

(703) 536-2310
Fax (703) 536-3225

Education TURNKEY Electronic Distribution, Inc.

256 North Washington Street
Falls Church, Virginia 22046-4549

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 1, 2006

TO: TechMIS Subscribers

FROM: Charles Blaschke

SUBJ: Technology Summit Highlights, Association's Positions on NCLB Reauthorization, and New Policies on SBR

Earlier this month, we sent subscribers an alert regarding the need for USED to recalculate all district Title I allocations because of a mistake made by the Census Bureau in reporting poverty data. Upon review of the recalculations, we found that Puerto Rico would receive an additional \$10 million and several large districts such as Los Angeles would receive one to two per percent cuts. The only major problem that was created was that states would have to recalculate the adjustments which they had made which slowed the funds allocation process by two to four weeks. By now, most districts are receiving, at least, estimated preliminary allocations after state adjustments.

The Washington Update includes a number of initial NCLB position papers on reauthorization by CCSSO and NASBE and several policies being used by USED to report on "evidence" about the effectiveness of groups of interventions or single interventions and other items.

- While we have shared our views on the possible impact of the November elections on education policy and funding, we highlight the views of Christopher Cross, a veteran education policy-maker/observer, on policy changes in NCLB if the Congressional leadership changes.
- The National Association of State Boards of Education, a major critic of NCLB, released its guidelines for reauthorization of ESEA which reflects their grave concerns over Federal intrusion upon state policy making. High-level administration officials are calling for the reauthorization to occur next year on schedule as is NASBE.
- The proposed policy statement for NCLB reauthorization by the Chief State School Officers would focus on "every child a graduate" with additional federal funding for state and district capacity-building
- The highlights of the SIIA/AEP School Technology Summit addressed a number of issues implicit in a move toward digital content, including alternative subscription arrangements, "reusable" content, and more customization to district needs

- A new Afterschool Alliance survey finds funding for afterschool programs have been reduced in almost 50% of sites and identifies what the impact has been of such reductions on the number and types of activities and students served; it also identifies the potential for afterschool program operators of becoming SES providers.
- The International Reading Association (IRA) calls for further investigation, by the Department of Justice, of the Reading First program and “goes live” with the new Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse website. Many observers believe that the Office of Inspector General’s September report was only the “tip of the iceberg” as a number of additional reports will be issued shortly. The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse website could provide new opportunities to disseminate product information to these new “gatekeepers.”
- The Department of Education's policies on releasing research based “evidence” on interventions continue to vary: many education practitioners and decision-makers question the usefulness and credibility of recent reports. Several developers and publishers of “effective” interventions are very likely to be upset with the way USED will announce the evidence of the Congressionally-mandated evaluation of technology interventions.
- The most recent Pre-K Now report estimates that state funding for pre-k education programs will increase by a total of \$450 million in 31 states; several states offer the most promising prospects.
- States are making slow progress in conducting evaluations of SES programs while the Department of Education's top concerns remain increasing student participation rates and helping SES providers.
- E-Rate Update: The “window” for 2007 will open November 14. New eligible services list has been released and allows for the first time voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) and other changes.

As a reminder, the March 2006 list of districts receiving increases in preliminary Title I allocations included a group of districts that were scheduled to receive more than a 20 percent increase which was at least \$50,000 or more. Many of these districts have not been told of these “windfall” increases by SEAs or believe the preliminary allocation was a mistake. Even though the preliminary allocations may be adjusted somewhat lower for certain districts by the SEA, most of these districts are just now being notified of these unexpected increases and are likely to use such funds to invest in products or staff development rather than hiring more staff. Call me if you have any questions.

The State Profile Updates cover a wide range of developments and activities among states. Generally speaking, across the states more and more schools are entering “corrective action” or “restructuring,” while the number of districts being identified for improvement have been fewer than those identified last year. In most states with exit exams, state funding for remediation and tutoring continues to grow and in many states proposed use of certain English language assessments for LEP students have been disapproved by USED which has told the states to go back to the drawing board to come with alternatives. The same is true in a limited number of states regarding alternative tests for severely cognitively impaired special education students. As always, if you have any questions please give me a call.

Veteran Education Policymaker/Observer Christopher Cross Shares Views on Policy Changes in NCLB if Congressional Leadership Changes

While numerous pundits have predicted a number of NCLB policy changes if Democrats take control of one or both houses of Congress, veteran policymaker and observer, Christopher Cross, in the Education Week (October 18) web chat, offered his predictions of what might be expected. Cross brings a unique institutional memory on the role of Federal policy in education having served as the chief Republican staff committee person on the House Education Committee along with his Democratic counterpart, Jack Jennings, now President of the Center on Education Policy (whose study findings we often cite in our TechMIS reports). In the late 1970s, Cross headed education research and evaluation studies for Abt Associates, with whom we joined forces in developing the first policy manual on Title I in the late 1970s. Later, he became Assistant Secretary for Education, Research and Improvement under President George H.W. Bush. Below are excerpted some insightful responses to several questions during the webcast.

When asked by a district official whether changes in NCLB would occur or whether it will go away if the political leadership in Congress changes, he responded, "I don't believe that a change in control of Congress will undo NCLB. Two of the biggest supporters of NCLB, Ted Kennedy and

George Miller, would become chairs of their respective Senate and House committees. There is also substantial support from many in the civil rights community....Yes, there will be some changes in NCLB, but at the margins, not the core. For example, it is possible that sanctions for years 2 & 3 (choice and tutoring) might be reversed, as has been done on a pilot basis."

In a question about the impact of the recent Office of Inspector General report on favoritism and conflict of interest in the initial implementation of the Reading First program, Cross volunteered, "There is much more to be known on the Reading First issue. The ED IG will issue 2-3 more reports later this year and there will be a GAO report early in '07, so I feel we don't yet know what we need to on this issue."

Following a later question about the unfunded mandate nature of NCLB, Cross responded, "Yes, there should be more federal money. But, no, that should not be seen as the solution."

Cross also addressed the question of whether, at the end of the current Administration, more states might opt out of participation under NCLB. He offered his perspective based on institutional memory, "When states are faced with the reality of opting out, the reality of what that would mean in lost financial support always trumps rhetoric. I have yet to see a chief, a governor or a state legislature willing to raise state taxes to support their ideological position. I suspect that neither a change in Congress or in the White House will affect

that.” At several points during the web chat, he also identified several policies which will largely remain unchanged including the role of supplemental educational service providers in the future. He stated firmly, “SES providers and services are here to stay. However, states must do a better quality control job.”

On a number of issues, he doubted some policy proposals expanding the Federal role are likely to occur. Regarding expanded Federal funding for preschool programs, he felt that the research findings point to a need, but the “national will” doesn’t exist. And, he noted, in response to several questions, that Federally-mandated content standards are not likely to occur nor is a national test. As to the future, he called for more policy research by the new Institute for Education Sciences, while noting that the new IES organization has very little stake “in the area of implementation and evaluation.” He also called for USED to better address issues of capacity building at the state and district levels, which apparently is a newly expanded priority within USED.

In addition to the web cast available at www.edweek-chat.org many of his views are detailed in his new book, “Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age.”

The National Association of State Boards of Education Guidelines For Reauthorization of ESEA Reflect Grave Concerns Over Federal Intrusion Upon State Policy Making

The initial guidelines for the reauthorization

of ESEA/NCLB reflect the growing concerns of many State Boards of Education that Federal intrusion upon state rights should be reversed, delegating policy implementation of NCLB provisions once again back to the states and allowing states to use their own accountability systems which have evolved over time rather than the Federal, “one-size-fits-all” model. As the initial draft states “This Federal leadership should provide the vision while allowing states freedom to develop and implement policies according to their individual circumstances....Goals should be national; the choice of means must be state and local.” Unlike some other associations, the National Association of State Boards of Education calls for ESEA/NCLB to be reauthorized in 2007 as scheduled, as it states, “Any delay or postponement of reauthorization beyond 2007 would send an unmistakable message to the public about the priority it places on national education reform and its concern, or lack thereof, about academic success of students such reforms are intended to help.” Ironically, the President and Secretary of Education are increasingly addressing the need for reauthorization next year as does one of its major critics, NASBE.

In agreement with most other education associations, NASBE calls for the use of “student growth” rates as the basis for any Federal accountability requirement. Not only does the Association call for the use of “value added” tests, but also it calls for greater individualization of student instruction and allowing states which currently “use performance index” and some form of growth models to continue using them.

Regarding NCLB treatment of students with

disabilities, the Association believes that students who complete their IEP but do not earn a diploma based on state academic standards should be allowed to be counted as “graduates” for inclusion in AYP calculations. Use of out-of-grade-level state assessments should be allowed for students with disabilities, depending on the students’ IEPs.

