers with a laptop computer. According to Education Technology News, \$188 million would be spent for the laptops and for the professional development needed to integrate the hardware into the classrooms. Another \$51 million will go toward recruitment and retention of teachers; it is estimated that the State needs at least 31,000 new teachers. Of this \$51 million, \$40 million would be allocated to school districts, \$9.7 million would be used to reimburse tuition or college loans for teachers in critical areas, and \$1.3 million would go to improve the Great Florida Teach-In website. The Governor's plan would also allow for an education minor at State universities so college students in science, engineering, and other technical fields would have the option of teaching. The fate of the Governor's plan is unclear. Democrats in the legislature have expressed displeasure but have not rejected it. If approved, the plan could start distributing the laptops as early as next Fall.

Georgia Update - March 2006

The Associated Press reports that Georgia legislators are considering approval of Governor Sonny Perdue's plan to require -- by 2008 -- all school districts to spend at least 65 percent of their budgets in the classroom. According to State data, in 2002-03 (the latest available data), 64 of Georgia's 180 districts already meet the standard and these districts show higher student performance than other districts. If all Georgia school systems meet the standard, \$192 million will shift to classroom instruction. Opponents of the plan say it removes local control of education money and establishes no sanctions for failing to meet the threshold.

Illinois Update - March 2006

Faced with a huge budget deficit and a declining enrollment, the Chicago school district is exploring a wide range of cost-cutting options. As reported in Education Week, the district, beside cuts in administrative functions and reduced contributions to the teacher pension fund, is considering modifying its program of reading and math tutors and Renaissance 2010, the city's effort to replace low-performing schools with smaller, better schools. The State has increased Chicago's education allocation in next year's proposed budget from \$70 million to \$100 million, but cuts will still be necessary.

The Chicago Tribune reports that the Illinois State Board of Education will, in early March, lower the passing score on the State's eighth-grade mathematics tests; last year, almost half of the students failed the exam. The State is also considering a change in the way schools are judged based on student performance. Local school districts would be given the flexibility to use a more liberal statistical scoring formula and to exclude scores of some students -- e.g., low-income, minority -- who traditionally score lower than other students. State officials believe the changes will allow more schools meet Federal and State standards; critics decry the lowering of standards.

Indiana Update - March 2006

Governor Mitch Daniels has proposed draft legislation that would provide more flexibility in spending State funds. As reported in Education Week, it is intended that the proposal would result in more money for teacher salaries, classroom supplies, and full-day kindergarten. As part of the plan, school districts would have to participate in shared-service agreements through which products and services would be centrally purchased.

Class Notes reports that currently about one-quarter of Indiana's 75,000 kindergarten students attend full-day programs. A Republican-sponsored bill being considered in the legislature would make as many as 7,000 more of the State's most economically disadvantaged students eligible for full-day kindergarten. The proposal is looked upon as possibly paving the way for school vouchers in the State.

The Associated Press reports that the Indiana Department of Corrections has reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to improve special education services at the State's juvenile centers. The State has agreed to provide adequate courses, teachers, and programs at the State's nine juvenile facilities which serve more than 900 youths.

Iowa Update - March 2006

The Des Moines Register reports that Iowa is the only state in the nation that does not have some form of Statewide high school graduation requirements. Nearly 20 years ago, the three State universities established high school unit requirements as part of their admission standards -- four years of English, three years each of math, science, and social studies, and two years of a foreign language. Many students do not complete these course requirements and are unprepared for college. Some State education officials are urging the legislature to institute the college's admission standards as high school graduation requirements.

Kentucky Update - March 2006

As reported in the Louisville Courier-Journal, math scores for Kentucky students on State and national standardized tests have been low and the math remediation enrollment rate at State universities has been high. According to a recent study (see below), almost half of the State's high school graduates are not prepared for college math and English. The State has addressed this problem by increasing high school math requirements. Starting with the Class of 2012, in order to graduate, Kentucky high school students will be required to take a math class every year and will be required to complete Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.

