

Alabama Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Week's "Quality Counts 2005," Alabama has eight categorical funding programs, including school construction, transportation, at-risk students, and preschool education.

An independent study of the Alabama Reading Initiative has shown that the seven-year-old program is effective in improving reading scores for Alabama students. Budgeted at \$40 million this year, the program has grown from \$1.5 million and 16 schools in 1998 to 512 schools today. The study, using reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test from 1998 to 2003, showed significant gains for minority students and that the gains were maintained over time.

Alaska Update - March 2005

The Education Commission of the States reports that Alaska requires its school districts to allocate at least 70 percent of their operating budgets to instruction. To ensure uniformity, all districts must use a common chart of accounts and itemize specific expenditures as either instructional or non-instructional. Districts can be granted waivers if the State determines failure to comply “was due to circumstances beyond the control of the district.”

According to Education Week, Governor Frank Murkowski's two-year budget calls for an increase in education spending for FY 2006 and FY 2007 of \$126 million. The FY 2005 education budget was \$806 million. Resulting from a windfall increase in State revenues, the new budget will allow State aid to increase from \$4,576 per pupil in FY 2005 to \$4,869 next year and to \$5,174 in FY 2007, a six percent increase each year.

Arizona Update - March 2005

According to The Arizona Republic, a total of 868 eleventh graders in 11 small school districts and charter schools have been approved to receive free tutorial assistance to help them pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) exam. The Class of 2006 is the first that will be required to pass the AIMS in order to graduate. Ten million dollars has been redirected from other budget items into a fund that will provide up to nine hours of tutoring for eleventh-grade students who have failed at least one section of the AIMS. Arizona's larger districts are compiling data to determine which of their students are eligible for the free tutoring. Six private firms have been approved to provide tutoring in the State.

A bill has been introduced in the Arizona legislature which would allow the State to approve a uniform set of textbooks for students in all of the State's 1,900 public and charter schools. Senate Bill 1110 would authorize the State to assume control of all book purchasing and distribution. The State would also serve as procurement agent for all districts, purchasing and distributing the books. As might be expected, the State considers the plan to be a valuable means to ensure the quality and uniformity of instruction. The Arizona School Boards Association, on the other hand, expressed its belief that textbook selection should be the responsibility of locally-selected school boards.

Beginning with the Class of 2006, high school seniors are required to pass the AIMS in order to graduate. Education Week reports that, to date, 37,000 (57 percent) of next year's seniors have not passed all three sections -- reading, writing, mathematics -- of the AIMS. A Republican State Senator has introduced a bill to eliminate the AIMS as a graduation requirement, but State Superintendent Tom Horne is adamant about retaining it. The concept of a separate diploma for students who could not pass the AIMS has been rejected by the Superintendent and the Senator. The State has approved a fund of \$10 million to be used to provide tutoring for students who have not yet passed the test and to make practice tests available.

In her State-of-the-State address, Governor Napolitano proposed a doubling of Arizona's all-day kindergarten to include 10,000 new students. As reported in Education Week, the expansion is

part of the Governor's five-year plan to make all-day kindergarten available, on a voluntary basis, to all elementary schools in the State. The Governor also asked that special education students be exempt from having to pass the AIMS as a high school graduation requirement, promised to place a "master teacher" in every school, and planned to budget \$10 million for one-on-one tutoring to help low-performing students.

A ruling by Arizona's Attorney General, in mid-February, says that special education students who fail the AIMS test but pass their high school classes will be allowed to graduate with regular diplomas. Last Spring, 6,000 special education eleventh-graders in Arizona took the AIMS; only 20 percent passed the writing portion, 17 percent passed reading, and six percent passed math.

In late January, a Federal judge ruled that Arizona is not devoting sufficient resources to the 200,000 English language learners in the State. Although the ruling did specify the amount needed, it is estimated that as much as \$200 million per year would have to be added to English language programs in Arizona. Under the judge's order, the State legislature has until April 30 (or the end of the current legislative session) to resolve the issue. Already facing a significant estimated deficit for FY 2006, legislators are reviewing a cost study on the issue.

In February, a Federal district court upheld a State policy requiring teachers of English language learners to obtain 15 hours of training by August 2006 and 45 more hours in subsequent years. As reported by Education Daily, the lawsuit, filed by parents of English language learners, demanded that the State require the teachers to have 272 hours of training.

State education officials have expressed concern that students entering high school are ill-prepared to begin the algebra and geometry courses that they will be required to take. Results of the most recent AIMS showed that 60 percent of the State's tenth-graders who took the AIMS failed the test's math component. In order to improve mathematics instruction, the State has established "math academies," full-day training seminars for math teachers, funded at \$248,000 per year.

Arkansas Update - March 2005

According to "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, Arkansas has 12 categorical programs including school construction, professional development, aid for isolated districts, early childhood special education, and the Better Chance program for at-risk pre-kindergarten students.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that Governor Mike Huckabee has proposed a total of \$2.3 billion in spending for K-12 education in FY 2006, a ten percent increase over this year. In justifying his request, the Governor emphasized the economic benefit to the State of increasing the number of its citizen's with college degrees.

California Update - March 2005

In January, a bill was introduced in the California Senate that would amend the State's Constitution to link the pay of teachers and principals to student performance on State tests. The Sacramento Bee reports that, if the bill is approved, more than 300,000 teachers and six million students would become participants in the most widespread experiment with performance-based pay in the Nation. It would represent a significant shift from the current pay structure which is based on seniority and advanced degrees. The bill also extends the probationary period for new employees to earn tenure from two years to ten years.

According to "Quality Counts" from Education Week, in 2004, California had close to 50 categorical programs totaling \$10 billion. The five largest covered class-size reduction, transportation, special education, preschool/child development, the Targeted Instructional Improvement program. Last Fall, the State consolidated more than 20 of these programs into six block grants.

According to Education Week, California's \$36 billion budget for K-12 education includes \$31.7 million for teachers' professional development programs and \$5 million to add a fifth year to a training program to enhance the management skills of principals. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has also proposed some new programs, including a plan to convert large schools into smaller schools or schools-within-schools, an accelerated English language program for LEP fourth-eighth graders, and a program to reduce child obesity.

Education Week reports that California's growing number of schools failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) represents a substantial opportunity for charter school providers. Currently, more than 1,600 schools in the State have failed to make AYP; 268 of these have failed for four consecutive years calling for school restructuring. Charter schools are seen as one means of restructuring. Education Week reports that four failing schools in the San Diego school district have been given approval by the U. S. Department of Education to restructure themselves as charter schools. The four schools -- three

middle schools and one elementary school -- represent half of the eight chronically failing schools in the district.

According to Education Daily, a new State study has found that the number of special education teachers in California is not keeping pace with the increasing number of special education students. The enrollment of special education students grew by 7.4 percent over the study period, while the number of special education teachers increased by only 1.3 percent. The study also reported that 10 percent of California's K-12 students receive special education services, but that 14 percent of the State's African-American students are in special education.

The Los Angeles Times reports that the U. S. Department of Education (USED) is pressuring California to toughen its requirements for acceptable performance by school districts. Last year, only 14 (out of 1,000) school districts in the State were placed on the "watch" list (failed to make adequate yearly progress -- AYP -- for two consecutive years). Under the policy called for by USED, 310 more districts could be added to the list this school year. These new "watch" districts could include some of the State's traditionally high-performing districts which have subgroups (e.g., special education students) who failed to make AYP. A number of large school districts -- including Los Angeles -- are arguing that USED's requirements will undercut the progress being made.

Colorado Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, Colorado provides aid to local school districts through eight categorical programs, the largest of which are for special education, English-language learners, transportation, vocational education, and gifted-and-talented.

The Rocky Mountain News reports that the bipartisan Colorado Commission for High School Improvement has issued a set of recommendations for secondary school reform. Among the Commission's recommendations are the requirement that all high school students must apply for post-secondary education and that illegal immigrants be eligible for in-State college tuition.

The Denver Post reports that Colorado has established a new initiative, called College in Colorado, designed to increase the number of the State's high school students who go on to college. The five-year program will be funded at \$15 million, with two-thirds of the funding coming from the private sector and non-profit organizations. The other \$5 million will come from State funds. The money will be used to promote new and existing scholarships for low-income high school graduates and to fund a media campaign to raise awareness of the availability of support for students enrolling in higher education.

According to The Denver Post, over the past five years the number of Colorado students attending online schools has increased from 166 in the 2000-01 school year to more than 4,200 in the current year. The State will reportedly spend a total of \$23.9 million this year on online education. In 2000-01, the total was only \$1.08 million.

The Denver Post reports that full-time students attending online schools in Colorado are required to repeat grades at a rate more than four times that of regular school students. Overall, 2.2 percent of the State's 737,000 students were retained in grade last year, compared with 8.9 percent of cyberschool students. Moreover, online schools appear to have higher attrition rates as well. Only 537 students, out of 1,863 enrolled full-time in cyberschools in 2002-03, were still

enrolled two years later. State officials have not analyzed the reasons for these data, but suggest that online schools tend to attract students who have failed in traditional schools.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that Governor Bill Owens has proposed a FY 2006 K-12 education budget of \$3.6 billion, 1.1 percent higher than the current year. The Governor also asked the legislature to enact a law requiring schools to notify parents if their children fail to register for a precollegiate curriculum. Facing a budget crisis and a State law (known as TABOR) which requires that any surplus State funds be returned to taxpayers, the Governor has proposed asking permission to retain the State's current surplus but maintain the law's spending caps. The surplus funds would be used to support a \$1.7 billion bond issue for public works and higher education projects.

