

Alabama Update - April 2005

As reported in the Montgomery Advertiser, Governor Robert Riley, in his 2005 State of the State address, emphasized distance learning as an instructional solution. He outlined a new program -- called Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS) -- which will use technology to connect students and teachers across the State. The Governor has proposed to include \$10.3 million in his 2006 budget for distance learning Statewide.

Arizona Update – April 2005

In mid-March, the Arizona legislature approved Senate Bill 1506 that would allow the State to provide vouchers to students who go to private schools. Under the Bill, elementary and middle school students could get vouchers worth as much as \$3,500 and high school students could receive \$4,500. The program would begin in the 2006-07 school year. It is expected that Democratic Governor Janet Napolitano will veto the Bill.

The Center for American Progress reports that Arizona identifies external facilitators to help low-performing schools implement their school improvement plans. These NCLB facilitators, selected and trained by the State, include staff of Federal technical assistance centers, representatives of private education reform firms, and individual practitioners. Some of the external facilitators have been specifically approved to assist schools with high percentages of English language learners.

In its "Policy and Progress Update" on supplemental educational services, the Education Leaders Council reports on a new initiative in Arizona which allocates \$10 million to tutoring services for high school students who have failed to pass the State assessment. The plan allows each such student to pay for up to nine hours of tutoring at \$30 per hour. Under the program, tutors are approved by school principals (unlike SES providers which must be approved at the State level).

A recent study by Arizona State University indicated that many minority students in the Class of 2006 continue to score poorly on the AIMS exit exam and are in danger of failing to graduate on time. Next year's seniors are the first class that will be required to pass AIMS reading, writing, and math tests to graduate. Despite two tries, 57 percent of the class has not passed all three sections. The report found that 65 percent of White students have passed the math section; only about a third of Hispanic and Black students, and a quarter of Native American students, have passed math. Most of the students in the lowest performance category (falls far below standards) failed both the Spring 2004 test and the Fall 2004 retest. Seventy percent of the more than 13,000 students in lowest category are minority students.

Arizona has asked the U. S. Department of Education (USED) to relax the requirements for Arizona schools. Under current rules, 600 (more than 30 percent) of Arizona schools will be listed as failing to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements by the start of the next school year. Over the past three years, Arizona has (with USED approval) been allowed to maintain a standard calling for a constant percentage of students to pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). But this year, schools will be required to show increases of nine to 15 percentage points (depending on grade). Among the changes requested of USED are: (1) a reduction in the required elementary attendance rate from 94 percent to 90 percent; (2) an increase in the minimum cell size needed to be measured from 30 students to 60; and (3) reduction in the 71 percent requirement for high school graduation.

California Update – April 2005

The Mercury-News reports that 57 percent of the freshmen entering California State University (CSU) campuses this past Fall were in need of remedial instruction in language skills (47 percent) or mathematics (37 percent) or both. Students have one year to reach a proficiency level to handle college-level work or they can be "disenrolled." Last year, CSU and State Education Department established an Early Assessment Program that allows eleventh grade students to take college proficiency tests in English and math. Those who pass do not have to take the CSU placement tests. Those who fail can use their senior year to improve their skills.

The Sacramento Bee reports that the California Teachers Association, the State's largest teachers' union, is planning to raise its dues by \$60 per year in order to lobby against Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposals for merit pay. If approved, the dues hike would raise as much as \$60 million over the next three years for the union, in addition to the union's current dues structure (\$500 per year). The union argues that the Governor has raised at least \$28 million in the last year to support his initiatives.

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, a State legislative report recommends that the State should not require students with disabilities to pass the high school exit exam in order to graduate. Under current California requirements, next years seniors -- including 44,000 students with disabilities -- must pass the exit exam to receive a diploma. However, a recent report from West Ed indicates that, while 74 percent of nondisabled students pass the exit exam on their first try, only 30 percent of disabled students do so. Because of this disparity, the report recommends delaying the exit exam requirement for students with disabilities for two years, until the Class of 2008.

As reported in School Reform News, English language learners in California have shown marked improvement over the past four years. Across the State, in 2004, 47 percent of English language learners were in the top two proficiency categories on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). This scoring is up from 43 percent in 2003, 34 percent in 2002, and 25 percent in 2001. Los Angeles was the largest contributor to those gains. CELDT results

showed that, at every grade level, the percentage of English learners scoring in the top two categories rose by at least 17 percentage points. The percent of seventh and eighth graders in the top two categories increased by 43 percentage points since 2001.

California has a Statewide System of School support designed to help districts and schools meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). As reported by the Center for American Progress, one county office of education in each of the State's 11 regions is designated as the fiscal agent and grant recipient for school support in its region. California directs its support services at the district level, believing that it is not practical to attempt to serve directly as many as 9,000 schools, more than 1,600 of which are identified as in need of improvement this school year.

The Los Angeles Times reports that the Los Angeles school board has called for a plan to address the district's high dropout rate, low graduation rate, and poor coordination among programs currently tasked with improving student performance. A recent Harvard University study showed that only 39 percent of Hispanic students and 47 percent of Black students who should have graduated in 2002 did so. Superintendent Roy Romer was given until mid-August to come up with a specific set of recommendations.