More than half of the entering freshman at Kentucky's State universities and community colleges were, in 2002 (the most recent available data), unprepared for college work in at least one area -- English, reading, or mathematics. Seventeen percent were unprepared in all three areas. The colleges spent a total of \$25 million -- \$14 million in State funds and \$11 million in student tuition -- for remediation. About 61 percent of the unprepared freshmen took classes in remedial math, 52 percent took remedial English, and 46 percent took remedial reading. A bill is pending in the Kentucky legislature that require eighth-grade students to take a test for high school readiness and tenth-graders to take a college readiness exam. It is estimated that these Statewide tests would cost between \$800,000 and \$1.5 million per year.

Maine Update - March 2006

The Bangor Daily News reports that Maine's Education Committee has recommended a continuation of the State's middle school laptop program for four more years at an annual cost of \$10 million. Under the laptop proposal, all of the State's seventh and eighth grade students will receive laptop computers and 33,000 existing, four-year-old laptops will be purchased by the State for \$1.6 million and resold for use in other grades for \$40 apiece. The State's \$42 million education supplemental budget request for next year includes the \$10 million for the laptop program as well as funding half of the total cost of K-12 education in the State. A recent survey of Maine's students and educators found that the laptop program has improved instruction by letting teachers customize their curricula and motivating students to learn more effectively.

Maryland Update - March 2006

Governor Robert Ehrlich has proposed a FY 2007 budget that allocates \$4.5 billion for K-12 education -- an 11.3 percent increase over the current year. As reported in Education Week, the proposed budget includes \$462 million more in basic school aid and \$281 million more for school construction.

A study shows that nearly one million adults in Maryland need a high school diploma or English language instruction according to the Washington Post. Serving about 37,000 people each year, the State's adult education programs have a waiting list of 5,000 -- most seeking ESL classes. In FY 2003, Maryland spent an average of \$77 per pupil (compared with \$477 per student in other Eastern states) for GED, ESL, and other literacy programs. Maryland does not promote its adult education programs because it does not have enough available classroom slots. The study recommended that the State allocate \$26.5 million over the next five years to improve adult education.

The Baltimore Sun reports that the Baltimore City school district will replace Studio Course as the principal middle school language arts curriculum. The change is an outgrowth of a panel review which found that Studio Course was not effectively preparing students for State assessments. The panel's conclusion was based on interviews with middle school principals and teachers. Some of the Studio Course books will still be used but the curriculum will focus on subject matter that is covered on the State's standardized tests.

Michigan Update - March 2006

As reported in Education Week, Governor Jennifer Granholm has endorsed the more rigorous high school graduation requirements being considered in the legislature, has proposed an afterschool program focusing on middle school math, science, and computers, and plans to offer more slots in State-funded kindergarten. The Governor and the legislature have also reached agreement on a compromise college scholarship package for high-performing high school seniors. Under the plan, high school graduates who score well on the State's high school exam would receive a \$2,000 scholarship to a Michigan college and college students who complete their first two years with a grade point average of 2.5 or higher would receive another \$2,000.

As reported in eSchool News, the Michigan legislature is considering a proposal that would make Michigan the first state to require high school students to take some form of online instruction in order to graduate. The online learning requirement is part of legislation that would greatly increase the types of courses required for graduation. Currently, a Civics course is the only requirement; the proposed legislation would require courses in mathematics, science, and foreign language.

The Associated Press reports that FY 2007 K-12 spending in Michigan is expected, pending legislative approval, to increase from \$12.75 billion last year to \$13.12 billion -- a three percent increase. Statewide, school districts would receive at least \$7,075 per student next year under Governor Granholm's budget proposal. Districts would receive an additional \$200 per pupil in the 2006-07 school year. In addition the Governor's plan would allocate \$15 million to set up 75 to 100 middle school afterschool and summer program in mathematics, science, and computer technology. The plan would also increase adult education by \$4 million, which only partially offset the \$57 million decrease in FY 2004 which caused many districts to cut their adult education programs.

Mississippi Update - March 2006

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, Mississippi's spending on K-12 education this year has increased by \$143 million -- 7.2 percent -- over the previous year. Per-pupil spending is, according to Governor Haley Barbour, now in excess of \$7,000. The Governor's Up Grade Education proposal is intended to cut the State's 40 percent dropout rate, redesign high schools to allow students to get college credits, and institute a performance-based salary program for teachers.