Education Week reports that, beginning next Fall, any student ranked in the top ten percent of a high school class will be guaranteed admission into the University of Colorado. The plan is intended to relieve the anxiety of students and parents about the admission process.

The Denver school district is planning to implement its new ProComp teacher merit pay system which rewards teachers for improving student performance, working in hard-to-staff schools, or continuing professional development. As reported in Education Daily, the \$25 million per-year program must be approved through a property increase vote in November. Some of the needed funds are being contributed by private foundations: the Rose Community Foundation (\$1 million), the Broad Foundation (\$620,000), and the Daniele Fund (\$500,000).

Connecticut Update - March 2005

In late January, Connecticut announced that 43 of the State's school districts -- approximately 25 percent of Connecticut's school systems -- were identified as failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Nearly half of these failing districts were cited because of low performance by special education students. The list of districts that did not make AYP includes the State's large urban districts -- Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport -- which have historically low test scores. It also includes a number of wealthy, historically high-performing school districts -- New Milford, Trumbull, and West Hartford -- all of which failed to make AYP because of low scores by their special education students. Most of the districts on the State's list have failed to make AYP for at least two years. They will be required to submit an improvement plan and inform parents that the district is "in need of improvement."

The U. S. Department of Education (USED) has refused Connecticut's request for an exemption from an expansion of testing under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). State education officials had requested the waiver on the grounds that testing all grade 3-8 students in reading and math would be too costly and provide no benefit. The State says that, by 2008, Federal funding in support of NCLB will be \$41.6 million short of what is needed to expand testing, help low-performing schools, and meet other NCLB requirements.

Following the lead of nearby Maine, Connecticut has proposed an ambitious plan to provide laptop computers to the State's high school students. As reported in [eSchool News](#), the plan calls for \$15.5 million to be set aside for laptops in high school English classes. Under the two-year program, 19,000 computers would be purchased for all of Connecticut's ninth and tenth grade classrooms, starting next school year. The State is considering using a computerized version of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test by the 2008-09 school year and wants the students to become accustomed to computer-based testing before then.

Delaware Update - March 2005

Education Week's "Quality Counts" reports that Delaware has 41 different categorical programs that provide support to local school districts. Among the larger such programs are aid for special education, reading initiatives, professional development, gifted-and-talented, bilingual, and early childhood education.

As reported in Education Week, newly re-elected Governor Ruth Ann Minner, in her State-of-the-State address outlined a number of education priorities for her final term (Delaware's Governors are limited to two terms). Among these are: (1) a teacher accountability system in place by the start of the 2005-06 school year; (2) math specialists in the State's 22 lowest-performing middle schools; and (3) voluntary full-day kindergarten Statewide by 2008.

Delaware Online confirms that Delaware is seeking to have optional, full-day kindergarten available in all school districts by 2008. Governor Minner believes that, although optional, the program will attract the majority of parents of five-year-olds. Her proposed FY 2006 budget includes \$3 million to expand full-day kindergarten this year and \$30 million for classroom construction. It has been estimated that the program will require a total of \$45 million in school construction and \$23 million per year in operating expenses. Four Delaware school districts -- Laurel, Seaford, Smyrna, and Woodbridge -- already have full-day kindergarten.

The State of Delaware has decided to provide the ETS PATHWISE Framework Induction Program to the State's new teachers in all 19 school districts and 13 charter schools. The State purchased 830 ETS PATHWISE Induction Kits last Fall and plans to buy more next Fall. The State believes the ETS program will help Delaware school districts comply with a new State law requiring mentors for teachers during their first three years of teaching.

Test results released in mid-February show that 90 percent of Delaware's fourth-grade students and 75 percent of sixth-grade students met State science standards based on testing last Fall. In social studies, 69 percent of fourth-graders and 57 percent of sixth-graders met State standards.

Students have shown improvement each year in both subjects with the exception of sixth-grade social studies which has seen declining scores for the past two years.

The Christina school district, the largest in Delaware, is considering a major overhaul of its teacher compensation structure.

District of Columbia Update - March 2005

D.C. is part of the Wisconsin, Delaware & Arkansas Consortium which is developing an assessment for English language proficiency (ELP). The District is currently developing ELP standards.

According to Education Week's "Quality Counts," D.C. has a number of categorical programs separate from the basic foundation formula; these include support for special education and tuition for private placements of special education students.

As reported in The Washington Post, new district Superintendent Clifford Janey has proposed a major overhaul of the district's curriculum over the next six months. The first phase of the Superintendent's plan is to adopt the highly regarded reading and mathematics standards used in Massachusetts. The standards would be implemented this Fall and the following Spring students would take a modified version of the Massachusetts exam. New standards for science and social studies will also be put in place when appropriate models are identified. During the summer, D. C. school officials will begin selection of new curricula and textbooks and the design of a new teacher training program. The planned district-level changes conform with a 2004 report by the Council of Great city Schools which said D. C. had no coherent academic program and had ceded instructional oversight to individual school principals. The local teachers union has indicated its support for the Superintendent's proposals but expressed doubt about the school system's ability to devote enough funds for teacher training.

Florida Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Daily, Florida has proposed an expansion of the State's ban on social promotion to cover all grades. Currently, only third-grade students are included in the ban. According to the plan, students scoring at the lowest level on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) would be retained in grade. Students who do not take the FCAT would be required to pass alternative criteria in order to advance in grade. If the proposed criteria were in effect last year, more than 430,000 students would have been held back. The State legislature, in its Spring session, must approve the proposal for it to go into effect.

The Orlando Sentinel reports that, in an effort to link school funding with student performance, ten percent of the State funds scheduled to go to public school districts could be withheld if the districts do not meet or exceed academic goals -- such as improved test scores, higher graduation rates, or increased enrollment in more rigorous courses. Critics of the policy say it could leave low-performing districts without the capability to provide basic academic programs or support functions.

As reported in "Quality Counts" from Education Week, Florida provides funds to local school districts through six categorical programs that are beyond the basic Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Funded at a total of \$1.8 billion in FY 2004, these categorical programs include support for transportation, literacy, professional development, class-size reduction, technology, and instructional materials.

As reported in Education Week, the Florida Supreme Court struck down Florida's five-year-old school voucher program known as Opportunity Scholarships. In November, a lower court ruled it unconstitutional and Governor Jeb Bush and other supporters of vouchers appealed. The law provided public school students with vouchers to attend private schools if their public school is identified as failing in two out of five years. During the current school year, 700 students from seven school districts have applied for such vouchers. The controversy does not affect other school choice initiatives such as vouchers for disabled children (McKay Scholarships) and the corporate income tax program that provides private scholarships to poor students.

In a special December session, the Florida legislature approved a plan calling for three-hour prekindergarten classes offered by private providers. As reported in Education Week, during the program's first year, instructors would not be required to have even a two-year degree but would receive some training in early childhood education. The final costs for the program will be determined during the March regular legislative session; estimates run approximately \$400 million per year. The content of the program has also yet to be determined. Although no specific curriculum will be required, the preschool providers will stress such early literacy skills as letter knowledge and vocabulary.

Education Week reports that Governor Bush has proposed a plan that would result in significant changes in Florida's middle schools. Last year's Middle Grades Reform Act provided reading coaches in middle schools across the State. The Governor's new proposal would require sixth-grade students to earn 12 credits before they could go on to high school -- one credit each year in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The plan would also require sixth-graders reading below grade level to take a remedial reading course.

According to the Palm Beach Post, in the past two years since the passage of Florida's class size reduction amendment, the State has spent only \$700 million more than the budgets schools in the State had already been receiving. When the amendment was originally passed, Governor Bush warned that reducing class sizes as called for by the amendment would cost the State an additional \$27.5 billion in new school construction. The actual spending appears to be approximately \$786 million, \$700 million of which has already been allocated to school districts. The Governor also estimated the amendment would cost \$1.7 billion in operating costs; in actuality, operating spending has changed little since the amendment's passage. Rather than calling for a repeal of the amendment, the Governor has proposed an alternative plan that would allow districts to average class size to meet the class size limits imposed by the amendment. He also says he wants to free up funds to raise Florida's minimum teacher salary from \$29,000 to \$35,000.

Facing a huge teacher shortage, Florida is planning to use the State's community college system to prepare new teachers. As reported in the St. Petersburg Times, an alternative certification program known as "educator preparation institutes," housed primarily in community colleges, will allow individuals with undergraduate degrees to go through a one-year education "boot camp" which will allow them to become fully certified if they pass the same exams as required of traditional teachers. The plan has not yet been completely formulated, but 23 of the State's community colleges have agreed to participate beginning this summer. According to projections, Florida will need 30,000 new teachers in the Fall of 2006 and 20,000 more each year for the next decade.

In February, the Florida State Board of Education voted to request proposals from outside educators to manage "chronically failing" schools. As reported in The Miami Herald, the proposals are due in March and will be discussed at the April board meeting. Applicants are expected to include charter school operators, universities, and for-profit companies. Currently, 41 schools in Florida fall in the "F" category, but final decisions about school takeovers will await the release of this Spring's FCAT results.

As reported in Education Daily, Governor Bush has proposed legislation that includes higher teacher salaries, more school choice options, and support for reading coaches. The Governor's plan calls for reading funds to become a permanent component of the State's school funding formula; the funds would support reading coaches, summer reading camps, and more instructional materials.

In late February, as reported in Education Daily, Governor Bush proposed a program which would allow students who perform at the lowest level on the reading FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) for three consecutive years to receive Reading Compact Scholarships to attend another public or private school.