The Association also address high school reform, stating that it should focus on the core issues such as illiteracy, high school structure, (including the use of the school day and school calendar), teacher quality, and dropout prevention. A redesigned high school must eliminate the need for remediation by the time a student earns a high school diploma. The statement also calls for greater opportunities for students to the access online and higher education courses, particularly those in rural schools.

While the guiding principles to be followed by the Council of Chief State School Officers does not specifically mention “education technology,” the statement by the NASBE mentions technology only once as noted above. However both of these associations feel that any implementation or execution of resulting policy changes based on their recommendations or adherence to their principles would necessitate the use of technology for implementation. Most Association position papers regarding NCLB reauthorization reflect a consensus of their respective memberships and do not necessarily reflect a cohesive set of policy recommendations with a great deal of specificity. At least some observers believe that positions should be taken early regarding the use of education technology in order to foster or stimulate a Congressional debate which is necessary for the

development of a policy. As noted in a related item, veteran policy-maker Criss Cross has observed that there is no Federal policy toward education technology because of the lack of such deliberations within the Congress.

Chief State School Officers Policy Statement For NCLB Reauthorization Would Focus on “Every Child a Graduate”

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) would refocus No Child Left Behind to “every child a graduate” for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, often referred to as the NCLB Act. The statement released on October 16 states, “In sum, ESEA and its implementation must evolve to fit with the next stage of standards-based reform, shifting from the law’s current focus on prescriptive compliance requirements to a law focused on providing real incentives for innovative state and local models along with fair and meaningful accountability for results.” Underlying CCSSO’s core principles for reauthorization, which reflect a consensus among state education leaders, are two consequences -- intended or otherwise -- of the evolution of NCLB implementation:

- Federal encroachment on traditional state and local rights and responsibilities which have been usurped by many NCLB provisions; and
- Increased recognition by USED that the SEA has become the fulcrum for leveraging compliance and

implementation at the district level, as reflected in increased flexibility taking into account state differences.

One such example is USED's October 11 policy letter to CCSSO encouraging more states to propose how they would use "growth models" for calculating AYP in districts and schools.

In recognition of the some of the building blocks and foundations which have been created by NCLB mandates, the CCSSO refocus stated, "This includes raising standards to reflect 21st century knowledge and skills, improving assessments to better inform teaching and learning, investing in teachers and administrators to improve effectiveness, and improving data systems to help drive instruction, and building more valid accountability systems to value growth as well as status." While acknowledging recent USED flexibilities provided for states and districts, CCSSO also recognizes that this flexibility exists "within rigid parameters" (such as those related to states' proposed use of alternative growth models), which, in turn, limit the number of states capable of taking advantage of such flexibilities. The heart of CCSSO's policy statement is "The Federal government should focus on accountability for results, with states and districts responsible for achieving those results based on innovative strategies and the most valid and reliable measures of student learning."

Not unexpectedly, throughout the policy statement are calls for increased Federal funding for capacity-building at the district, and particularly the state, level. For example, the statement notes, "No longer should state administrative funds be viewed as overhead to be minimized; rather, such

funds should be viewed as essential to promoting data-informed decisionmaking, accountability, and reform." In addition to refining the standards-based movement led by state level offices, SEAs would play an increasingly important role in a number of areas if funding for capacity-building were provided, including aligning standards with college work and expectations, adding standards for additional subjects beyond math and reading, building more instructionally-based formative assessments, expanding state data systems to "drive student pathways to success in graduation," and assisting districts and consistently under-performing schools in the implementation of effective interventions.

Recognizing the Federal role in research and innovation, the CCSSO statement calls for greater Federal investments in exemplary pilot projects, rigorous evaluations, meaningful research, and dissemination of research and promising practices focused on public schools all to help inform state and local efforts to improve student achievement. Unlike the research agendas initially developed by Federal officials and their hand-picked panels, CCSSO's position paper emphasizes, "This enhanced research strategy should target areas identified by state and local education leaders, include various levels of specific scientific inquiry, include both qualitative and quantitative research and more --- all focused on better providing key information that can help inform and scale efforts to dramatically improve student achievement."

During the initial implementation of NCLB the Council of Great City Schools was, according to many observers, the most important education association, influencing interpretation of key provisions and ensuring

urban districts received increased funding. However, many of these same observers now believe the states' role will be much more influential during the reauthorization and subsequent implementation, especially for those changes reflecting CCSSO's priority focus. Moreover, many of the unintended consequences included as a result of certain NCLB provisions will likely be minimized after the reauthorization, if for no other reason than CCSSO's incoming Executive Director, Gene Wilhoit, played a key role in implementing many similar provisions in the Kentucky accountability system beginning in the 1990s. For a copy of the statement go to: www.ccsso.org.

Highlights of SIIA/AAP School Technology Summit

On October 5-6 in Washington, D.C., SIIA and AAP hosted the "School Technology Summit: K-12 Digital Content: Evolving Models and Markets" conference. Highlights of the conference are noted below.

During the initial panel session on the Federal education agenda -- including NCLB reauthorization -- committee staffers representing Senator Ted Kennedy and Representative McKeon, Chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, identified some of their different priorities in the NCLB reauthorization. Chairman McKeon, who was not one of the major drafters of NCLB and who is reportedly open to changes, is concerned more about why schools fail to make AYP; what is the role of growth models; and the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, Head Start, and other Federal programs.

Chairman McKeon continues to state that he wants to reauthorize NCLB during the next Congressional session. Senator Kennedy's priorities are: increasing Federal funding to implement NCLB; passage of a "national competitiveness act," which includes some funds for the Math Now program; how to ensure the quality of supplemental educational services, which according to the spokesperson is much more important than ensuring parents are informed their student is eligible for SES participation; and expanding afterschool programs. While Chairman McKeon feels Federal funds supporting technology is not a high priority, Senator Kennedy does, arguing that there still exists a digital divide among different groups of students. Senator Kennedy's spokesperson supported increased funding for high school initiatives such as Smaller Learning Communities, dropout prevention, credit recovery programs, and the use of state assessments and exit exams to determine work and college readiness, citing recent efforts in California.

In response to a question about the Office of Inspector General's report on Reading First mismanagement and "conflict of interest" violations, Chairman McKeon's spokesperson emphasized the need to increase and enforce "conflict of interest" guidelines, while Senator Kennedy's spokesperson noted that additional OIG recommendations, other than those included in the OIG report, have been made to the Secretary of Education. Chairman McKeon's spokesperson indicated that Title I and IDEA special education funds have been increased each year over time and that such increases could be used for purchasing technology products. The spokesperson for Senator Kennedy refuted such allegations. In an offline discussion with her, it was

noted that Title I and IDEA operational programs have received a de facto 30 and 15 percent reduction, respectively, for this year as a result of increased earmarks for staff development, SES, and early intervening services, especially in large urban districts. She indicated that she would “remember that in her next confrontation.”

During a panel discussion on district policies and funding initiatives related to digital content, officials from Texas and California noted that, while state funding related to adoption (e.g., textbook and supplemental materials, including software) had increased, many of the policy recommendations and legislative actions are constantly changing. Michael Golden, the SEA deputy who directs the Pennsylvania Technology Division, described a new initiative, “Classrooms for the Future,” which eventually will involve more than 600 high schools in the state in which technology enhancements will be occurring. Kate Kemker with the Florida Department of Education, noted that, next year, FCAT scores in science will be counted for determining a district’s status under the state accountability system. One of the major priorities is improving the “fidelity” of all professional development activities.

Susan Patrick, Executive Director of the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), estimated that the market for online course delivery is about \$50 million and growing by 30 percent annually. One-third of all districts currently offer some type of online learning. More than 100 virtual charter schools exist with total enrollment increasing from about 500,000 to one million in two years. One particular growing niche is the use of online courses for credit recovery, she noted.

During a subsequent interview reported in Education Daily, Patrick argued that school boards spend money on technological hardware such as computers, but that spending is not generally matched by an investment in technologically-advanced content. She also noted funding for digital content on par with print content is not yet, but will soon be a trend.

During a panel discussion on district needs for technology and electronic learning resources, there appeared to be some consensus on the following issues and trends:

- digital content has to be “reusable,” which has direct implications for subscription licenses;
- with digital content there is a need for embedded, “just in time,” professional development;
- the need for differentiated instruction is driving the demand for digital content which can be customized by teachers and districts;
- if publishers don’t provide districts with digital content in a reusable format, then districts will take selected content and develop their own instructional lessons.