The Associated Press reports that a number of bills being considered in the Mississippi legislature would bring significant changes to the State's education system. Under one bill, high-performing school districts would be given the authority to manage their finances as they see fit (within the limits of State law). The bill also provides for a teacher mentoring program and proposes a merit pay system for teachers based on school performance. Another bill would restructure the State's school funding formula -- the Mississippi Adequate Education Program -- which has been fully funded only once since it was established in 1997. Yet another bill will address dropout prevention.

Nebraska Update - March 2006

Education Week reports that Nebraska's budget for State K-12 school aid will increase by 10.5 percent -- to \$683.5 million -- in FY 2006. K-12 spending is slated to increase another 7.4 percent to \$734 million for FY 2007. Over the last biennium, special education will be an increase from \$161.1 million to \$174.3 million.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Nebraska funded new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of nearly \$5 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afterschool opportunities for 4,900 children.

Nevada Update - March 2006

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Nevada funded new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. The State's total appropriation of more than \$5 million would, based on current cost estimates, provide afternoon opportunities for 5,100 children.

The Reno Gazette-Journal reports that software entrepreneurs Bob and Jan Davidson have founded the Davidson Academy for exceptionally gifted students to begin operation next Fall. Located on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, the new Academy will use \$15million in Davidson money to build a separate facility inside the University's planned \$50 million math and science center. A 2005 State law allows for the establishment of schools like the Davidson Academy but makes no provision for State aid to fund them. It is hoped that in the next legislative session, per-pupil funding will be approved.

Nevada has applied to become one of the ten states eligible to use a "growth model" to measure performance under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Under a "growth model," Nevada would continue to use criterion-referenced tests as proficiency standards but would add a growth component to measure individual student improvement beginning in the 2006-07 school year. Recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education on the states to be approved for the "growth model" are expected in May 2006. Nevada is considering operating its own growth analysis even if USED does not approve the State under NCLB.

New Jersey Update - March 2006

The Star-Ledger reports that the Annual School Report from the New Jersey Department of Education shows an inability on the part of the State to track and analyze student and school performance. The new report prepared for new Governor Jon Corzine calls for the renewal of a stalled program to create a Statewide student database which would catalogue -- for each student in the State -- test scores, socio-economic data, and other information to track students. It is estimated that the database would cost \$10 million to establish; \$1.5 million has already been committed by the State.

Education Week reports that New Jersey's trouble-plagued School Construction Corporation (SCC) will be the subject of an intensive review. Last year, amid reports of waste and mismanagement, the SCC delayed a large number of construction projects for lack of funding. According to SCC sources, 69 projects are currently underway and 59 others have been scheduled to begin. Governor Corzine, has called for a working group of State officials to review the SCC's operation and recommend appropriate means of reorganization. A recent change in the State's code for school construction allows SCC funds to be used to purchase infrastructure and computer hardware. The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that the School Construction Corporation has estimated the cost to complete the 313 construction projects in the State's 31 Abbot (special needs) districts at more than \$12.8 billion. Work on these projects was suspended last summer by the State Supreme Court which ordered the cost analysis. State officials estimate the costs could rise to \$19.2 billion in five years and \$29.2 billion in ten years.

New York Update - March 2006

Governor George Pataki has proposed the establishment of a \$500 education tax credit that could be used for private school tuition or tutoring and afterschool services. Traditionally opposed to private school choice, some New York legislators -- particularly in poorer sections of New York City -- have expressed interest in the idea because public school students could use the credit for private tutoring. Most Democratic legislators, however, are opposed and consider the proposal to be part of the Governor's expected campaign for the U.S. Presidency.

New York State is planning to tighten regulations under the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for low-income students. Last year, the State provided \$876 million in TAP grants to more than 300,000 students; 40,000 of these attended proprietary schools, many of which have been accused of abusing the system by admitting unqualified students to reap TAP money. Under the new restrictions, students must be legal State residents, take at least 12 credits per semester, have either graduated from high school or earned a GED, and maintained a "C" average. No new commercial colleges will be approved in the State pending a review of their operation.