As reported in The Miami Herald, Governor Bush has proposed a new voucher program as part of his package of education reforms. Florida's existing voucher program is in serious jeopardy after two courts have ruled that public funds cannot be used to pay tuition at religious schools.

The Governor's expanded voucher plan is intended to provide alternatives for nearly 200,000 students Statewide who have scored at the low end of State reading tests for three consecutive years. The plan is likely to be opposed by Democratic legislators as well as the State school boards association.

The Miami/Dade County school district is planning to expand summer school programs this summer. As reported in The Miami Herald, the plan calls for month-long, full-day sessions serving more than 100,000 PreK-12 students and at-home or part-day services for another 58,000 students. Including a wide range of remedial and enrichment classes, the program is expected to cost three-times as much as the \$14 million last year's summer school cost. Remedial reading would be provided to as many as 8,000 third-grade students who failed the reading FCAT and another 8,000 second-graders who are struggling with reading. Among the other components of the planned summer school are: (1) *Zoom-In, Zoom-Out* allowing third-graders to work with digital microscopes; (2) *Hands-on Math and Science Career Sailing Camp* by which seventh- and eighth-graders could apply science and math to nautical projects; and (3) *World Language Immersion* through which middle and high-school students would study a foreign language full-time.

Georgia Update - March 2005

As reported in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia's graduation rate of 63 percent is one of the lowest in the country. Students must pass all five sections of the State graduation test -- English, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science -- in order to graduate. Many Georgia students have failed to graduate with their classes because they could not pass the test's science section. Moreover, the State, beginning in 2007, will start the teaching of science in the eighth -- rather than the sixth -- grade. State Superintendent Kathy Cox has requested an additional \$3 million to provide science tutoring to high school students at risk of failing the science exam.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that the State has proposed a budget item for next year that would provide \$1 million to give Georgia students free access to online SAT preparation. The funds would allow the State's 58,000 students who take the SAT each year to take three full-length practice tests and individual score reports prepared by the College board who administers the SAT.

Governor Sonny Perdue has proposed an education initiative that would provide online course options for all Georgia students. Part of the initiative is the Georgia Virtual School which offers particular benefits for students in small or rural school districts that are unable to offer adequate Advanced Placement courses. The bill would also offer online courses after school hours and during the summer. Participation in the Georgia Virtual School is likely to be limited because there are only 30 teachers in the State who are trained in online instruction. The online school would provide Georgia students with access to 60 online courses including SAT prep and Advanced Placement classes. The web-based school would also allow Georgia high school students to research Georgia college choices, apply for admission, submit transcripts, and apply for financial aid. The State estimates that eventually 2,000 students could take online courses at \$400, representing a cost to the State of approximately \$800,000.

As reported in Education Week, Governor Perdue, in his State-of-the-State address, proposed a "master teacher" program which would allow the best teachers to serve as academic coaches and role models for other teachers.

As reported in Education Week, Georgia has adopted a new strategic plan for the State's 35 charter schools. Among the plan's key long-term goals are: (1) sharing information with all stakeholders on charter school expectations; (2) promoting charter schools as an option for schools that have failed to meet the standards of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act; and (3) using outside evaluations and self-assessments to improve charter school operation.

Based upon a national report prepared by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation gave Georgia a "B" grade for the quality of the States academic standards in English and mathematics. Only a handful of states received higher grades. The report's principal criticism of Georgia was the State's requirement that first-graders use calculators.

Cobb County is in the process of completing a deal with Apple Computer to provide 63,000 wireless laptop computers to its students and teachers. As reported in eSchool News, the districts "Power to Learn" program, unlike other laptop programs around the country, will include middle- and high-school students. The four-year project is budgeted at nearly \$90 million -- \$350 annually per computer including software, maintenance, and training. The County School Board has been asked to approve a \$69.9 million budget for the project's first four years.

Idaho Update - March 2005

Idaho has 19 categorical programs as reported in Education Week's "Quality Counts." These programs, funded at a total of \$966 million in FY 2004, include support for transportation, literacy initiatives, teacher benefits, substance abuse prevention, bilingual education, gifted-and-talented, school facilities, and technology.

Governor Dirk Kempthorne has proposed a \$999 million budget for public schools in FY 2006, an increase of 3.6 percent over the current year. As reported in Education Week, the Governor -- in his State-of-the-State address -- said he plans to increase the State's focus on helping students who have failed the new State high school graduation test and promised support for Idaho's proposed performance-based program for teachers.

Illinois Update - March 2005

Illinois provides targeted funds to local school districts through 42 categorical programs funded at a total of \$1.96 billion in FY 2004. As reported in Education Week's "Quality Counts," the largest such programs provide support for transportation, special education services, and high-cost special education students.

As reported in the Chicago Sun-Times, the emphasis on reading and math skills embodied in the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has, in many Illinois schools, resulted in a sharp drop in the time spent on social studies. In the past, Illinois students were tested in social studies in the fourth and seventh grades and as part of the State's high school exam. In July, however, the State legislature voted to eliminate all State assessments not required under NCLB, including social studies. Many educators argue that not having early assessments of social studies makes it difficult for schools to evaluate their integrated curricula and results in students entering high school with widely different social studies backgrounds.

The Chicago Sun-Times, reporting on a study by the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research, indicated that only about 54 percent of the public high school students in Chicago graduate in four years. The study shows that, although the city's graduation rate has improved in recent years (it was 46 percent in 1996), it is nowhere near the 71 percent claimed by the State. The State has questioned some of the study's findings but has agreed that the longitudinal tracking of students is more accurate than the State's methodology of simply comparing the number of students who enter high school with the number who graduate four years later. The State says it will not have the ability to track students until 2006, when the district's new student information system is implemented.

In late January, Chicago Public Schools agreed to forego \$5 million and pay for its district-operated tutoring program out of local (\$4 million) and State (\$1 million) funds. The district has been under pressure from the U.S. Department of Education to outsource its tutoring to private providers. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school districts such as Chicago that fail to meet the Federal standards are not allowed to operate in-school tutoring. Currently, more

than 80,000 Chicago students receive tutoring; fewer than half go to private tutors who, according to district sources, cost four times as much (\$1,200 per student or \$300 per student). The district's \$4 million contribution to the tutoring program will come from the \$40 million summer school budget; the cut could have an effect on summer school offerings.

Indiana Update - March 2005

In mid-January, the Indiana Education Roundtable recommended the implementation of higher passing scores on Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+). As reported in The Indianapolis Star, of the 50,000 tenth-graders who took the test in the Fall, 32 percent would fail the reading component and 36 percent would fail the mathematics component. These estimated failure rates are marginally higher than the rates for students who took a different (and considerably easier) version of the graduation exam in 2003-04 (reading - 31 percent; math - 33 percent). Students who fail are permitted to take the exam up to four more times during their junior and senior years. If they still do not pass, they will not graduate with their class, but can take the tests again as adults and receive a diploma if they pass. Schools also receive State funds to provide remedial classes for students who fail any portion of the exam.

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, Indiana provides support to local school districts -- beyond the State's basic formula aid -- through 14 categorical programs funded at a total of \$135 million in FY 2004.

New legislation, backed by Governor Mitch Daniels, could create as many as 70 new charter schools across Indiana, according to The Indianapolis Star. The Governor has announced his intentions to loosen the State-imposed restrictions that have limited the growth of charter schools in Indiana. Under the proposed legislation, charter schools would: (a) be eligible to receive Federal school construction funds and matching State funds; (b) quality for the same funding school districts receive for alternative schools; (c) be allowed to offer online classes; and (4) be given 90 days (rather than the current 60 days) to review proposals for new charter schools. Currently, 11 charter schools are operating in the State.

In order to meet the increasing graduation rate requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Indiana legislature is considering a law to encourage potential dropouts to remain in school. According to Education Daily, the law would revoke the driver's license and work permit of any student under 18 years old who quits high school. Under existing law, students can drop out after age 16 only with the consent of parents and the school principal.

The Indianapolis Star reports that the State's plan to impose tougher graduation requirements for high school students in science and mathematics has been somewhat eased. Among the changes the State has proposed are: (1) eliminating the requirement that students take math through twelfth grade; (2) allowing students who attempted but failed more rigorous courses to return to the basic diploma track; and (3) expanding the range of optional classes for a basic diploma to include social studies, foreign languages, and fine arts.

Governor Daniels, in his State-of-the-State address, called upon the State legislature to move the State's assessment exams to the Spring each year rather than the Fall. His proposed budget for the 2006-07 biennium is \$7.4 billion, a one-percent increase over the current budget period. He also recommended that the State education superintendent position be shifted from an elected to an appointed position. All State agencies have been told to keep their spending next year at the 2005 level. The freeze will have particular impact on growing districts because the basic State formula limits funding for new students. Under an Executive Order, the Governor has created a Department of Government Efficiency and Financial Planning which has been charged with slowing down what the Governor sees as excessive school construction costs.

The Indiana legislature is considering a bill that would provide private school vouchers to students in schools in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. According to Education Daily, the proposal would also allow parents whose children go to private schools to take tax credits for tuition and other instructional expenses for up to \$1,000 in 2006 and 2007, with the credit increasing by \$500 each year until it reaches \$3,000 in 2014.

The Indianapolis Star reports mixed results for the most recently released scores on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress - Plus (ISTEP+). For the State's fourth-grade students, 64 percent passed both the language arts and mathematics sections of the ISTEP+. In 180 (out of 292) Indiana school districts, the fourth-graders showed higher passing rates than they did as third-graders; in urban districts, however, the fourth-grade pass rate was lower than for the prior year's third-graders.