It is interesting to note that all district panelists currently or in the recent past have developed and sold to other districts some of the digital curriculum components that they have developed.

Tom Greaves and Jeanne Hayes presented the highlights of their recent survey about “digital schools” in 2,500 districts with

enrollments of 4,000 or more. Some interesting findings included:

- districts that are planning to implement 1:1 computing are much more optimistic than those already experienced in implementing 1:1 computing in believing that student academic performance will increase;
- about three percent of students currently are taking online courses; this does not include online test prep, remediation, tutoring, or online assessments, according to Jeanne Hayes;
- the estimated annual cost of providing 1:1 computing is \$97 per participating student;
- the fastest growing products over the next five years will be student appliances, tablet computers, and handheld devices, with only about 25 percent increase in the use of laptop PCs, laptop Macs, and interactive white boards.

About two-thirds of the responding curriculum directors in the survey at the district level felt that the most important factors driving the movement toward digital content would be:

- adherence to universal design principles for accessibility;
- scientifically proven to have a positive impact on student achievement;
- capability of assessing and diagnosing student level; and

- inclusion of interactive exercises or simulations that can be used with text or learning materials.

In a concluding comment, Tom Greaves predicted that schools will still seek curriculum materials from trusted sources and will not rely only on free content from Internet sources. In an offline discussion, he confirmed that he was talking about core curriculum materials and not supplemental materials. Other recent surveys have found a publisher's reputation and trustworthiness was not an important factor in deciding what types of supplemental materials districts want to use.

New Afterschool Alliance Survey Finds Funding for Afterschool Programs Has Been Reduced in Almost 50 Percent of Sites and Identifies the Impact on Activities and Students Served

The Afterschool Alliance recently conducted a survey regarding the level of funding afterschool programs sites have received and the likely impact of budget cuts on their activities. The 2,100 responses, representing approximately 9,800 afterschool sites serving more than 1.5 million children, found that in almost half of the sites over the last two years funding has decreased a "little" or "a lot," while funding is "up a little" or "a lot" in only 22 percent of the sites. About half of the respondents have been operational for more than five years. About 30 percent of the sites were operated by community-based organizations, while 35 percent were school-based organizations. Well over a third of the sites reported 80 percent or more of their participants

qualified for the Federal free or reduced price lunch program.

The survey found that, during the 2005-06 school year, the types of activities offered included: arts/music/cultural activities (92 percent); homework help (91 percent); reading (84 percent); science, math, and/or technology (77 percent). While 91 percent of the respondents said some of their programs' participants were children with disabilities, only about five percent indicated that at least half of their participants had disabilities. Similarly, two-thirds of the survey respondents had limited-English-proficient participants, but only eight percent said more than half of their participants were LEP.

The primary Federal funding source for afterschool programs was 21st Century Community Learning Centers (43 percent). Only seven percent reported receiving Title I funds for providing supplemental educational services. While almost 20 percent of the sites felt that 21st Century Community Learning Centers, as a funding source, was "very accessible," only three percent reported supplemental educational services as a funding source was "very accessible." Almost 50 percent were not aware of the potential availability of SES funding. Recent Non-Regulatory Guidance from USED clearly allows afterschool programs, such as those funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers, if approved by the state, to provide SES. Over half of the sites reported receiving no state funds. Twenty-two percent reported using SEA funds, while 14 percent used funds from the state departments of health or human services. About 50 percent reported receiving funding from the city or county or the school district.

For those sites which had to make cuts due to funding loss over the last few years, the major impact was in a reduction of the number of students served, field visits and in the "variety" of activities offered in the program; 20 percent indicated they had to reduce professional development. Conversely, in those sites with increased funding (which was less than one-quarter of all respondents), almost 60 percent indicated they would add to the "variety" of activities offered, while only 40 percent would increase professional development. When asked what changes would most likely be made should the site receive more funding, 10 percent indicated they would add to the variety of activities offered in the program.

Several findings have potential implications for many TechMIS subscribers. The number of at-risk students served and the variety of activities offered are impacted greatly by increases or decreases in the availability of funds. Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding has been level-funded at about \$1 billion annually over the last three years. Title I funding for 2006-07 for operational programs is 20-30 percent less than the previous year due to an increase in the number of districts which have to set aside 30 percent for staff development and SES. On the other hand, state funding for K-12 has increased in more than 45 states for the 2006-07 school year and some of those funds are earmarked for afterschool or extended learning activities. Another implication is that about 60 percent of the afterschool programs are operated by either community-based or school-based organizations, but only three percent have attempted to access SES as a funding source; these "affiliated" entities could represent a potential market with whom

publishers might wish to partner, providing the necessary special instruction materials, training, and support. Over half of the afterschool program operators apparently are not aware of the potential of providing SES in schools identified for improvement for two consecutive years. Although the Federal funding picture for FY 2007 remains unclear, the survey found that only 17 percent of the respondents felt funding over the next 1-2 years was "not secure." On the other hand, with respect to the availability of funding 3-5 years ahead, almost 50 percent felt they were not secure. Included in this year's survey are responses from operators in each state. The impact of increases and decreases in funds available is impacting operators in certain states differently than in others as one might expect. The degree of funding security over the near term (1-2 years) and long term (3-5 years) also varies considerably.

For a copy of the report go to:
[www.afterschoolalliance.org/Uncertain Times/Complete Nat Report.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/Uncertain_Times/Complete_Nat_Report.pdf).

The International Reading Association (IRA) Calls For Further Investigation by the Department of Justice of Reading First Program While Going Live With the New Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse Website

Following the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) "scathing review" of Reading First on September 25, the IRA sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney General Gonzales stating, "This IG report confirms what many have been saying and fearing about Reading First and No Child Left Behind implementation

and how that process has been corrupted....The goals of improving reading outcomes and eliminating the achievement gap are too important to be "hijacked" by a group of biased insiders....We are concerned that the investigation did not go far enough." The IRA has argued that a "select group" were directing funds to specific programs and products and that this "select group may have had financial interest in products and programs recommended." The letter stated, "...that any corruption or misuse of funding be corrected immediately and punished if the problems rise to the level of criminality. Reading First is an important piece of legislation and must be administered fairly, honestly, and in a manner consistent with the law."

The IRA, along with the Association of American Publishers, was among the first to protest formally the alleged use of "unofficial lists" of approved reading programs and assessment instruments to be used in Reading First state plans in order to be approved by USED in 2002-03.

Since the OIG report was released in late September, a number of additional events have occurred. Representative George Miller has asked the Department of Justice to launch a criminal inquiry. On September 28, an op/ed piece written by Michael Petrilli, who worked as a special assistant to then Secretary Paige, stated that Secretary Spellings "micromanaged the implementation of Reading First from her West Wing Office." The former number two person at USED during that time, Eugene Hickock, in an interview with David Hoff of Education Week (October 11), stated, "I would be surprised if Margaret didn't have a pretty good sense of what was going on in

Reading First.” During the SIIA/AAP education summit on October 5 and 6, an aide to Senator Ted Kennedy noted that the OIG had made recommendations to Secretary Spellings beyond those officially included in the OIG report and that she expected further developments to occur as the five additional OIG reports are released over the next two months (see related item).

Although over-shadowed by the release of the OIG Reading First investigative report, the IRA went live on October 26 with its Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (LCC) at www.literacycoach.online.org. As reported in the IRA Reading Today publication (October/November 2006), the LCC Director Nancy Shanklin said that the website would serve as a library that would include information on books and articles related to coaching and would include links to other sources. LCC “briefs” will be developed on a number of topics including:

- Features of Models for Literacy Coaching Programs;
- Professional Development and Support for Literacy Coaches;
- Literacy Instruction and Coaching Across the Disciplines.

In that article, she encouraged IRA councils and members to submit information about successful programs. Her contact information is nancy.shanklin@cudenver.edu or (303)556-4757.

USED’s Policies for Releasing Research-Based Evidence on the Effectiveness of Instructional Interventions and Products Continue to Vary Considerably: Education Practitioners/Decision-Makers Question the Usefulness and Credibility of Reports While Developers/Publishers of “Effective” Interventions Could be Short-Shifted

Despite being criticized by its own Office of Inspector General for playing favorites and for not following the definition of SBR in the Law under the Reading First program during the program’s initial implementation, USED apparently has different policies among some of its offices and the Institute for Education Sciences on releasing official “research evidence” about certain products and interventions. These “evidence” reports are emanating from the What Works Clearinghouse and from a to-be-published report based upon a USED-conducted evaluation of 15 computer-based curriculum packages in a \$10 million Congressionally-mandated study which uses randomized trial evaluations. Another set of policies are being formulated under the Promising Practices Initiatives (PPI), funded within USED’s Office of Program Policy and Evaluation, which is scheduled for implementation this Fall. There are implications for both education practitioners/decision-makers at the district and school levels, as well as for developers and publishers, particularly of technology-based interventions.