According to Education Week, the Chancellor (superintendent) of New York City's schools has expanded the district's "autonomy zone" from 58 to more than 200 schools. Principals of these schools are given more authority over school management -- including spending and professional development activities -- in return for being held more responsible for the academic performance of their students.

North Carolina Update - March 2006

The Afterschool Alliance reports that, in FY 2005, North Carolina received more than \$21 million in Federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds -- a six percent drop from the previous year. The State was able to fund some new afterschool programs and provided afterschool learning opportunities for about 21,000 students.

North Carolina has dropped IBM as the contractor for NC WISE, the new Statewide education data management system. The contract was to have paid IBM \$78 million in total when the system was to be completed in 2007-08. The State has withheld \$4.5 million in payments claiming IBM failed to live up to its obligations.

A recent study by the John Locke Foundation has determined that the most efficient use of lottery money to support education is its use in capital projects such as expanding and maintaining schools. As reported in Education Daily, half of North Carolina's \$425 million in lottery proceeds for education goes to prekindergarten classes and class size reduction. The Foundation's study recommended that the State use the money for building expansion and repair, particularly for 22 schools -- identified as "high growth" -- that are expected to enroll at least 1,500 new students over the next ten years. The study also recommended higher contributions to State public charter schools.

North Dakota Update - March 2006

The Bismarck Tribune reports that Governor John Hoeven has established a ten-member North Dakota Commission on Educational Improvement which will include four legislators, the State superintendent of education, and two local district superintendents. The Governor also promised to add at least \$60 million (9.5 percent) in new school spending in his next biennial budget proposal. These actions have been taken in an effort to settle a lawsuit filed in October 2003 by eight school districts challenging the State's education finance system. If the proposed funding increase is forthcoming, the plaintiffs have agreed to drop the suit.

Oklahoma Update - March 2006

According to Education Week, Governor Brad Henry's proposed FY 2007 K-12 budget will be \$2.3 billion, a 4.9 percent increase over FY 2006. The Governor's proposal includes \$5 million for three new high school subject area tests as part of the State's Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) initiative and \$10 million for remediation for this year's sixth-graders, the first class that will be required to pass the ACE exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Oklahoma funded six new 21st Century Community Learning Center programs with FY 2005 money. Most of the State's total appropriation of nearly \$11 million was used for the continuation of existing projects. Based on current cost estimates, the FY 2006 funding will provide afterschool opportunities for 11,000 children.

According to The Oklahoman, a recent survey of Oklahoma schools showed that 98 percent of the State's classrooms have at least one computer, most of which have Internet connections. About 40,000 of the 200,000 classroom computers are older models, but last year the State awarded 41 grants -- most of them from Federal funds -- that allowed replacement of older hardware. Almost all of Oklahoma's 540 school districts administer tests by computer. Last year's seventh-grade geography tests were the first to be required to be given online and many more are expected. About 40 percent of the State's districts report using interactive whiteboards and a third offer credit for Internet-based courses.

Pennsylvania Update - March 2006

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, Governor Ed Rendell's FY 2007 budget proposal calls for a \$517 million increase in State funding for public education -- a 6.4 percent hike -- to \$8.7 billion. The budget proposal includes a \$20 million "Classrooms for the Future" initiative under which 100 high schools would be equipped with laptop computers for every desk in English, mathematics, science, and history. Six million dollars would be set aside for teacher training. The Governor's proposed budget also includes \$10 million for the "Science: It's Elementary" program to upgrade the science curriculum in 150 elementary schools. Pennsylvania's accountability block grants would go from \$200 million to \$250 million and the State's foundation funding would increase from \$22.3 million to \$64 million.

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reports that school districts in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) have asked the State for a moratorium on the creation of cyberschools. Last year, Pennsylvania's 144 charter schools served about 50,000 students at a cost of \$368 million. Twelve of the charter schools are cyberschools which deliver most of their instruction online. Districts pay about 80 percent of their per-pupil costs as tuition for students enrolled in online schools. District officials argue that this is too high because the cyberschools do not have the same level of expenses as traditional schools.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that the Philadelphia School District is facing a \$16 million budget deficit for the remainder of this school year and has instituted a 30 percent cut in spending for its schools through June 2006. Salaries and capital expenditures will not be affected but extracurricular activities will be severely hit. School budgets for books could also be in danger.