Iowa Update - March 2005

According to The Des Moines Register, Governor Tom Vilsack has called for more relevant and rigorous high schools. However, the Iowa Board of Education and the incoming State Superintendent, Judy Jeffrey, oppose State-mandated increases in minimum graduation requirements, arguing such matters should be left to the control of local school boards. Ms. Jeffrey did say, however, that if local districts do not raise graduation requirements, the State could take action.

As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Iowa Learns Council has recommended that Iowa high schools deliver a "more rigorous and relevant high school experience." Governor Vilsack has said he intends to follow the Council's recommendations including strengthened curricula, tougher graduation requirements, and allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school.

Kansas Update - March 2005

According to Education Week's "Quality Counts," Kansas provides categorical support to local school districts through five programs: food service, juvenile detention services, Parents as Teachers, bond and interest State aid, and special education. These categorical programs were funded at \$316 million in FY 2004.

Education Week reports that Governor Kathleen Sibelius' budget for FY 2006 includes \$2.4 billion for K-12 education, an increase of only .06 percent. It would leave per-pupil spending unchanged at \$3,863.

Kentucky Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, Kentucky provides targeted support to its local school districts through 27 categorical programs including transportation, reading initiatives, professional development, gifted-and-talented, early childhood education, school construction, teacher benefits, and technology.

The online Kentucky Post reports that some school districts in Northern Kentucky have asked for a waiver that would allow them to use different assessment measures. Currently in use is the Statewide Commonwealth Accountability Test System (CATS) developed by Kentucky educators. Under the waiver proposal, the districts would use the nationally-normed Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Iowa Test of Educational Development, and the ACT rather than components of CATS.

The Louisville Courier-Journal reports that Kentucky is planning to conduct a Statewide "academic audit" through which a team of educators and parents would visit approximately 50 schools selected based on their performance on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). The audit teams would assess each schools curriculum and support structures and make recommendations for improvement. Each of the schools would receive at least \$10,000 to implement some of the recommendations.

Louisiana Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts" (Education Week), Louisiana provides targeted aid to its local school districts through 13 categorical programs, including special education, literacy initiatives, professional development, and early childhood education.

Louisiana has developed a diagnostic test that could tell high school dropouts whether they will succeed in the State's community college system. The exam gives credit for skills learned in the workplace and is based on the traditional ACT's WorkKeys test which has been used for many years in Louisiana as a workplace readiness measure.

As reported in Education Daily, Louisiana has established a plan to bring high school dropouts back to school and help them join special programs in the State's community college system. Known as *Jobs for America's Graduates: Louisiana*, the program -- funded at \$500,000 this year -- provides career mentors for students who are out of school. These mentors provide help in job-seeking and encourage students to complete their education.

Studies of high school programs in Louisiana have determined that many of the programs lack sufficient rigor. Data from the studies show that:

- 45 percent of the State's Class of 2004 would require remediation in mathematics and 36 percent would require remedial work in English;
- 40 percent of the seniors who did not graduate completed their coursework but failed the required exit exam;
- 12 percent of the State's high school classes are taught by uncertified teachers.

Educators in Louisiana are debating how to correct these shortcomings.

State Superintendent Cecil Picard plans to lead an effort to overhaul the Orleans Parish financial operations and get to the root of problems which has resulted in an audit exception from the USED Inspector General's office that found between July 2001 and December 2003 a district could not account for spending approximately \$70 million in Title I funds. An earlier probe by the Federal Bureau of Investigation has resulted in more than two dozen indictments within the

district relating to fraud and abuse. The Office of Inspector General report indicated that the Parish could not verify that staff time paid for with Title I dollars had actually been allocated and used in Title I-related activities. As reported in Education Week, State Superintendent Picard said that USED would stop the allocation of Title I funds for Orleans Parish if problems were not corrected. In addition to creating an oversight committee, Superintendent Picard was reportedly planning to hire a corporate "turnaround" firm to assist in the Orleans Parish situation.

Maine Update - March 2005

This Spring, Maine, along with Vermont and Alabama, will administer a new test for students who have languages other than English as their native language. Designed by a ten-state consortium, the test has both written and oral components. It has five levels, all of which must be passed for a student to be considered proficient. A total of approximately 3,200 Maine K-12 students will be assessed using the new test.

According to "Quality Counts" from Education Week, Maine provides support to its schools -- beyond the basic foundation formula -- through five categorical programs: special education, early childhood education, vocational education, transportation, and bus purchasing.

Governor John Baldacci, in his State-of-the-State address announced plans to expand Maine's laptop program to next year's ninth-grade students. As reported in Education Week, the Governor also indicated that the State would create worker training programs to teach parents how to use laptops. The Governor also announced a pilot Early College program at 25 high schools; it would identify students who are unlikely to attend four-year colleges and offer free community college classes during their senior year.

Maryland Update - March 2005

Maryland has appointed a 24-member task force to study K-12 social studies instruction in the State. Slated to continue through next September, the Task Force's deliberations will address best practices, the amount of time devoted to social studies instruction, and a professional development plan for social studies teachers.

Education Daily reports that a Maryland legislative committee has reinstated a program, ended last year, which allowed school districts to pay returning educators their full salaries and allow them to keep their retirement annuities. If passed, this year's program would allow the rehiring of teachers and principals for critical subject areas (mathematics, science, special education) and for low-performing schools.

In late February, the Maryland Board of Education established minimum passing standards for the Maryland High School Assessment tests that will be required for graduation, starting in 2009. Students will be required either to pass all four components (English, algebra, biology, government) of the tests or achieve a satisfactory combined score for all four (as long as a minimum score is reached on each). Under this approach, according to State officials, students who are poor in one subject (e.g., LEP students) would still be able to graduate.

As reported in Education Week, Baltimore City Schools has Federally mandated IEP teams that are intended to ensure that the districts' 14,600 special education students get appropriate individualized instruction. However, a recent study -- authored by Kalman Hettleman and distributed by the Abell Foundation -- says that the IEP teams are not trained in the most effective instructional programs and are not able to customize IEPs to the student's needs. The district has questioned the impartiality of the study saying that the author, a former school board member, has an adversarial relationship with the district.

Massachusetts Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Week's "Quality Counts," Massachusetts provides targeted funding to local school districts through 22 categorical programs. Among these are programs for: transportation, early childhood education, literacy, kindergarten development grants, school construction, high-cost special education students, and support for low-scoring students on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

Data from the Massachusetts Department of Education indicate that more than 30 percent of the State's eighth-grade students failed the science section of the MCAS last Spring. In the State's five largest districts, more than half failed. This has caused great concern among educators who believe the effort to make science a high school graduation requirement could cause thousands of students to fail to graduate. School officials argue that the increased emphasis on science must be accompanied by more State funds for teacher training, instructional materials, and tutoring.

Massachusetts education officials are hoping to make passing the Statewide science assessment a graduation requirement by 2007. Currently, high school seniors must pass the English and mathematics portions of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in order to receive their diplomas. The science component is scheduled to become a requirement by 2009; the new proposal would accelerate the plan by two years. Currently, all fifth- and eighth-graders take the science MCAS and, beginning in 2006, all tenth graders will also be required to take it.

Education Week reports that Governor Mitt Romney, in his State-of-the-State address, outlined a budget proposal for FY 2006 that would increase direct education funding from \$3.1 billion to \$3.2 billion.

The Alliance for Excellent Education has proposed a new Education Reform Act of 2005 which would improve teacher training and mentoring, implement a science graduation test, and extend the school day in low-performing school districts.

The Boston Teachers' Union, headed by Richard Stutman, is implementing Homework Helpers, a free tutoring program for K-8 students. Tutors are members of the Boston Teachers' Union. The program, which is operating at all 27 Boston Public Library locations, is being funded in part by over \$40,000 in membership dues. The Boston Public Schools has been identified for improvement as a district and may be required to outsource all of its SES tutoring. Currently the district provides an extensive SES afterschool program.

Michigan Update - March 2005

Michigan provided approximately \$676 million in categorical aid to its local school districts in FY 2004. As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, among the State's 28 categorical programs are: special education, transportation, aid for low-income students, gifted-and-talented, bilingual education, and early childhood education.

As reported in eSchool News, Michigan is planning to pilot test the use of computers to grade student essays. The pilot project will involve a small group of sixth-graders, probably those already participating in the State's laptop program. Students would take essay exams on a computer and the essays would be graded by both the computer and teachers to assess the system's reliability. If the pilot project is successful, it could be expanded Statewide. It is not expected that the essay-scoring system would be used to score State assessment exams to measure progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Some educators have expressed skepticism about computer essay-scoring, arguing that it can grade spelling and punctuation, but will be unable to evaluate content.

Michigan State School Superintendent Tom Watkins resigned under pressure from Governor Jennifer Granholm. The Detroit News reports that Michigan's chief academic officer, Jeremy Hughes, will serve as acting State Superintendent through early March when the resignation of former Superintendent Watkins becomes effective. Watkins has taken a position with Wayne State University as a special assistant to the University's President, specializing in K-12 initiatives.

Governor Granholm, according to Education Week, has proposed a scholarship program for high school graduates that would provide \$4,000 tuition grants to students who obtain a two-year degree, move to a four-year institution, or complete a technical program. In her State-of-the-State address, the Governor also called for \$800 million for Statewide infrastructure improvements including modernizing many aging school buildings.