Created by Congress in 2002, the Institute for Education Sciences has funded the What

Works Clearinghouse to the tune of slightly over \$23 million which was supposed to be IES' major mechanism for making research-based evidence more credible and useful to decision-makers. And as reported in Education Week (September 27), IES, over the last half year, "has been stepping up its efforts to be more relevant to practitioners, tinkering with the What Works Clearinghouse and making plans to develop practical policy guides informing task forces on urban education that put researchers in touch with educators from the trenches." One such change was a decision to produce "intervention reports," which provide findings from studies that did not meet the gold bar of randomized trials or which did not have large enough samples (see TechMIS June 2006 Washington Update). As of September 30, the What Works Clearinghouse had identified only eight interventions which met a more rigorous standard. On October 4, IES announced ten new intervention reports highlighting available research on beginning reading, early childhood education, character education, English language learning, and elementary school mathematics. The quality of the evidence, based upon the rigor of the study design, was found positive for certain supplemental as well as core curriculum interventions. The policy which apparently has evolved at the What Works Clearinghouse is to identify specific products or interventions by name, summarize the nature of the evidence and its quality based on study design features, and allow the user to draw his/her own conclusion about the quality of the evidence.

In October, the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, which in the past has received major funding from IES, released its report (which will most likely be

one of its last reports because funding will be terminated shortly) which found that only ten of the eighteen most widely used school improvement programs for middle and high schools have "moderate" or "limited" evidence based upon the quality of studies conducted. None deserved a "high" rating. Several years ago, when the Center's contractor, American Institutes for Research rated the programs, several were rated much higher at that time. As the October 2006 AIR report noted, the criteria for rating the rigor of the study's conclusion are significantly higher following the "scientifically-based research definition used by IES which favors randomized trials with comparison or control groups." As noted in the Education Week article, of the 1,500 effectiveness studies the Center reviewed for the current secondary school report, only 41 made the cut. In the most recent AIR report, only four programs rated "moderate" for their effectiveness, using the more rigorous research design criteria for individual studies.

The AIR recent report also confirmed that USED is planning to launch a large-scale Promising Practices Initiative that "identifies potentially promising education practices in providing educators with tools and other support to assist with implementation." The so-called PPI is the brainchild of former Assistant Secretary Tom Luce who initiated a similar initiative during the 1990s in Texas where he was the key education advisor to then Governor George W. Bush through the "Just for Kids" entity which he directed at that time. Just for Kids has been integrated into several Bush initiatives at the national level, including the Center for Education Accountability involving the Education Commission of the States among other groups, and another initiative undertaken by

Standard and Poors which identifies high-performing schools based upon test results. Based on discussions with several knowledgeable observers, the PPI policy differs from the What Works Clearinghouse policy in that PPI will identify exemplary practices and solutions to problems, particularly in urban districts, relating to restructuring, notifying parents about the eligibility of their students for transfer or SES in schools identified for improvement, and other solutions related to major problems districts are having in implementing certain NCLB provisions. Rather than a focus on evidence gained from rigorous studies, PPI would tend to identify more general practices and procedures and suggest how to implement them under specific conditions. Apparently there will be no references to specific products or services. These same observers feel that offices at the What Works Clearinghouse are concerned that rigor of scientifically-based research criteria will be even more eroded.

USED is apparently planning to follow another different strategy in releasing evidence and findings from its Congressionally-mandated large intervention evaluation which tested 15 technology-based products in more than 130 schools. As reported in Education Week (August 9), one of the study's technical advisory group members, Michael L. Kamil, Stanford University, stated that the study was "One of only a few national-level randomized-trial evaluations that the Federal government has ever done." Each of the 33 participating school districts selected the interventions to be used in their schools. However, teachers were randomly assigned to use a specific intervention or to continue using their regular program. Pretests were given at the beginning of the 2004-05 school

year.

According to USED release of the evidence which was compiled and analyzed for the first school year (2004-05), results will not be available for each of the 15 commercial interventions. Rather, the evidence will be reported by groups of like products. Hence, findings for grade 1 early reading, which includes five different commercial technology-based programs, would be reported in the aggregate. There is a high probability that positive evidence on effective interventions could be washed out by negative evidence producing a net finding of no significant differences between the experimental and control groups. A more significant problem with releasing the first year's results in any form is the lack of time for planning to ensure the training and subsequent implementation occurred in the manner recommended by each of the 15 publishers. Andrew Trotter, the Education Week reporter who covered the project indicated that the first-year results were expected to be released in late summer. It now appears that USED may hold the release until the lame duck session of Congress returns to address the Department of Education's FY 2007 appropriations. Release of negative findings could further erode support even for level-funding state education technology grants (E²T²). And, even though findings related to each intervention will be released at the same time to the publishers who will decide what if any reports they will release, much of the damage will already have been done. According to Trotter, in the August 9 Education Week article, "Officials at the IES underscored that, if the study were starting today, data on individual products would be reported from the get go."

State Funding for Pre-K Education Will Increase By \$450 Million in 31 States in Fiscal Year 2007

The most recent report from Pre-K Now entitled "Votes Count: Legislative Action On Pre-K Fiscal Year 2007" reports that state legislatures in 31 states and the District of Columbia appropriated more than \$450 million in new money for early education in 2006 which is an increase of about 12 percent over 2005. For the first time, states with existing pre-k programs did not have a decrease in funding. The report notes that 12 states provided only flat funding or increases that fell below the Federal cost of living adjustment of 4.1 percent. Ten states currently provide no state funded pre-K services. Several states, such as Kansas and Tennessee, have initiated a strategy which focuses on improving the quality of pre-K education rather than merely serving more students. In some states, the additional funds will be used to increase per-student funding allocations which creates opportunities for purchasing products and services. As the report states, "Small classes taught by bachelor's degree-holding teachers with low teacher-child ratios and developmentally appropriate curricula are the most essential elements of quality, and they are the difference between dollars merely expended and those invested wisely for the future." Overall, state pre-K funding has increased from \$2.9 billion in FY 2005 to \$4.2 billion projected for FY 2007. In FY 2007, 23 governors recommended increased funding for pre-K. However, 31 state legislatures appropriated funding increases for pre-K. Clearly legislators are playing the key role in placing a higher funding priority on pre-K than governors generally. Below, we highlight some of the states with increased appropriations, which offer

perhaps the best prospects for purchasing developmentally-appropriate instructional programs and services for young learners.

California: The State pre-school program will increase from \$342 million to \$392 million, of which \$5 million is earmarked for family literacy, instructional materials and staff development.

Delaware: The early childhood assistance program will increase from \$5.3 to \$5.7 million; the hike will be used to increase per-child spending, not the number of children served.

Georgia: The pre-K program will increase from \$290 million to \$302 million. However, much of the increase will be used to raise teacher salaries up to four percent.

Illinois: Preschool for Now will increase from \$243 million to \$283 million, with \$5 million allocated to birth through three-year-old programs.

Kansas: Pre-K appropriations will increase from \$13.7 million to \$15.1 million with all of the new funds allocated to a pre-K pilot program to serve four-year-old students with disabilities or four-year-old high-poverty students.

Michigan: The School Readiness Program will increase \$5 million to \$91 million, the first increase in pre-K funding in Michigan since FY 2001.

New Jersey: The Abbott Preschool Program will receive an increase from \$530 million to \$578 million.

New Mexico: The State's Pre-K program will increase from \$5 million to \$13.5

million. Most of the funding will increase the per-child allocation because only 650 additional slots will be allowed.

New York: The Universal Pre-K Program will increase from \$204 million to \$254 million which is the first increase since FY 2001.

North Carolina: The More At Four program will increase from \$66 million to \$84 million while, at the same time, State funding for the Smart Start Program will grow from \$190 million to \$204 million.

Oklahoma: The Early Childhood four-year-old program will increase from \$199 million to \$209 million between FY 2005 and FY 2006, while figures for FY 2007 are not yet available. Some of the anticipated increased funding will be used to offset an accounting understatement.

Pennsylvania: The State's Accountability Block Grant will increase from \$200 million to \$250 million with the pre-K portion increasing from \$10 million to \$15 million, while the State Head Start program will increase from \$30 million to \$40 million.

South Carolina: The New Child Development Education Pilot program will receive \$23 million in first-year funding and will be targeted toward children from the State's lowest-performing school districts that have full-day pre-K programs.