The Sacramento Bee reports on a partnership between the California State University (CSU) system and the State's public high schools to reduce the need for remediation in college by helping college-bound students while they are still in high school. During the 2003-04 school year, nearly 40,000 freshmen at CSU campuses required remedial courses at a cost of nearly \$30 million. About 47 percent of the entering freshmen needed English remediation; 37 percent required help in math. Under the Early Assessment Program (EAP), high school juniors will be assessed to determine their college readiness. Last year, 150,000 juniors took the voluntary English EAP and 115,000 took the math portion. CSU and high school faculty are designing programs to help students who perform poorly on the EAP to catch up during their senior years.

Colorado Update – April 2005

As reported in Education Week, the plan for a teacher merit pay plan in Denver has become hung up in negotiations between the district and its teachers' union. The proposed plan, known as ProComp, is designed to recognize teacher classroom skills and performance rather than seniority. Denver has on the ballot this coming November a measure which would raise property taxes by \$25 million per year to support the new pay system, but the district-union impasse, as well as flat district enrollment and continuing budget shortfalls, have made the teachers' union reluctant to accept the new plan.

Delaware Update – April 2005

As reported in Education Week, Delaware's charter schools appear to be outperforming regular public schools. Based upon a State study, the findings should be considered preliminary because nearly half of the State's 13 charter schools have been open for less than three years. Conducted the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University, the study found that, in the eighth and tenth grades, charter school students significantly outperformed students in public schools. Results for third- and fifth-grade students were more mixed. Delaware's charter schools serve 6,200 students -- five percent of the State's public school enrollment.

Florida Update – April 2005

The Orlando Sentinel reports that Florida localities could lose millions of dollars in Federal community development block grants if President Bush's proposal to tie these funds to performance under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) goes into effect. Because of the State's rigorous reading and mathematics standards, very few Florida schools and districts met NCLB standards last year and the number is expected to go down as academic benchmarks go up this year. State education officials have argued that the State should not be punished for high standards. Last year, Florida received \$189 million in community development funds that were used for health clinics, sidewalks, etc.

The Miami Herald reports that Florida has asked the U. S. Department of Education (USED) to ease the way schools are determined to have met the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act. Under existing rules, subgroups within schools (e.g., special education students, English language learners) of at least 30 students are tracked and measured for performance. If one such subgroup fails to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), the entire school is considered low-performing. Florida wants to change the threshold to 15 percent of the school's enrollment. It is estimated that such a rules modification would triple the number of Florida schools making AYP. If approved, the 15 percent threshold would be the highest in the nation. Florida is also requesting a delay in the effective date for higher Federal standards scheduled for this year. Under the existing schedule, 31 and 38 percent of students in all schools and subgroups must be proficient in reading and mathematics, respectively; the rates are scheduled to increase to 48 and 53 percent this year. The State wants to phase-in the changes more slowly.

Early this year, also as reported in The Miami Herald, the Florida State Board of Education requested expressions of interest from private firms who are capable of operating struggling schools, possibly as early as next school year. Identifying the lowest-performing schools will depend on results from the FCAT. Among the four firms who might run failing schools is Edison Schools whose contract to operate a Miami elementary school was terminated by the Dade County School Board earlier this year. An evident conflict of interest exists because Florida's public employees pension fund is Edison's largest stockholder. The other three private

firms who have expressed interest are: The Rensselaerville Institute, Victory Schools, and Community Education Partners.

Georgia Update – April 2005

Georgia allocates its school improvement money through a formula based on the number of years a school has been identified for improvement and the number of students in the school. As reported by the Center for American Progress, schools in improvement for one year receive base grants of \$10,000 per school, with supplements of \$5,000 for schools with enrollments of between 600 and 1,000 students and \$10,000 for schools with high enrollments. Schools in their second and third years of improvement get grants of \$75,000. The enrollment supplements remain the same. Georgia does not permit its school improvement for capital expenses such as school renovations, and strongly urges limited expenditures for instructional technology, and discourages the use of school improvement funds for long-term personnel costs because the grants are intended to cover only one year. The funds are generally spent on such non-recurrent costs as professional development, part-time coaches or facilitators, and staff per diem for work on school improvement plans.

Indiana Update – April 2005

The Indianapolis Star reports that an investigation is underway to determine the extent of Indiana's violation of e-Rate regulations over the past few years. The State has received \$23 million since 1998 under the e-Rate program. The investigation has found that the State failed to get competitive bids on school and library Internet services and then fixed prices for the services at artificially high rates. Indiana's e-Rate agency, The Intelenet Commission, has set aside \$5 million to pay anticipated Federal penalties.

The Indianapolis Star also reports that a recent public survey shows that 55 percent of Indiana citizens support school vouchers. Other poll findings indicate that:

- two-thirds of younger (than 35 years old) respondents supported vouchers as opposed to 39 percent of older (65 and older) respondents;
- 61 percent of surveyed Catholics supported vouchers versus 54 percent of Protestants;
- 58 percent of Republicans supported vouchers compared with 48 percent of Democrats.