The Detroit News reports that the Detroit school district will close as many as 40 of the district's 252 schools at the end of this school year. District officials argue that the closings are necessary because of Detroit's loss of students -- expected to be 10,000 per year for the next few years -- and the district's \$200 million budget deficit. Detroit closed 21 schools between 2000 and 2003, but, during the same period, opened 16 new ones using the proceeds from a 1994, \$1.4 billion school construction bond. The planned closings for this year are believed to be the most by any district in a single year.

Minnesota Update - March 2005

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Tim Pawlenty proposed a K-12 education budget of \$12.4 billion for the FY 2006-07 biennium, a 1.5 increase over the prior two-year budget period.

Minnesota has proposed a plan to increase spending on K-12 education by more than \$350 million over the next two years. As reported on Minnesota Public Radio, the plan would increase the State's basic funding formula by two percent each year yielding an additional \$202 per student. The most important component of the plan set forth by Governor Pawlenty is an incentive program that would be built into the teacher salary structure. The budget includes \$60 million for incentives that would help school districts switch from pay scales based on seniority and college credits to one based on student performance. His proposal calls for \$60 million, over two years, to be made available to districts that create new systems with different levels of teachers including mentors and master teachers. He believes this funding would be enough to help districts serving half of Minnesota's K-12 students.

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, State support for Minnesota's local school districts comes from the State's school finance formula (75 percent) and from 48 categorical programs (25 percent). Among these categorical programs are funding for adult literacy, debt service, desegregation, and high-cost special education students.

In early March, Minnesota reported the results of tests for the State's 57,000 students English language learners. Only 20 percent of the State's sixth-graders who took the English language proficiency test last Fall were rated "proficient"; only 22 percent of the test sixth-graders who had been enrolled in English language programs for at least five years were proficient. The news was even worse at the high school level. About 11 percent of tested twelfth-graders were rated proficient, including only 15 percent of those who had been enrolled in English language programs for at least five years.

As reported in the Star-Tribune, Republican State legislators have introduced a school voucher plan by which low-income students in Minneapolis and St. Paul could receive "education access grants" to attend private schools. Under the plan, \$4,601 per student per year -- representing the basic per-pupil State aid -- could be used to pay private school tuition. As expected, officials from the two school districts strongly oppose the proposal.

Mississippi Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Week's "Quality Counts," Mississippi provides targeted support to its local school districts through five categorical programs: transportation, vocational education, alternative education, special education, and gifted-and-talented.

As reported in Education Week, Governor Haley Barbour has proposed a State budget that would place K-12 spending at \$2.1 billion, an increase of \$57 million (less than three percent over the current year). The Governor's plan includes a four percent increase in general State aid and restoring funds for teacher supplies that had been cut last year. But "non-instructional" components of the K-12 budget would be cut by the same five percent as other departments. The budget plan includes bonuses for teachers whose students' test scores improve and a decrease in State regulations for the State's highest rated school districts.

Governor Barbour has proposed an eight percent pay raise for Mississippi's teachers. As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, his proposed education budget is \$2.1 billion, a three percent increase over the prior year. The Governor also included a number of high school initiatives as part of his Education Reform Act, including a program to allow high school students to take classes -- for both high school and college credit -- at a university or community college.

Missouri Update - March 2005

The USED Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has found an unusual audit exception in Missouri which has implications for many TechMIS subscribers. Under NCLB, districts are encouraged to consolidate funds of various Federal programs including IDEA and Title I schoolwide programs in order to serve both Title I eligible and non-eligible students who have education deficiencies. In the past, many school districts were concerned that, if they commingled these funds, a Federal or state auditor might claim they misused Title I funds, which has been a major audit exception over the past three decades. In this case, the OIG is citing Missouri for not commingling funds. According to Title I Monitor, state Title I officials argue that not only has USED provided no guidance in this area, but that targeted assistance schools have outperformed schoolwide programs two to one in terms of meeting AYP targets. As we have noted on several occasions, districts do not have to report how Title I and other Federal funds are spent in Title I schoolwide programs which is an open invitation for "supplanting" -- using Federal funds to make up for shortfalls in local funds in cases such as hiring teachers or retaining teachers who otherwise would have to be released. This is also an open invitation for districts to transfer up to 50 percent of funds from other Federal Titles into schoolwide programs again to be used for supplanting purposes. Over a year ago, the Government Accounting Office recommending dropping the "supplement not supplant" provision for schoolwide programs because districts don't have to report how the money is spent. The OIG, in its October 2004 audit work plan, noted the consolidation of Federal funds in schoolwide programs is a major focus of their audit plans across all states.

Education officials in Missouri are bemoaning the decline in the teaching of social studies. As reported in The Kansas City Star, most of the blame is directed at the Federal No Child Left Behind Act which emphasizes basic skills such as reading and mathematics. In the past, Missouri required testing fourth-graders in social studies as part of the State accreditation. Now, particularly at the elementary and middle grades, social studies topics must be woven into basic literacy instruction.

"Quality Counts" from Education Week shows that Missouri provides support to its school districts -- beyond the basic foundation formula -- through categorical programs for transportation, special education, gifted-and-talented, professional development, and early childhood education.

Education Daily reports that USED has approved a proposal from Missouri that would lower the State's academic targets under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for the current school year. The new student proficiency goals will be 26.6 percent (rather than 38.8 percent) in language arts and 17.5 percent (rather than 31.1 percent) in mathematics. This represents the first time USED has permitted lowering of standards and is being cited by AASA as a good sign that USED will be making "decisions with good common sense."

Missouri is facing a significant controversy over how to pay for the education of students with severe disabilities. The State has 1,200 special education students who are sent to private institutions because they cannot be adequately served by their public school districts. The cost of their private education is about \$23 million. According to State law, the education of severely disabled students is a State, rather than local, responsibility. However, the State is reviewing hundreds of cases to determine whether the students meet the definitions under the Law.

The new budget proposed by Governor Matt Blunt calls for elimination of the \$23 million line item for the Missouri First Steps program which serves children from birth to age three who have disabilities or developmental delays. Last year, more than 8,000 children participated in the program. Specifically, the program has served young children with development delays in speech/language, motor skills, cognition, and social/emotional development, as well as such disorders as Down Syndrome, autism, spina bifida, blindness, and hearing impairment.

Nebraska Update - March 2005

Data released in early December show significant increases in the numbers of school districts and schools making adequate yearly progress (AYP) last year. However, because the data only counted schools with 30 or more students in specific student subgroups, only 153 of Nebraska's 495 districts were included. Eighty percent of the State's school districts made AYP in 2003-04, nearly twice the number that did so the prior year, and more than 85 percent of the schools (up from 66 percent this prior year) made AYP last school year.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Dave Heineman proposed a K-12 education budget of \$1.2 billion (6 percent). For FY 2007, the increase would be \$142 million (13 percent).

Nevada Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Week, Governor Kenny Guinn, in his final State-of-the-State address, proposed a dedicated \$100 million fund to help low-performing schools. More than 120 Nevada schools have failed to make adequate yearly progress under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. The Governor's proposal would include establishment of best practices for remediation programs, more staff development, and full-day kindergarten. The Governor also called on the legislature to provide \$500 million in new State aid over the FY 2006-07 biennium.

The Las Vegas Review Journal reports that graduates from Nevada high schools are less prepared for college than they were three years ago. More than 40 percent of Nevada high school graduates (Class of 2004) who enrolled in a State college or university had to take at least one remedial course. Of the 7,088 students who fell in this category, 1,004 took only remedial English in college, 851 took only remedial math, and 989 took both. In 2001, only 36 percent of high school graduates were required to take remedial classes in the State's colleges. This past year, Nevada spent \$3 million for these remedial classes, \$1.7 million of which was for students from Clark County (Las Vegas).

New Hampshire Update - March 2005

In the Spring of 2006, New Hampshire will administer a new test for students who have languages other than English as their native language. Designed by a ten-state consortium, the test has both written and oral components. It has five levels, all of which must be passed for a student to be considered proficient. A total of approximately 3,500 New Hampshire K-12 students will be assessed using the new test.

As reported in Education Daily, New Hampshire -- along with Massachusetts -- is conducting a project to research, develop, and implement better testing for students with disabilities. Funded by a \$1 million grant from USED, the effort will be coordinated by New Hampshire and the National Center on Educational Outcomes. The study will focus on establishing alternative assessment systems for students with severe cognitive disabilities. Compilation and publishing of final data is scheduled for 2006.

New Jersey Update - March 2005

Education Week's "Quality Counts" reports that New Jersey allocated \$2.8 billion in FY 2004 for 18 categorical programs, including transportation, special education, and early childhood education. The State's second largest categorical program for local school districts is known as Parity Remedy Aid, a court-ordered program providing funds to the so-called *Abbott* districts. These funds are intended to create greater equity between the *Abbott* districts (in low-income areas) and wealthier districts.

Education Week reports that New Jersey's \$28 billion FY 2005 budget included a total of \$8.9 billion for K-12, a nine percent increase over the prior year. The budget also includes \$15 million to fund a new public-private partnership that will provide grants for the operation of after-school programs that offer academic enrichment.

New Mexico Update - March 2005

"Quality Counts," published by Education Week, reports that New Mexico provides targeted support to its local school districts through a number of categorical programs, including transportation, reading initiatives, compensatory education, early childhood education, professional development, school construction, and technology.

A recent analysis by the Rural School and Community Trust found that low-performing school districts in New Mexico tend on the average to have three times the percentage of English language learners in their enrollments. Differences were even more pronounced at the extremes. The 20 lowest achieving districts in the State had seven times the LEP percentage that the 23 top-performing districts had. "Achievement Distributions and Fiscal Inequality in New Mexico Public School Districts" can be found at www.ruraledu.org.