Tennessee: The voluntary pre-kindergarten program will increase from \$35 million to \$55 million which will allow 5,000 additional children to be served.

Texas: The Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) pilot will increase from \$10 million

to \$18 million which can be used, along with other funding sources, for staff development and quality enhancements.

Virginia: Virginia's preschool initiative will increase \$3 million to \$49.6 million which will increase per-child spending to \$5,700.

West Virginia: The Public School Early Childhood Education program will increase from \$40 million to \$47 million. School districts also have the option of using State formula funding for pre-K programs.

For a copy of the 23-page report go to:
www.preknow.org/documents/LegislativeReport_Oct2006.pdf.

E-Rate Update: Filing Window To Open November 14 and New Eligible Services List (ESL) Released

The next E-Rate window is scheduled to open on November 14 with a closing date of February 7. While the normal window opening should be 60 days after the release of the new list of eligible E-Rate products and services, an exception has been made as the list was released by the FCC on October 19. Several types of products and services have been included for the first time on the revised eligible services list, as highlighted below.

In addition to installation, activation and initial configuration services, on-site training is now eligible as part of installation services. However, the training has to focus on the use of eligible equipment directly related to the equipment installation and the

training must be part of a contract or agreement for the equipment. A caveat is, as stated, "Training must occur coincidentally or within a 'reasonable time' after installation." Later on, the list states, identifies specific installation-related services that are not eligible including, "End-user training such as training of teachers and staff in the use of covered services in their programs of instruction or for professional development."

As stated in FCC's Public Notice on October 19, "Interconnected voice over Internet protocol (interconnected VoIP) service has been added to the 2007 ESL as an eligible service." There are some conditions which an "interconnected VoIP" is eligible -- e.g., it must involve a public-switched telephone network.

The new ESL also clarifies that customer charges for universal service fees are eligible as long as they do not include additional charges for universal service administration, which some providers charge separately. The ESL also clarifies that redundant components which are installed as a "standby mode" are not eligible. Now included as eligible is a KVM switch which is short for "keyboard video mouse." As reported in eSchool News, senior editor Corey Murray noted that, "In personal computing scenarios, the KVM device has been used as a 'money saver' enabling users to upgrade their machines without spending extra cash on ancillary attachments." Another change is that applicants need not have an auditable system in place to receive funding for wireless Internet access that is designed for portable devices.

The lame duck Congressional session after

the election will likely address the permanent exemption for E-Rate under the Antideficiency Act. The current temporary exemption runs out in December, but most observers feel there are adequate balances in the E-Rate fund so that issuance of funding commitment letters will not be halted. Most observers also feel that continuation of the E-Rate program is likely in spite of resistance from several key Republican House leaders.

States Make Slow Progress in Conducting Evaluations of SES Programs While Increased Student Participation Rates and Help for SES Providers Remain USED's Top Concerns

In mid-October, USED sponsored a supplemental educational services (SES) technical assistance meeting which focused on state evaluations of SES programs and encouraged afterschool program operators, primarily under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, to provide SES. While some states -- such as Georgia, Virginia, and Illinois -- have developed evaluation models which attempt to identify the "value added" of an SES provider's program to a student's overall performance, in most states, little progress has been made. As a result, according to reporter Sarah Sparks who covered some of the sessions, only in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania have SES providers been removed because of failure to increase student performance. As he did during the SIIA Fly-In three years ago, Dr. Steven Ross, who heads the Center for Research and Education Policy at the University of Memphis, identified the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to

determining the “effect size” of an individual student’s achievement by participating in an SES program, while at the same time controlling for demographic, school, and other exogenous variables. Most of the state models currently being implemented compare the results of students participating in SES programs to projected gains which should be made by students having similar characteristics or pre-post test scores with a matched comparison group of students.

While many of the state (and some district) attendees were wrestling with problems associated with evaluations, Morgan Brown, newly-appointed Assistant Deputy Education Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, expressed the Department’s top three concerns as reported in Education Daily (October 20):

- “districts and providers must collaborate better on outreach to parents;
- the student registration process must become clearer, easier, and more streamlined;
- providers want clear expectations for how they will be evaluated, a difficulty as most states are still creating the systems.”

Solutions to the stated top concerns all relate

to increasing the participation rate of students in SES (currently at about 18 percent) and providing further assistance to SES providers, particularly those that are independent third-parties which have been approved by the states.

On the last day, a session -- closed to the public -- was held which was designed to encourage more afterschool program operators, particularly those that are funded through 21st Century Community Learning Centers, to become approved for providing SES. As noted in a related item, a recent survey of afterschool program operators found that only three percent actually received some Title I funding by providing SES. Earlier Non-Regulatory Guidance from USED indicated that operators of afterschool programs, including those operated by districts, could be approved for providing SES even if the district is identified for improvement. To the extent that more afterschool operators are approved for, and provide, SES components, then the opportunities for partnering with these operators by providing materials and support, becomes even greater. As we have stated on several occasions, because of cost, logistical, and other factors, the use of afterschool operators is one of the most promising means of increasing student SES participation rates.

Alabama Update - November 2006

Education Daily reports that, over the next three years, 38 schools in Alabama will receive a total of almost \$12 million in grants for extended-day programs. Averaging \$3.9 million per year, the grants have been awarded by the State, but the funding comes from the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. The districts' initiatives, focused on Title I schools, include tutoring, drug and violence prevention, technology education, and arts enrichment.

Education Week reports that Alabama has created its first State Performance Plan (SPP) for students with disabilities. The SPP calls for two percent annual increases in the number of students with disabilities who graduate from high school. Currently, only about 52 percent of students with disabilities graduate with regular, advanced, or occupational diplomas -- compared with 89 percent of all students. To eliminate this gap, the SPP proposes a number of improvement activities including: (1) continuing to inform students about diploma options; (2) providing self-determination training; (3) supporting dropout prevention programs; and (4) ensuring all students have access to the general education curriculum. The State has begun implementing such intervention approaches as early intervention, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling.

Alaska Update - November 2006

Education Daily reports that Alaska's proposal to participate in USED's growth model pilot program is being considered. The State's revised plan calls for each student to close a quarter of the gap between the student's scores and proficiency in the first year, a third of the remaining gap in the second year, and one half of the still remaining gap in the third year, reaching full proficiency by the fourth year. This represents an improvement over the State's original proposal which did not set forth a rigorous course by which all students could reach proficiency.

The Anchorage Daily News reports that a suit has been filed against the State demanding more money for the public schools. Known as *Moore v. Alaska*, the lawsuit has been filed on behalf of the many small and isolated schools across the State, joined by the State teachers union and an organization called Citizens for the Educational Enhancement of Alaska's Children, Inc. The case alleges that:

- In some schools, most students cannot pass State basic skills exams;
- Textbooks, libraries, and technology are outdated;
- Some schools fail to teach subject matter required for high school exit exams; and
- More than three-fourths of the schools do not have a psychologist who can diagnose learning disorders.

Arizona Update - November 2006

Last Spring, the Arizona legislature approved, and the Governor signed, a measure that would allow tax breaks for business donations for private school tuition grants. As reported in Education Week, just two days before the law was scheduled to go into effect on September 21, the Arizona School Boards Association and the American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona filed a lawsuit challenging the law which gives companies dollar-for-dollar income tax savings for donations to groups that provide private school grants to low-income students. Critics of the law say it violates the State constitution and diverts funds from the public schools.

In November, Arizona voters will consider the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Initiative (called First Things First) which would increase cigarette taxes to pay for services for pre-school-aged children, including preschool, health screening, and child development services. According to Education Week, observers consider the possible passage of the Initiative as the first step toward implementation of full-day kindergarten in the State.

California Update - November 2006

The California legislature has passed SB 1133 known as the Quality Education Investment Act. The Law will allocate \$3 billion over the next seven years for the State's 1,600 lowest-performing public schools. Among the uses of the funds are:

- reducing class sizes to 25 students in grades 4-12;
- maintaining a class size of 20 students in grades K-3;
- providing professional development;
- creating a teacher quality index; and
- supporting credentialed counselors for every 300 students.

Education Daily reports that California has allocated \$550 million for new before- and after-school programs. All public schools in the State are eligible to apply for the grants. Their applications must include an educational and literacy component (e.g., tutoring, homework assistance) in core areas as well as enrichment elements (e.g., music, health, performing arts). More information on the program is available at: www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/as/index.asp.

A California State Appeals Court has, for the second time, upheld the constitutionality of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The Court dismissed an appeal filed by Public Advocates and the Californians for Justice Education Fund, which claimed the test is biased against some groups of students. The plaintiffs have not yet decided whether to file a further appeal.