A new Pennsylvania law allows home-schooled students to participate in school-based extracurricular activities. As reported in Education Week, home-schoolers must meet the same eligibility requirements as public school students.

Rhode Island Update - March 2006

The Providence Journal reports that Governor Donald Carcieri has proposed a \$15 million bond issue in November to improve the training of teachers in mathematics and science. In his proposed FY 2007 budget, the Governor has also allocated \$200,000 to create a Statewide science curriculum by 2007 and increase from two to three the number of years of required high school science. He also proposes to invest \$75,000 for an alternative certification program (in development at the University of Rhode Island) to ease the certification of engineers and scientists as teachers. The budget includes \$525,000 for the Physics First program (now being pilot tested in five school districts) and \$750,000 to enhance professional development. The Governor also proposed to extend the teachers' school year to 190 days.

An analysis of graduation rates, conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures, indicates that only 71 percent of entering high school freshmen in Rhode Island graduate within four years -- a percentage far below the 84 percent graduation rate for the country's highest-performing states. Moreover, of the entering freshmen, 38 percent immediately enroll in higher education but only 22 percent get their degrees -- associate's or bachelor's -- in a timely manner.

South Carolina Update - March 2006

According to Education Week, the South Carolina legislature is considering -- and is likely to pass -- a bill that would establish a Statewide authority for charter schools, as well as a State charter school district. Currently, only districts can authorize charter schools of which there are only 27 in the State. Over 150 separate state budget line items could potentially flow directly to schools in the Statewide district depending on the enrollment of eligible students. Colorado is the only state that now has a statewide charter school district.

Education Daily reports that South Carolina has become the first state to receive full approval of its accountability system from the U.S. Department of Education. At USED suggestion, the State is still refining its alternative testing for the most cognitively impaired special education students. The State legislature has passed a bill calling for a study of how to make greater use of computer-based testing and to include more diagnostic items to help teachers.

Texas Update - March 2006

The Texas Education Agency has released its list of approved providers of reading programs. Ten providers were identified:

- CompassLearning - Odyssey Reading and Language Arts
- Regional Education Service Center IV - Reading
- Harcourt Achieve/Steck Vaughn/Renaissance - Read Now, Power Up!
- Harcourt School Publishers - Harcourt Trophies
- Pearson Digital Learning - Fast Forward Reading
- PLATO Learning - Reading
- River Deep - Destination Reading
- Scholastic - Read 180
- Scientific Learning- Reading
- Voyager Expanded Learning - Passport

School Reform News reports that the Texas Education Agency has identified 821 schools -- twice as many as the year before -- as “academically unacceptable,” making nearly 540,000 students eligible for transfer. To be labeled “academically unacceptable,” a school had to have 50 percent or less of its students pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in two of the last three years. The State is attempting to address the problem, in part, through its \$71 million T-STEM Initiative which would create new schools that would take over failing campuses. T-STEM will also establish professional development and technical assistance centers and create a Statewide best practices network. Supported by the Dell Foundation and the Gates Foundation, T-STEM academies will emphasize science-based fields for students in sixth grade and up.

The Associated Press reports that a \$10 million incentive pay plan, initiated through Executive Order by Governor Rick Perry in November, will make teachers in schools with high percentages of poor students eligible for bonuses of between \$3,000 and \$10,000 each year if their schools are highly rated or if their students show significant academic improvement in reading and math. About 100 schools (two percent of the schools in the State) will receive three-

year grants of \$60,000 to \$180,000 a year -- depending on school size -- to implement the plan. Grants are to be awarded by September 15, 2006.

The Houston Chronicle reports that dyslexic third- and fifth-grade students in Texas have been provided accommodations to finish the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The approach allows teachers to read aloud all proper names on the test and gives the untimed reading test over two days to minimize fatigue. To receive such accommodations, students must be identified with dyslexia or similar reading problems and must be receiving remediation because of their disability. A pilot test of the approach last year in Houston showed that the accommodations helped increase the pass rate for dyslexic students from nine percent to 41 percent.