The Albuquerque Journal reports that Governor Bill Richardson's budget includes \$4 million in start-up funds for a pilot prekindergarten program for four-year-olds. The Governor had originally asked for \$9 million, but the legislature cut the funds back. It is estimated that, when implemented Statewide, the program will cost close to \$30 million a year. The Governor's plan called for \$9 million in each of the next two years for voluntary preschool programs that would serve 3,100 of the State's 26,000 four-year-olds. The legislature have allocated the \$4 million to begin the effort and to assess whether the program's success warrants additional funding.

As reported in Education Week, Governor Richardson has asked the legislature for an additional \$51 million for New Mexico's new three-tiered, performance-based teacher salary system. Under the new structure, salary increases are based on improved teaching skills and better student performance.

New York Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, in FY 2004, New York allocated \$960 million in targeted aid to school districts through 30 categorical programs. Among these are programs for literacy/reading initiatives, class size reduction, professional development, early childhood education, and technology.

As reported in The New York Times, New York is planning to implement a voluntary test that measures students' ability to succeed in entry-level jobs. For students who pass the test, the State would issue a "work readiness" credential that should ease employers' hiring decisions and reduce employee turnover. The Equipped for the Future (EFF) work-readiness certification was prepared by the State Workforce Investment Board under an initiative of the U. S. Department of Education's National Institute for Literacy. The EFF would be issued to high school students who pass a skills test covering ten areas: (1) acquire and use information; (2) use technology; (3) use systems; (4) work with others; (5) know how to learn; (6) exhibit responsibility; (7) exhibit integrity; (8) manage themselves; (9) allocate resources; and (10) solve problems. The computer-administered test will include one section on speaking skills with oral responses scored by test examiners. The testing/credentialing initiative is expected to be pilot-tested this Spring and could be ready for implementation in the Fall. New York would become the first state to institute such a work readiness credential although a number of other states (Florida, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington) are participating in a program conducted by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce to create a nationwide work readiness credential.

As reported in The New York Times, New York, after studying the issue for three years, has decided to give middle schools more flexibility in the scheduling of student instruction. For more than 20 years, the State has dictated the number of minutes each day middle school students must spend on particular subjects. The new policy will allow low-performing schools to devote more time on reading and math at the expense of "non-academic" subjects like arts. Selected high-performing middle schools will also be permitted greater flexibility in their curricula and scheduling. After a three-year study, the State was unable to find a single

successful, replicable middle school model. The new approach appears to be a desperate shot at allowing schools to experiment in hopes a successful model will emerge.

The New York Times reports that a State Supreme Court ruled that New York City must spend \$5.6 billion more annually than it currently does (a 43 percent increase) to ensure that students receive an adequate basic education. Moreover, the judge ruled that another \$9.2 billion would have to be spent over the next five years for class size reduction and facilities construction. The court did not determine whether the additional funds should come from State or local sources. The ruling is the latest skirmish in a 12-year legal action initiated by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. It is expected that the decision will have an impact on every school district in New York and could influence education finance nationwide.

North Carolina Update - March 2005

Education Week's "Quality Counts" reports that North Carolina provides more than 25 percent of its State education funding through categorical aid. In FY 2004, North Carolina spent more than \$1.6 billion on categorical programs.

As reported in the Charlotte Observer, North Carolina has contracted with the Utah-based Caveon company to analyze test data from across the State and identify any indicators of cheating or erroneous grade reporting. Using a process known as "data forensics," Caveon will look for unusual grade patterns such as abnormally high pass rates in individual classes or wrong answers replaced with correct ones.

Under consideration by State education officials are new, more rigorous high school graduation requirements. The proposed new system would require high school students to pass end-of-course tests in five core subject areas: Algebra 1, ninth-grade English, Biology, Civics/Economics, and U. S. History. Still under construction is whether students would be required to pass all five exams or just four. Currently, students must pass 20 courses and reading and mathematics exams at the eighth-grade level. The new standards would take effect beginning with the Class of 2010 -- this year's seventh graders.

As reported in the News-Observer, ten public schools and ten charter schools in North Carolina are being required to provide tutoring for their students because the schools failed to meet standards under the No Child Left Behind Act. A total of 18 programs will provide the supplemental services including for-profit firms (e.g., Sylvan, Huntington), online services, and non-profit, community-based organizations. The State expects the number of schools required to offer tutoring services to increase next year.

North Carolina's dropout rate increased somewhat last year causing State education officials to consider raising the State's compulsory education age from 16 to 17.

State education officials are planning a thorough review of North Carolina's testing and accountability system to see if they can account for statistical variations in student scores. Two years ago, 94 percent of the State's public schools earned incentive pay based upon students' academic performance, requiring an additional \$44 million in State funds. The prior year only 75 percent of the schools had qualified for the incentive pay. Last year, 97 percent of the high schools and 85 percent of the elementary schools qualified, but less than a third of the middle schools did so.

North Dakota Update - March 2005

According to The Bismarck Tribune, the U. S. Department of Education originally ruled that North Dakota elementary teachers did not meet the definition of "highly qualified" under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Then, in early February, USED reversed course and declared that the State's teachers would be considered "highly qualified" if they have a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a teaching certificate. As reported in Education Daily, the ruling allows 3,800 elementary school teachers to meet the Federal standard. There is significant sentiment that new Education Secretary Margaret Spellings is making an effort to help struggling rural school districts meet NCLB requirements.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that Governor John Hoeven has proposed a \$75 million increase in education funding spread equally over the next four years. The Governor's proposed State budget of \$2 billion for the FY 2006-07 biennium includes \$662 million for education, a five percent increase over the current biennial budget.

Ohio Update - March 2005

Education Daily reports that charter schools in Ohio have generally underperformed on Statewide tests. According to a study by the Progressive Policy Institute, the low performance by charter schools was, in part, due to higher enrollments of poor and minority students than public schools. The charter schools also average a third less funding than public schools. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the study (www.ppionline.org) entitled "A Tough Nut to Crack," recommends increasing funding for charter schools with a portion of the funds dedicated to facilities.

Education Week reports that Governor Robert Taft has proposed an expansion of the \$18 million Cleveland voucher program. The Governor's proposed FY 2006 budget includes \$9 million for new vouchers/scholarships. The Cleveland program currently provides up to \$2,700 toward private school tuition. The new "Ohio Choice Scholarships" would provide \$3,500 for each student in low-performing (i.e., two-thirds of the students have failed both reading and math tests for three straight years) elementary and middle schools Statewide. Currently, 70 schools in the State meet the criteria. If approved by the legislature, the program would begin in the Fall of 2006 with an estimated 2,600 students eligible for the vouchers.

This school year, nine school districts in Stark and Portage Counties have collaborated on an online instructional program acquired from the Florida Virtual School. Called the Stark Portage Area Computer Consortium, the initiative has provided 300 middle and high school students with web-based courses in such core subjects as mathematics, science, and literature, as well as Advanced Placement classes.

Oregon Update - March 2005

According to "Quality Counts" from Education Week, Oregon provides assistance to its local school districts, beyond its basic foundation formula, through three categorical programs: transportation, high-cost special education students, and instructional materials in renovated schools. In FY 2004, the State allocated \$157 million to districts through these three programs.

As reported in The Oregonian, Oregon has approved the State's first virtual public charter school. Opening next Fall in the community of Scio, the online school is designed to attract students from across the State, particularly those in rural areas, those with time conflicts, and housebound and home-schooled students seeking a structured curriculum. To be operated by Connections Academy, the virtual school will use teachers certified in Oregon and will deliver lesson plans via e-mail. Much of the curriculum consists of print-based materials with a great deal of the learning done away from the computer.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Theodore Kulongoski proposed a K-12 education budget for the FY 2006-07 biennium of \$6.4 billion, 2.4 percent higher than the current two-year period. Education Week reports that, of the total, \$5 billion is State aid to school districts. The Governor has also proposed improving the efficiency of the State education department by establishing a Statewide electronic data system to track student progress.

Pennsylvania Update - March 2005

In "Quality Counts," Education Week reports that Pennsylvania, in FY 2004, distributed more than \$2.7 billion to local school districts through 34 categorical programs. Among the categorical programs funded are transportation, special education, reading initiatives, professional development, early childhood education, teacher retirement, staff benefits, and technology.

As reported in Education Week, recent legislation in Pennsylvania will have the effect of shifting a greater portion of K-12 cost to the State from local taxes. One law now in effect allows slot machines at racetracks and calls for property tax reductions. The FY 2005 budget (signed last July) includes \$7.9 billion for K-12 education, an eight percent increase over the prior year. Included in the budget is \$200 million in "accountability block grants" for districts that adopt State-approved measures to improve performance. The State has also earmarked \$15 million in State funds to expand Head Start. And a two-year-old tutoring program for students in districts who fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act saw an increase to \$38 million in FY 2005 from \$25 million the prior year.

Governor Edward Rendell has proposed a K-12 education budget of \$8.2 billion for next year -- a 2.7 percent increase. According to Education Week, the Governor's proposal includes:

- a "dual enrollment" program that would allow high school students to earn college credits (\$5 million);
- academically challenging high schools (\$4.7 million);
- a doubling (to \$76 million) of the existing tutoring program that currently services 35,000 students;
- doubling (to \$30 million) the State's contribution to the Federal Head Start program;
- level funding (at \$200 million) the State's block grant program that tends to be used for preschool, full-day kindergarten, and class size reduction; and
- diverting funds (\$23 million) from the basic education subsidy to be used as a supplement for districts spending less than \$8,500 per student.