The California legislature has passed, and the Governor has signed, an extension of last year's exemption of special education students from the requirement that they pass the CAHSEE. As reported in The Sacramento Bee, students in the Class of 2007 who have Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and who have completed all other graduation requirements can receive diplomas without passing the CAHSEE. In addition, students with disabilities who pass the test using modification (e.g., calculators, dictionaries) may graduate without going through the previously-required waiver process.

Assembly Bill 172, signed by the Governor, expands preschool instruction for additional 12,000 children from low-income families; the State's current preschool enrollment is about 100,000 students. Of the total of \$100 million authorized by the Law, \$50 million will be used to help the State's lowest-performing schools to hire and train more teachers and develop literacy/outreach programs to encourage parents to read to their children. The other \$50 million will be used to improve preschool facilities.

As reported on CNN.com, in some parts of the country, shop classes -- dropped from many high school

programs years ago -- are beginning to make a comeback. For example, the number of shop courses offered in California high schools has dropped from 40,000 in the 1980s to about 24,000 last school year. The State has, however, allocated \$100 million from its FY 2006 State budget for program expansion.

According to Education Week, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has vetoed a bill that called for special textbooks for English language learners. The veto of the bill represented support for the decision this Spring by the California board of education to approve a new language arts curriculum for 2008 that did not include separate textbooks for students with limited English proficiency.

Also reported in Education Week, there are two propositions on the November ballot affecting school funding. Proposition 1 D would authorize more than \$10 billion in bonds for construction of K-12 and higher education facilities. In particular, the funds would be used to build charter schools and vocational facilities, as well as to relieve overcrowding. The proposition is part of Governor Schwarzenegger's "strategic growth plan." A citizens' initiative, Proposition 88, would create a new \$50 tax on real estate to fund class size reduction and instructional materials. The proposition is opposed by the State PTA and other groups who argue it will only create more bureaucracy.

California has awarded \$22.4 million in California Partnership Academy continuation grants to 281 schools. As reported in Education Daily, the grants are intended to facilitate partnerships with business and community organizations that would create smaller high school units focused on academic and career technical education for students at risk of dropping out. Because funding for the program has not increased since 1993, only existing grantees have received funding. For more information on the program, go to: www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r17/cpa06result.asp.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has appointed retired Vice Admiral David Brewer as its new Superintendent to replace the retiring Roy Romer. According to the Los Angeles Times, the new Superintendent will be in place before a new power-sharing arrangement with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa takes effect.

As reported in Urban Schools, the Los Angeles school district is providing 80 of its middle and high schools with additional counselors whose jobs are to help students at risk of dropping out of school.

Colorado Update - November 2006

Education Week reports that Colorado's K-12 education budget for the 2006-07 school year (FY 2007) will increase by \$109 million to a total of \$3.4 billion. The increase can be attributed to a referendum last Fall that suspends the cap on State spending. Even during the 2005-06 school year, additional funds began flowing to school districts, including \$20 million for special education and \$25 million for capital construction.

Education Week also reports that Colorado's Commissioner of Education, William Moloney, is in a heated debate with the 178 superintendents in districts across the State over the role of the State in improving student performance. The superintendents collectively prepared a "white paper" this Spring to the Commissioner and the State Board of Education calling for more inclusion in decision-making with respect to accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act and more service to local districts.

Connecticut Update - November 2006

As reported in the Hartford Courant, Connecticut has allocated \$5 million to install fiber optic wiring in 66 school districts and other educational institutions in the State. The funding is being distributed through grants from the Connecticut Education Network which serves 160 schools and 40 higher education institutions.

Connecticut educational officials, as reported in Education Week, are pleased at the progress made by the State's system of technical schools in meeting the requirements of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). After the 2002-03 school year, seven of the system's 17 schools had failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB. After the last school year (2005-06), only two schools remained on the low-performing list.

Delaware Update - November 2006

A new plan -- known as Early Success: Delaware's Early Childhood Plan -- is intended to ensure the long-term success of early learners. The plan was released by the Delaware Early Care and Education Council, the Early Childhood Comprehensive System Steering Committee, and Delaware Early Childhood Stakeholders.

The plan calls for:

- public policy development;
- creation of research-based programs;
- expansion or redesign of existing programs;
- collaboration between State and local agencies;
- establishment of long-term public-private partnerships; and
- measurement of effectiveness.

Delaware's Vision 2015 Coalition, a committee of education, community, and business leaders, has released a report that makes a number of recommendations for improving the State's schools. Among the report's recommendations are:

- conduct assessments that measure student progress over time;
- increase the school year by 140 hours (with appropriate State funding);
- expand online distance learning;
- negotiate a Statewide teacher salary schedule; and
- weight per-pupil funding toward students with special needs (disabled, low-income, gifted).

District of Columbia Update - November 2006

The District of Columbia school district reportedly failed to spend \$14 million in Federal grant funds last year and could be required to return the money to the U.S. Department of Education (USED). As reported in Education Daily, the District has vowed to streamline its grant management program and is working with USED to implement a financial action plan that would allow the District to retain the funds and to continue program activities.

As reported in the Washington Post, 30 of the 34 charter schools in the District failed to meet reading and math standards under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The charter school results are similar to those for regular public schools in D.C. where 118 out of 146 traditional schools also failed to meet NCLB requirements. Last year, only 81 schools missed standards.

Declining district enrollment -- down 10,000 students in the past five years -- has led the District to approve a collaboration between an underenrolled elementary school and an innovative charter middle school. According to The Washington Post, the Scott Montgomery Elementary facility will house a public elementary through Grade 4 and a new charter middle school, KIPP-DC, for the middle school grades. KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) operates 47 (mostly charter) schools in 15 states and the District.

Florida Update - November 2006

According to the St. Petersburg Times, Florida's universal prekindergarten program has come under increased criticism from early childhood experts for its "lax teacher requirements" and inadequate funding. The constitutional amendment that established the PreK program mandated that it be of "high quality," but the State legislature's standards include no requirement that teachers have college degrees and funding has been increased by less than one percent. The program's critics argue that the State's budget surplus should allow for adequate funding.

As reported in Education Daily, the Hillsborough County (Tampa) school district has been the first school system approved for a merit pay plan under Florida's Special Teachers Are Rewarded (STAR) program. Funded at \$147.5 million by the State legislature, STAR allows districts, once they are approved by the State, to pay the top 25 percent of teachers bonuses equal to at least five percent of their annual salaries.

Georgia Update - November 2006

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that many of last year's third-, fifth-, and eighth-graders are repeating grades because they did not pass the Statewide promotion exam after a second opportunity this summer. Nearly 21,000 third-graders failed the reading test in the Spring; after summer refresher classes, 45 percent of these students passed the summer retest. The rest failed, or didn't try, a second time and have been retained in grade. Similarly, 41 percent of the more than 22,000 fifth-graders who failed the first reading test passed during the summer. In the eighth grade, of the approximately 13,000 students who failed reading in the Spring, 40 percent pass the retest.

As reported by the Associated Press, Georgia has budgeted \$21 million this year for high school graduation coaches. Moreover, Governor Sonny Perdue -- running for reelection -- has declared that he will request another \$20-\$25 million to install graduation coaches in all of the State's 450 middle schools. The middle school graduation coaches will identify students at risk of failing to graduate and match them with the kind of academic assistance (tutoring, mentoring) that can put them on a track to a high school diploma.

Urban Schools, published by the Council of the Great City Schools, reports that Atlanta Public Schools is implementing its new Math Initiative to improve student performance in mathematics across all grade levels. The district also requires all of its schools to establish a wellness plan for student fitness and nutrition.

Idaho Update - November 2006

The Twin Lakes Times-News reports that a State panel on labor and workforce issues has endorsed a plan to increase Idaho's high school graduation requirements. The plan, similar to one which failed in the legislature last year, would raise graduation requirements to include at least three years of math and science (currently, only two years of each are required). In addition, high school seniors would be required to take a math course, complete a senior project, and take a college entrance exam.

Education Week reports that voters in Idaho will be deciding, in the November elections, on whether to impose a one-percent increase in the sales tax (up to six percent) to establish the Idaho Local Public Investment Fund. The money would be used to reduce K-12 class sizes, recruit teachers, and purchase classroom materials.

Illinois Update - November 2006

The Chicago Tribune reports that testing problems in Illinois last Spring have resulted in serious delays in getting test results to schools. The results for elementary schools have been sent to the schools. But high schools have not yet received their results from the eleventh-grade Prairie State Achievement Examination, meaning the State has missed the statutory October 31 deadline for making annual school report cards available. This means that high schools do not know whether they have met Federal standards under the No Child Left Behind Act and do not, therefore, know whether they are required to offer tutoring or transfer options. This information was supposed to be available to parents on or before the first day of school.