Utah Update - March 2006

According to The Salt Lake City Tribune, high school seniors who fail to pass all three sections (reading, math, and science) of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT) will receive high school diplomas (rather than certificates of completion as earlier planned), but the diplomas will note which portions of the UBSCT have been passed. The State requires students to make three attempts to pass the UBSCT and, starting with the Class of 2008, requires students to take advantage of remediation opportunities. Currently, there is no State funding for such remediation, but State education officials have urged the legislature to provide up to \$10 million so school districts could create such remediation programs.

Vermont Update - March 2006

The Burlington Free Press reports that total spending in Vermont for special education was more than \$194 million in FY 2005. About 13 percent of the State's public school enrollment are eligible for special education services at an average per-pupil cost of \$15,732. More than three-quarters of special education students are served in regular public school classrooms. But many of the other students are taught at private schools with tuitions that run as high as \$33,000.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that Governor James Douglas, in his State-of-the-State address, proposed to establish a \$175 million college scholarship program that would provide tuition assistance to Vermont high school graduates who attend State colleges and agree to live and work in the State for three years after college graduation.

Washington Update - March 2006

The Washington State legislature has passed a bill that would establish alternative graduate routes for students who fail the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). As reported in The Seattle Times, the two alternatives are a portfolio assessment or a comparison of student grades with those of other students who pass the WASL. The bill is considered a stopgap measure which a legislature-sponsored study of alternative assessments is conducted. The study's initial report is due December 1, 2006, with the final report due a year later.

The Seattle Times reports that nearly half of students entering community colleges from high school in 2004 needed to take a remedial course in mathematics. The problem at least partially stems from students taking the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in the tenth grade. Many students believe that, once they pass the WASL, they need no more math. Statewide in 2005, 52 percent of tenth graders failed the math section of the WASL (which educators believe was not very difficult). Starting with the Class of 2008, students must pass the reading, writing, and math portions in order to graduate. Some high schools in the State are addressing the problem by creating online refresher courses for seniors, establishing peer tutoring programs, and making sure students are aware (as early as sixth grade) that continuing with math is crucial to success in college and for employment.

Education Daily reports that a group of Seattle consumers has filed a class-action lawsuit against Scholastic, Inc. over its marketing practices. The proposed suit charges that Scholastic uses its position as a public school book provider to deceive parents into buying unsolicited materials. The company has, in the past, settled suits claiming that it violated the Federal Trade Commission's "prenotification negative option" rule that requires prospective consumers be informed about their purchase obligations and how to opt out of purchases.

Wisconsin Update - March 2006

A recent analysis by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute showed that the gap between the State's best- and worst-performing high schools is growing. Comparing test scores for the 1996-97 and 2003-04 school years, the study found that, in 2003-04, Wisconsin's most successful high schools (i.e., those in which tenth graders scored in the top ten percent on the State's standardized tests) scored 21.3 percent above the State average, compared with only 10.7 percent in 1996-97. Similarly, the State's least successful high schools (i.e., those in which tenth graders scored in the bottom ten percent on State tests) scored 17.3 percent below the State average in 2003-04 compared with 13.7 percent seven years earlier. The study found correlations between these scores and such factors as poverty and race.

As reported in [Class Notes](#), Wisconsin has agreed to increase the size of Milwaukee's voucher program. The program currently limits the number of Milwaukee students who can receive public vouchers to attend private schools to 15,000. Governor Jim Doyle will increase the cap under the condition that the private schools be held more accountable for their students' academic performance.

Wyoming Update - March 2006

The Casper Star-Tribune reports that Wyoming's nearly \$2 billion budget surplus has engendered a range of funding requests from the State's education community; these include a State-funded scholarship program, school construction, and nearly \$1 billion for day-to-day operations. School facilities funding proposals include \$637 million in construction requests from school districts and \$358 million for health/safety projects (\$221 million) and a "Project Opportunities Fund" that would allow districts to aggregate projects (\$137 million). A consultant study has proposed a revised comprehensive school funding model that would have added about \$150 to the State's K-12 spending, but legislators have eliminated many elements of the proposed model.