The State Department of Education is planning to issue an RFP in the near future to create an information management system which will be used to monitor student achievement and to determine which schools are making progress toward proficiency targets under NCLB AYP requirements. The SEA is also planning to discuss new staff development initiatives which will use "high-performing teachers" to mentor other teachers on technology integration. Another initiative likely to be announced in the near future will be an Internet portal designed to share lesson plans. The new State Director of Education Technology is Michael Gordon, 717/783-9802.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that only about two-thirds of the funds set aside for Governor Rendell's early childhood education program have been spent by local school districts. Signed in December 2003, the grant program allocated \$200 million to three initiatives: expanded preschool, full-day kindergarten, and class-size reduction in K-3. According to a recently released report, only \$134 million of the grant money has been spent. The Governor's new budget did not ask for an increase in funding for the grant program, but requested small increases in tutoring programs and Federal Head Start programs.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that the City of Philadelphia's School Reform Commission is considering whether or not to make African-American History a mandatory course for high school graduation. The Commission has determined that the subject will be offered at all high schools -- either as a requirement or as an elective replacement for a required course.

Rhode Island Update - March 2005

Beyond its general aid formula, Rhode Island allocated \$241 million last year to local school districts through 13 categorical programs. As reported in "Quality Counts" (Education Week), among these programs are support for literacy initiatives, professional development, bilingual education, early childhood education, teacher retirement, capital outlays, and technology.

According to Education Week, Governor Donald Carcieri, in his State-of-the-State address, reiterated his call to make Rhode Island students "the best in the nation in math and science." The Governor had earlier earmarked funds to help math teachers improve their teaching skills. He also called for a merit pay plan for teachers and principals but provided no details of a plan.

As reported in Education Week, Rhode Island Education Commissioner, Peter McWalters, under authority of a 1997 law, has begun to restructure a low-performing high school in Providence. The State will re-evaluate all teachers and administrators at Hope High School, make changes in the school's schedule, and reassess the school's attempts to create "small learning communities." The Commissioner also plans to appoint a "special master" to oversee the changes.

South Carolina Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, South Carolina provides targeted assistance to local school districts through 35 categorical programs funded at a total of \$538 million in FY 2004. The five largest of these programs support academic assistance, transportation, class size reduction, gifted-and-talented, and additional high school credits.

South Carolina's Education Oversight Committee has recommended significant changes to the State's program for standardized testing. The State's current program calls for standardized tests in nearly every grade. The new, scaled-back plan would reduce the amount of testing and replace paper-and-pencil exams with computer tests. State officials believe the new plan will speed up analysis of test results, save a considerable amount of money, and free up time for instruction. Specifically, if adopted, the new program would: (1) replace multiple choice items on the English portion of the State's Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) with written answers; (2) eliminate the requirement for both end-of-course and PACT tests for Algebra 1; (3) require end-of-course exams in physical science and U. S. History/Constitution; and (4) develop a scoring system using in-State resources to cut out the expense of out-of-State scoring.

As reported in Education Week, Governor Mark Sanford has proposed a plan that would give a State income tax credit to every family in the State with an income below \$75,000. The credit would be worth as much as 80 percent of the State's average per-pupil cost toward public or private school tuition. Private businesses would be allowed to make contributions to non-profit scholarship groups rather than paying State income taxes and the scholarship groups could pay students' tuition. Home-schooled students would not be eligible for the tax credits, but instructional costs -- e.g., textbooks, online services, etc. -- could be deducted from the families' tax returns.

South Dakota Update - March 2005

Education Week's "Quality Counts" reports that South Dakota provides support for local school districts -- beyond the basic foundation formula -- through only one categorical program: special education. The amount of categorical aid a district receives is determined by the local tax effort and the number of students in the different disability categories.

Education Week reports that Governor Mike Rounds has proposed a FY 2006 education budget that increases formula spending by \$6 million. However, the budget proposal does not include a \$7.3 million special payment the State has made to local school districts for the past two years. The Governor also said that South Dakota's improved test scores in reading and mathematics put the State ahead of 40 other states.

Tennessee Update - March 2005

As reported in Education Week, Governor Phil Bredesen has proposed the establishment of a Statewide prekindergarten program. Existing preschool programs reach only about a fifth of the eligible students. Statewide prekindergarten has been considered for many years but never implemented for budgetary reasons. Despite the tight current budget situation, the Governor would create a voluntary preschool system for all four-year-olds in Tennessee at an estimated cost of \$200 million for the first year.

As reported in eSchool News, Tennessee prosecutors have filed charges for obstruction of justice against Albert Ganier, founder of Education Networks of America (ENA), an Internet services company that services K-12 schools. He is charged with deleting computer files sought by investigators. The charges have arisen from a Federal investigation into \$200 million worth of contracts let to ENA during the administration of former Governor Don Sunquist.

Texas Update - March 2005

School Reform News reports that the Texas Education Agency has released a list of low-performing schools which includes 420 schools (up from 126 last year) serving 293,000 students. The increase is attributed to an increase in the State's performance standards and the redesign of the State's achievement test. Although these nearly 300,000 students are eligible to transfer to better performing schools, few are expected to do so. In the more than five years since Texas implemented its program allowing students from failing schools to go to other schools, only about 2,000 have actually transferred.

The Dallas Morning News reports that Governor Rick Perry and some legislators are proposing to establish a \$270 million Statewide merit pay plan for teachers as a component of the State's new education package. Currently, less than four percent of Texas school districts have performance-based incentives. The average salary for the State's 300,000 teachers is about \$41,000. Bonuses of \$5,000 (or \$7,500 depending on the information source) would be available to teachers whose students perform well on the State's standardized tests. Education Week reports that Governor Perry's proposed bonus system is designed to attract teachers to schools with the lowest student performance. The proposal, whose details have yet to be worked out, has, of course, been vigorously opposed by the State's teachers unions.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the Texas legislature is expected to enact a substantial business tax which would lower property taxes and provide additional funding for education. The State is under pressure to replace its existing school finance system that is largely based on property taxes. Last Fall, a district court ruled the existing funding system unconstitutional and ordered the Legislature to come up with a new system.

Education Daily reports that district superintendents in Texas have initiated a letter-writing campaign asking the U. S. Department of Education to lift its one percent cap on the proportion of special education students with severe cognitive disabilities whose scores on below-grade exams can be counted toward adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Texas education officials made a similar request to USED (i.e., raising the cap to

seven percent) last year and were denied. For the 2004-05 school year, only Ohio (1.3 percent) and Virginia (1.13 percent) were granted permission to increase the cap.

As reported in Education Week, for the past seven years, Texas has had a Top-10 policy which says that the top ten percent of students in every graduating class is guaranteed admission to the University of Texas at Austin. Last year, three-quarters of the University's entering freshmen were accepted based on the Top-10 policy. The University's President has called for a cap on Top-10 acceptances, arguing that it is "unhealthy" to base such a large percentage of admissions on a single criterion.

Education Week reports that Texas is imposing new and more rigorous requirements on the State's 200+ charter schools. Currently, 28 charter schools in Texas fall into the lowest performance category, "academically unacceptable," for two consecutive years. Even more charters could be affected in May when this year's scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) are released. Among the changes in charter school regulations that became effective on March 1, 2005, are more established timelines and grounds for State action against low-performing charter schools and higher training requirements for operators of new and low-performing charters.

As reported in the Austin American-Statesman, a Texas legislation has proposed a major overhaul of the State's testing system. Under the proposal, the TAKS will be administered on computers rather than pencil-and-paper and the high school TAKS will be replaced with subject-specific end-of-course exams. The online testing mechanism would begin with basic questions; correct answers would lead to more difficult ones; incorrect responses would bring up easier questions. Such a procedure would result in real-time scoring as well as diagnostic information. Texas' current budget for the TAKS is \$45 million. The total cost of the proposed reform would be about \$1.5 billion. It is estimated that the testing component could be more than \$225 million a year. As part of a pilot test last Spring, 22,000 eighth-grade students took the TAKS online.

As reported in Education Daily, the Texas legislature is considering a bill that would provide vouchers to students in large cities. To be eligible, a district must: (a) be in a county with a

population of at least 800,000; (b) be the largest school district in the county; and (c) have at least 90 percent of its students rated as "educationally disadvantaged" the prior year. The vouchers would enable students to attend another public or private school in the county.

The proposed elimination of the Federal Enhancing Education through Technology (EETT) program could have a negative effect on other technology initiatives in Texas. [eSchool News](#) reports that, among the endangered programs, is the Technology Immersion Pilot (TIP), a \$14.5 million project to study the impact of technology on middle school learning. TIP has provided 15,000 wireless laptop computers, as well as educational software, to students in 23 Texas school districts. But evaluation and expansion of the program beyond 2006 is dependent on EETT funds. Other technology programs at risk are: (a) an online program that stores and updates district technology plans for more than 1,300 public and charter schools; (b) Texas STaR Chart, an online tool to help Texas' teachers to assess their technology skills; and (c) a program providing e-Rate support to schools.