Education Week reports that, when Illinois' State superintendent Randy Dunn steps down in December to become President of Murray State University, the State's director of special education, Christopher Koch, will become interim superintendent. The State will continue to look for a permanent superintendent.

Iowa Update - November 2006

The Des Moines Register reports that 83 percent of Iowa's nearly 1,500 schools met State goals last school year. A total of 96 schools and 15 school districts failed to meet goals for two consecutive years -- up from 94 and 14, respectively, the year before. Twelve of the 96 schools labeled as "in need of assistance" are Title I schools and thus face Federal sanctions. More than \$2.1 million in Federal funds was set aside for these schools.

A new report by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has given Iowa a D- grade largely because of the State's lack of progress in educating poor and minority students. Based on data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Fordham report indicates that:

- 17 percent of low-income fourth-graders are proficient in reading;
- 16 percent of low-income eighth-graders are proficient in mathematics;
- 10 percent of Iowa's Black fourth-grade students are proficient in reading;
- 8 percent of Black eighth-graders are proficient in math;
- 47 percent of Black students graduate from high school;
- 13 percent of Hispanic fourth-graders are proficient in reading;
- 8 percent of Hispanic eighth-graders are proficient in math; and
- 58 percent of Hispanic students graduate from high school.

Kentucky Update - November 2006

Education Week reports that the Kentucky State board of education will not, this year, increase the proficiency level required of students on the State assessment. The Federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that states increase annually the percentage of students who must be proficient.

An analysis by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education shows that, for 2004 (the last year with available data), 53 percent of the entering first-year students at the State's colleges and universities were required to take at least one remedial course. The most recent report indicates that 32 percent of college freshmen need remediation in English (down from 35 percent in 2002), 25 percent in reading (down from 27 percent in 2002), and 44 percent in mathematics (the same as 2002). The State estimates that the cost of college-level remediation is \$25 million a year, \$14 million from the State and \$11 million from student tuition.

Urban Educator from the Council of Great City Schools reports that the Jefferson County school district (Louisville) is implementing new science modules in all of the districts' elementary and middle schools. The modules, part of Louisville's \$25 million math and science initiative, contain the equipment and supplies each student requires to learn inquiry-based science.

Maryland Update - November 2006

The Baltimore Sun reports that Maryland has begun offering online courses for students who are at risk of failing their high school exit exams. Known as High School Assessment (HSA) classes, the programs will be available to any student Statewide who has failed any part of the HSA or who needs extra help for the test. Students, beginning with the Class of 2009, are required to pass HSAs in four subject areas in order to receive a diploma. Currently, HSA classes in Algebra and American Government are available; Biology classes will start this Winter and English II classes will be offered next Fall.

Under Maryland's Bridge to Excellence legislation, all of the State's 24 school districts are required to develop a master plan for academic reform and to update the plan annually. As reported in the Baltimore Sun, the plan from the Baltimore City school district has been rejected twice by the State as "unrealistic," the only district plan not approved. So, Baltimore is in the process of developing a whole new master plan and has been required to hire an independent monitor to evaluate whether the plan is being followed. The tentative plan includes a number of reforms for the district's 11 schools that are targeted for takeover. These include: quarterly testing in key subjects, hiring more teachers for struggling students, and improving teacher training. The district also plans to adopt the middle school language arts curriculum from nearby Anne Arundel County and the middle school mathematics curriculum from Cecil County.

The Baltimore City school district has launched a number of new initiatives intended to improve student academic performance. As reported in Urban Schools, the new programs include an enhanced reading program for early learners and a revised social studies curriculum that includes a course in American government.

Massachusetts Update - November 2006

The Boston Globe reports that the State's plan to raise the passing score on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests would have a disproportionately negative impact on minority students. The State has raised the MCAS passing score from 220 to 240 beginning with the Class of 2010. Students who do not reach the new standard but do meet the old passing score will have to complete an "educational proficiency plan" to obtain a diploma. The higher standards have raised questions about the possibly disproportionate effect on minority students; school districts will be expected to provide "targeted support" for students at greatest risk of failing. Based on current test results, more than two-thirds of White and Asian students achieve the higher score compared with less than a third of Black and Hispanic students.

As reported in Education Daily, last year, 234 of Massachusetts' school districts made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. A total of 130 districts were identified as "in need of improvement" or "corrective action" because they failed to make AYP in English only (23 districts), math only (55 districts), or both subjects (52 districts). For more information on district performance, go to: <http://Profiles.doe.mass.edu/ayp2006.aspx>.

Michigan Update - November 2006

Education Week reports that voters will consider, in the November elections, Proposal 5--known as the Educational Funding Guarantee -- which would increase the current level of State education funding by \$565 million and would require the State to increase its annual funding by an amount equal to the rate of inflation.

As reported in Education Daily, Michigan State University, along with two nearby school districts, is the recipient of a \$800,000 Federal grant to teach students “critical” foreign languages. The Lansing district will receive funds from USED’s Foreign Language Assistance Program to offer Mandarin Chinese in kindergarten through fifth grade. Dearborn will be funded to develop an Arabic language curriculum.

Urban Schools reports that the Detroit school district has implemented the Virtual Early Middle College which allows high school students to take high school and college classes online.

Mississippi Update - November 2006

According to the Commercial Dispatch, 54 percent of Mississippi's public schools were classified as "superior" or "exemplary" last year, up from 52 percent the year before. Under the State's complex grading system for measuring school performance, State schools break down as follows:

- Superior (Level 5) -- 228 schools/27 percent
- Exemplary (Level 4) -- 225 schools/27 percent
- Successful (Level 3) -- 307 schools/37 percent
- Under-performing (Level 2) -- 70 schools/8 percent
- Low-Performing (Level 1) -- 3 schools/less than 1 percent

According to The Jackson Clarion-Ledger, Mississippi has adopted a new calculation of high school graduation rates that effectively reduces the State's rate from 85 percent to 61 percent. Using a combination of the Federally approved formula and one approved by the National Governors Association, Mississippi tracks groups of students through high school and accounts for dropouts and transfers. The new system also calculates rates of "completion" which includes GED recipients and special education students who receive certificates other than regular diplomas.

The Clarion-Ledger also reports that the State is scaling back its proposed changes to the middle and high school curriculum and has requested less than half of the \$24 million in funding originally proposed to support the changes. Instead of installing new courses in grades 7-9 in about 20 percent of the State's middle schools, the State will initiate pilot courses in a small number of schools. The new courses are expected to be Information and Communication Technology I and II for seventh- and eighth-graders and Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics Applications for ninth-graders. The overall five-year plan, projected to cost \$125 million, also calls for new high school courses organized along seven career pathways.

The State has also requested: \$2.1 billion for full funding of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program which pays teacher salaries; \$33 million for teacher salary increases; and \$10 million to support 88 prekindergarten pilot projects.

New York Update - November 2006

A total of 75 school districts in New York have been low-rated because of poor performance by students with disabilities. As reported in Education Daily, 58 of these districts are designated as “needs assistance” and 17 districts (including New York City) are “needs intervention.” “Needs assistance” districts must have their instruction practices reviewed by the State. Those in “needs intervention” status will have their Federal IDEA funding redirected. Many of these districts show high school graduation rates for their students with disabilities of less than 35 percent and dropout rates in excess of 20 percent.

As reported in The New York Times, a study of failing students in New York City has identified 140,000 young people, aged 16-21, who have dropped out of high school or who are unlikely to graduate. According to the report, 68,000 students have dropped out and another 70,000, although still enrolled, are so far behind in credits they will not be able to graduate. It has been recommended that the City provide more “transfer schools”-- small (200 student) schools that focus on students who have struggled in traditional high schools. Fifteen such schools are already planned and five more are possible, in part because of funding from the Gates Foundation.

The Buffalo school district has added about 50 new reading and math teachers in its middle schools in hopes of increasing student test performance. As reported in Urban Schools, the district has also opened a new school, called Math, Science and Technology Preparatory School for middle and high school students. The school is designed to provide students with a rigorous academic program including a range of Advanced Placement courses.

Also as reported in Urban Schools, the Rochester school district, through a \$5 million grant from the Gates Foundation, has opened two new small schools this Fall. Operating in partnership with the College Board, the schools serving 150 students in grades 7-9 will be located within larger high schools. The Northeast College Preparatory High School will focus on math, science, technology, and engineering; the Northwest College Preparatory High School will concentrate its programs on government and law.