State Commissioner Shirley Neeley has approved appeals from 431 districts which would allow them to count as proficient more than one percent of special education students who take the State's alternative test. This clearly violates USED regulations which stipulate that only up to one percent of such students achieving proficiency on the alternative test be counted toward AYP. Over a year ago, USED denied Texas' requested approval for an amendment to their assessment plan which would increase the proficiency cap to eight percent. This, which among other things, led to the late notification of districts and schools as to whether or not they met AYP targets. According to [Education Daily](#), slightly over 92 percent of Texas' 1,037 districts would miss AYP proficiency targets last year. Without the waiver, all of the State's urban school districts would have missed AYP. TEA officials argue that the State law, which reflects IDEA amendment provisions, should override USED regulations. As the recent NCSL report (see [Washington Update](#)) indicated, where such conflicts exist, IDEA should take preference over conflicting NCLB provisions. Indeed, the first major lawsuit, filed by several Illinois districts, is based upon the same premise.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the number of schools in the Houston school district that met Federal standards in 2004 increased to 260 from 251 the previous year. On the other hand, of the 26 schools "needing improvement," 18 were high schools, half of the high schools in the district.

Utah Update - March 2005

The Salt Lake City Tribune reports that Utah, despite earlier threats, will not boycott the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and will not forfeit more than \$100 million in Federal funds. However, a new piece of legislation, HB 135, has been introduced in the legislature to assert State control of education policy. The bill would allow the State to ignore Federal mandates if they entailed State funding and would permit districts to offer supplemental educational services (tutoring) rather than school choice for students in low-performing schools.

In change of position, the U. S. Department of Education has ruled that Utah's standards of teacher quality meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Most of Utah's 8,500 elementary school teachers hold degrees in elementary or early childhood education, but not in a core subject as called for in NCLB. Utah addressed this issue by declaring teachers to be "highly qualified" if they had three years teaching experience and had received positive reviews in their evaluations.

"Quality Counts" from Education Week reports that Utah provides targeted funds to its local school districts through 27 categorical programs, funded at a total of \$940 million in FY 2004. Among these are programs that support transportation, special education, reading initiatives, class size reduction, professional development, compensatory education, gifted-and-talented, teacher retirement/benefits, capital outlays, debt service, and technology.

As reported in Deseret Morning News, there are two separate voucher plans being considered in the Utah legislature. One would provide a tax credit for half the cost of private school tuition up to \$2,000. The second plan would establish a seven-year pilot program to provide tax credits to families and reimbursing public schools for lost revenues. An independent study of tax credits has indicated that the State could save as much as \$1.3 billion over the next 14 years if a tuition tax credit is used to send approximately 15,000 students to private schools.

As reported in Education Week, Governor Jon Huntsman, in his State-of-the-State address, outlined a budget proposal that would allocate more funding for K-12 education, including \$5.5

million in new money for classroom supplies. That translates to \$300 in new supplies for each elementary teacher in the State. The Governor also said he plans to expand his predecessors' emphasis on improving reading scores to mathematics.

Education Week reports that Utah's legislature has been asked to remove the cap on the number of charter schools that can be opened in the State each year; currently, the limit is eight charters. The State charter school board has also asked for the elimination of the requirement that the Board act on charter school applications within 60 days. The Board argues that these changes will improve the flexibility of Utah's charter school system.

The Utah legislature has approved the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarships, a voucher program expected to be signed into law by the Governor. According to Education Week, the program would provide \$1.4 million in vouchers that would allow students with disabilities to go to private schools that focus on special needs students. Although there are approximately 50,000 students in the State who would qualify for the scholarships, the initial funding is sufficient to provide vouchers for only a few hundred. Worth almost \$5,500 per student, the vouchers must be applied for by the parents of eligible children. If signed into law, the program would be the second such plan in the country, following Florida's McKay scholarships.

Vermont Update - March 2005

The Education Commission of the States reports that Vermont's policy for school restructuring calls for: (1) continued technical assistance for low-performing schools; (2) adjustment of district boundaries; (3) assumption of management control to address deficiencies; or (4) closing of the school with the district paying students' tuition at another public or approved independent school.

This Spring, Vermont, along with Maine and Alabama, will administer a new test for students who have languages other than English as their native language. Designed by a ten-state consortium, the test has both written and oral components. It has five levels, all of which must be passed for a student to be considered proficient. A total of approximately 1,200 Vermont K-12 students will be assessed using the new test.

The Vermont legislature is considering opting out of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and forfeiting nearly \$50 million in Federal funding each year. Bills to ignore the Federal program have been introduced in both houses of the Vermont legislature. Some educators in the State argue that meeting the requirements of NCLB would cost the State four times as much as the State receives from the Federal Government.

Virginia Update - March 2005

The State Board of Education recently voted to request an exemption from several of the current provisions under NCLB. The State argues that the Standards of Learning (SOL), which the State began implementing in the 1990s, has set standards higher than No Child Left Behind, which they argue erodes the State's accountability system. One requested waiver is to allow schools identified for improvement under NCLB to offer supplemental educational services prior to requiring them to provide transportation to parents who want to transfer their students to another school. The State's request to USED also proposes that schools missing AYP because of the performance of specific subgroups be required to offer supplemental services or school choice only to the subgroups or individual students who missed the targets. Another request would allow students to take tests more than once without having to count the results from the first test. Virginia was one of the first states, at the request of the Governor, to establish an online test retaking tutoring program for students who fail portions of the SOL. Other requested waivers relate to the true Achilles' heel of NCLB, namely dealing with special education and limited English proficient students.

The Washington Post reports that the Virginia legislature has requested a cost analysis of how much the State is paying to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and how much Federal funding it would lose if it withdrew from NCLB. Virginia currently receives \$350 million in Federal funds for disadvantaged students. In the bill, the legislature has asked that the cost analysis be completed by October 1, 2005.

As reported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Governor Mark Warner intends to expand college offerings available to high school students and to strengthen remedial programs designed to help struggling students pass the Standards of Learning, the State graduation test. The Governor also plans to upgrade mentoring programs for new teachers and make available more "turnaround specialists" for low-performing schools.

The five-year-old specialty high school policy in Prince William County has shown considerable popularity this year. As reported in The Washington Post, the plan instituted specialty programs

-- such as the arts, math/science, computer technology, and foreign languages -- in different high schools across the district. Students are allowed to transfer to out-of-boundary schools in order to participate in the specialty programs. This school year, more than 3,200 students have taken advantage of the policy, up from less than 2,500 last year.

Washington Update - March 2005

As reported in "Quality Counts," published by Education Week, Washington has nine categorical programs for local school districts beyond the State's basic formula funds. Funded at a total of \$1.4 billion in FY 2004, these programs are transportation, special education, bilingual education, gifted-and-talented, reading initiatives, capital outlays/debt service, vocational education, class size reduction, and technology.

According to Education Week, starting in the Spring of 2006, Washington's ninth grade students will be allowed to take the State's tenth grade assessment a year early. The tenth grade test will become a graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2008. Next year's ninth-graders who pass sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning will receive credit toward graduation and will not be penalized for sections they fail.

The Seattle Times reports that the Washington State legislature is considering two bills (House Bill 1633 and Senate Bill 5828) that seek to clarify the State's position with respect to online learning. Current rules require that students have face-to-face contact with teachers and that teachers organize curricula. Moreover, Internet classes are not now eligible for State funds. The proposed legislation is an outgrowth of the case of the Federal Way Internet Academy which a State auditor found to be out of compliance with State policy; the legislature granted a waiver for the current school year. An online pilot program; Digital Learning Commons has been able to provide blind students with 200 more courses than before using the Internet.

The State of Washington is partnering with Lexia Learning Systems to create an "Oasis of Literacy" in the State. The program would provide English language learners and their families with access to educational software through schools, libraries, churches, and health clubs. A number of Washington school districts already use some of the Lexia software with reported success. The Statewide collaboration includes a negotiated discount price determined by the number of work stations. Funding for the program will come from Title I, as well as State and Federal migrant programs.

West Virginia Update - March 2005

As reported by the Education Commission of the States, West Virginia's school restructuring plan gives the State the authority to intervene in the operation of any low-performing schools, including the replacement of the principal.

As reported in eSchool News, Governor Joe Manchin is developing a plan to promote distance learning across the State. The Governor is concerned that, without distance learning, many small schools would have to consolidate in order to offer their students an appropriate range of courses. Challenge West Virginia, an organization dedicated to maintaining small community schools, supports the Governor's direction, saying that a \$20,000 per school investment in distance learning technology could save many millions in school instruction and transportation expenses.

Wisconsin Update - March 2005

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports that Wisconsin is one of only 13 states with a two-year mathematics requirement for high school graduation. Governor James Doyle, in his State-of-the-State address, has proposed instituting a three-year graduation requirement in both math and science. The Governor also requested additional funding for early childhood programs including school breakfast programs and more kindergarten classes for four-year-olds.

Education Daily reports that the Wisconsin legislature has proposed an expansion of the Milwaukee school voucher program from its current 15,000 students to 16,500 students. Governor Doyle has said he would not support the increased vouchers unless the expansion is tied to increased education quality for all Milwaukee public school students.

Wyoming Update - March 2005

According to "Quality Counts" from Education Week, Wyoming provides targeted support to local school districts through 15 categorical programs, the largest of which are special education, transportation, major maintenance, education reform, and reading assessment.

In his State-of-the-State address, Governor Dave Freudenthal has proposed adding \$103.5 million in additional K-12 education funding for FY 2006 to the \$1.4 billion budget for the FY 2005-06 biennium. The legislature is trying to eliminate \$90 million of the proposed add-on. As reported in Education Week, approximately \$45 million would go to the Wyoming Education Trust fund to promote innovative teaching. Originally intended to be funded at \$50 million, the Trust fund has never been fully funded.