North Carolina Update - November 2006

Education Week reports that North Carolina's FY 2007 budget for K-12 education will be \$7.3 billion, an increase of \$450 million (seven percent) over the previous year. The budget increase includes \$323 million for teacher salary increases of eight percent and \$90 million for bonuses for teachers in schools that show improvement under the State's accountability program. It also includes \$42 million for low-wealth districts (above their regular per-pupil allocation) and \$27 million in support of programs for disadvantaged students. North Carolina expects the new State Lottery to generate an additional \$425 million which will go to the State's preschool initiative, reduced class sizes in grades K-3, and school construction.

According to the Associated Press, North Carolina's system of End-of-Grade tests are far too easy and do not predict student success in high school or beyond. Begun in 1992-93, the exams were intended to become more rigorous over time but this did not occur. A score of 3 on the tests' four-point scale has been considered "proficient," but such a score on some tests means answering less than half of the questions correctly. An analysis of test scores shows that about half of eighth-graders who score a 3 on their End-of-Grade tests could not pass the End-of-Grade tests in ninth grade. More than 95 percent of the eighth graders who score a 4 on their End-of-Grade exams pass the exams a year later. Moreover, half of the State's high school graduates who enroll in North Carolina community colleges are required to take at least one remedial course. The State is planning to discuss ways to address this issue.

The North Carolina legislature has appointed a committee to conduct a study of the high dropout rates in the State. As reported in Education Week, only 66 percent of the State's entering ninth-graders graduate within four years and State law allows students to drop out at age 16. Scheduled to continue through January, the legislative study will review achievement data and spending patterns in hopes of developing policies and strategies to improve secondary education.

As reported in Urban Schools, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district is in the process of converting two of its high schools into smaller, themed high schools that will provide innovative academic programs to raise student performance and to prepare students better for post-secondary education and skilled employment.

Ohio Update - November 2006

According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, charter school advocacy groups have released a report calling for the closing of the lowest-performing charter schools in Ohio. Sponsored by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and the Fordham Institute, the report also calls for more State oversight of Ohio's 305 charter schools and says that charter school funding should increase, arguing that charter schools receive an average of \$2,500 less per student than regular public schools.

As reported in Education Week, the proposed Ohio Learn and Earn amendment is up for voter consideration in the November elections. The constitutional amendment would allow as many as 31,500 slot machines at horseracing tracks and off-track-betting locations, with 30 percent of the proceeds going to the State to pay for college scholarships to eligible students.

As reported in Education Daily, General Electric has given the Cincinnati school district a five-year, \$20 million grant to improve math and science test scores, reduce achievement gaps, and increase college enrollments. Planning for the five-year grant was funded by a \$500,000 development grant from the General Electric Foundation.

As reported in Urban Schools, the Columbus school district is in the process of establishing two new programs to improve student behavior. The Positive Behavioral Support system will help schools develop programs for behavior improvement. Success Works Academy is intended to allow disruptive students to obtain the skills and support needed for academic success.

The Ohio Supreme Court has ruled that charter schools in Ohio count equally as public schools according to Education Daily. The ruling says it is constitutional for a private organization to operate publicly financed schools. Charter school advocates hope the Ohio decision will provide precedents for other states.

Oregon Update - November 2006

As reported in Education Daily, Oregon's second-round proposal to participate in the Federal growth model pilot program is being considered by the U.S. Department of Education (USED). The State's revised model would use three years of test data to measure each student's "growth trajectory" toward proficiency over the next three years. If the student's score predicts to the proficiency level in three years, the student would be considered "on target." The Oregon plan does not have a firm time frame for reaching proficiency, but would track student growth even after he/she get to the proficiency level.

In partnership with the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (ESDs) and Intel Corporation, the Oregon Department of Education will implement a pilot program to provide laptop computers to sixth-grade students in three schools. Intel will contribute \$350,000 worth of computers and training; the State will provide \$100,000 for software, equipment and training; and the ESDs (three of the 20 Oregon ESDs will participate) will contribute matching funds. The pilot program is intended to improve student test scores by providing the sixth-graders with laptops at no cost for use in all of their classes.

According to Urban Schools, the Portland school district has begun shifting its schools to a K-8 model with 16 of the district's elementary schools adding a sixth grade this year. The district has also implemented a new high school math curriculum intended to provide a more rigorous college prep program.

South Carolina Update - November 2006

South Carolina reports that none of its 85 school districts and only 38 percent of its 1,100 schools made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act last year. This is a regression from the year before when 47 percent of schools made AYP. Of the failing schools, 185 (up from 167) have missed AYP for at least two years and are, therefore, required to offer a transfer option to their students. Of the approximately 87,000 students in these 185 schools, only 925 have actually taken advantage of the “choice” option.

The South Carolina Department of Education reports that the number of Hispanic students in the State’s public schools has increased from 12,000 three years ago to more than 28,000 last Spring, about four percent of the State’s total enrollment. About 65 percent of the Hispanic students receive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. The State receives about \$2.5 million in Federal funds to provide ESOL programs for close to 20,000 students, but does not allocate any State funds for the purpose, leaving local districts to supplement the Federal funds. It is estimated that, by 2018, 21 percent of South Carolina’s graduating high school seniors will be Hispanic, up from two percent in 2005.

Texas Update - November 2006

As reported in Education Week, the Texas Attorney General approved the State's authority to review supplemental educational materials included in textbooks, but did not allow the State to set general content standards for the textbooks. Textbooks approved by the State go on a "conforming" list and are available to districts at no cost.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the graduation rates reported by Texas school districts are, in many cases, greatly inflated. Based upon district numbers, the State's official graduation rate is about 85 percent. Researchers who have looked at the data believe the true rate is below 70 percent and that, in urban districts (e.g., Houston, Dallas), less than half of some minority students graduate within four years. Moreover, a new report by the Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas indicates that only 20 percent of English language learners graduate. Texas has changed its methodology for calculating dropouts. For the first time, students who don't pass the State assessment or earn a GED by the end of their senior year will be counted as dropouts.

According to Education Week, a number of Texas schools whose teachers are eligible for bonuses under the State's new incentive-award plan will not apply for the grants. Teachers in high-poverty districts can receive bonuses of up to \$10,000 a year for, among other criteria, raising student scores on State tests. The three-year, \$300 million program offers eligible schools grants of between \$40,000 and \$300,000. Of the 1,160 schools that are eligible for the grants, at least 21 have indicated they will not apply for the program.

The Houston Chronicle reports that the Houston school district expects to receive a \$3.9 million grant from a number of hurricane-related foundations to provide tutoring and social services programs for the 3,000 hurricane-displaced students in Houston schools. Only about half of the sixth-grade and less than a third of the fourth-grade evacuee students pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading exam. And no more than a third of the evacuee students at any grade level passed the TAKS math test. The scores of these evacuees on the TAKS did not count for school rating purposes last year, but they will this year, possibly causing many schools to face sanctions.

Also according to the Houston Chronicle, the Houston school district has 19,000 of its students eligible for tutoring or transfer because their schools had failed for two consecutive years to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Of these, only 648 (three percent) signed up, most (520) for tutoring. These numbers are considerably lower than the national figures which show about 18-20 percent of eligible students enrolling in tutoring and one percent opting to transfer.

According to Urban Schools, the Austin school district is establishing its Skills for Life Middle School Initiative in four elementary schools and 11 middle schools. The program is intended to provide early teens with the knowledge and skills for sound decision-making.

Virginia Update - November 2006

A University of Virginia study predicts that, by 2010, the State's K-12 population will grow by 2.5 percent to 1.22 million students, increasing State education costs by more than \$275 million of which \$136 million will be borne by local school districts. Despite this projected increase, the study predicts that 60 percent of the State's school districts will see declining enrollments. A total of 12 districts -- many in Northern Virginia -- are projected to grow by 1,000 students or more in the next five years. The largest enrollment increases are expected to be in Loudon County (an increase of more than 21,000 students) and Prince William County (a 16,000 student increase). Virginia Beach, on the other hand, is projected to have an enrollment drop of more than 4,000 students.

As reported in Education Week, Virginia has rejected a request from several local school districts to recalculate results of the State assessment -- called Standards of Learning -- by disregarding math scores for students in fourth, sixth, and seventh grades who were tested for the first time. According to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, this is the first year that low-performing Virginia schools have been denied accreditation by the State. Only two school districts -- Sussex County and Petersburg -- have had schools denied State accreditation and both are working on agreements with the State to meet requirements. Petersburg, for example, has agreed to create a position of chief academic officer to address the schools performance problems. Dorothea Shannon, former superintendent in Prince George County, Charlottesville, and Greensville County, has been appointed to the State-funded position.