A voucher plan being considered by the State legislature calls for tuition "scholarships" to lower income (less than \$66,000 per year) families whose public schools fail to meet standards of the Federal No Child Let Behind Act for three consecutive years. The proposed legislation would also provide tax credits to parents who pay private school tuition.

School Reform News reports that an Indiana legislative committee has approved a bill that would allow parents to transfer their children, if their current school is failing under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, to another public, charter, or private school at State expense. Under the proposal, as many as 25,000 students could change schools accompanied by State funding estimated at \$9,000 per student.

As reported in The Indianapolis Star, a number of Republican-sponsored education bills are being reconsidered in the State legislature. HB 1134 would shift Indiana's Statewide testing (ISTEP-Plus) from the Fall to the Spring. HB 1530 would raise the recognized high school

dropout age from 16 to 18. HB 1009 would provide funds to allow parents to transfer their children out of failing schools. Each of these bills died in early March when House Democrats staged a boycott.

Iowa Update – April 2005

A recent study funded by the Pew Charitable Trust identified Iowa as one of the states that has taken a leading role in improving early childhood education. In next year's budget, Governor Tom Vilsack has asked for \$39 million to improve public school preschool programs. Being considered by the legislature is a scaled-back initiative calling for \$12 million emphasizing incentives for parents to make use of existing preschool programs.

Kansas Update – April 2005

According to The Kansas City Star, Kansas will see a two percent decrease in Federal Title I funds for next year -- from \$82 million to \$80.3 million; the second straight year of decline. The cut will mean that some districts may have to reduce afterschool programs and cut some staff positions. The State is expected to eliminate its budget to help struggling districts to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. Although preliminary allocations show some districts with substantial Title I increases -- Wichita would see a \$2.3 million gain -- State law says no district can have a reduction of more than 15 percent a year. Funds will be reallocated away from the big gainers such as Wichita in favor of districts that would have lost more than 15 percent.

In response to a State court ruling that Kansas' school funding system is unconstitutional, State legislators are proposing an additional \$145 million in K-12 education spending this year, a six percent increase over the current spending level. As reported in Education Week, the plan would establish a \$20 million program to improve student reading and math performance in the early grades (K-3) and would increase per-pupil funding for special education students and English language learners. Critics of the proposal say the increase is not enough and Governor Kathleen Sibelius has not indicated if she will approve the plan.

Kentucky Update – April 2005

As reported by the Center for American Progress, Kentucky has a dual system of technical assistance, one for schools identified by the State's biennial accountability system and another for school districts that have schools identified under Federal accountability requirements. The latter assistance is provided by facilitators hired with Title I school improvement funds. Some schools receive support under both State and Federal improvement structures.

Massachusetts Update – April 2005

The Boston Globe reports that a coalition of business and education leaders, established by Mass Insight Education, has called on the State to infuse \$90 million into the lowest-performing schools in the State over the next three years. The coalition wants the Governor to declare a state of emergency and allocate \$30 million annually to improve the 115 worst schools in the State.

As reported in Education Daily, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council and MassBioEd has established a new "Bio Teach Initiative." The new program is intended to provide every Massachusetts public high school with the resources to teach biotechnology courses. The initiative plans to raise \$9 million over the next six years; more than \$3 million has already been raised. The money will go toward outfitting science labs with biotechnology equipment and supplies, providing professional development for biology teachers, and helping teachers to access high-quality biotechnology curricula.

A new report by the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy found that Massachusetts identified 376 schools in need of improvement but make efforts to fix only 16. Similarly, 132 school districts were low-performing, but only 17 received State scrutiny. The report follows a court ruling against families from 19 poor school districts who sought more funds for their schools. The report calls for the State legislature to make a priority of training principals and teachers in struggling schools and recommended that the State spend at least \$44 million to implement the report's recommendations.

Michigan Update – April 2005

The Michigan legislature is considering a package of bills designed to encourage early intervention for students with disabilities to minimize the need for expensive special education programs. One part of the package requires school districts that have large special needs populations to set aside -- from State at-risk funding -- dollars for prereferral disability diagnosis and assistance. The legislative package also includes training to help teachers recognize symptoms of learning disabilities in young children. The package would allocate \$1 million, for 50 district grants of \$20,000 each, to develop early learning programs and to establish tougher reading requirements for new elementary teachers.

Michigan provides support for low-performing schools through intermediate districts, Comprehensive School Reform providers, and literacy and math/science specialists. As reported by the Center for American Progress, the State Department of Education has consultants conduct on-site reviews of schools which are designated for corrective action and, through a State-funded initiative, provides training and school improvement materials to the State's lowest-performing schools.

According to the Center for American Progress, Michigan focuses its school improvement funding on schools in corrective action or restructuring. The amount of funding is determined by the number of schools in these two improvement stages. A school district that has three or fewer schools in corrective action or restructuring receives \$45,000 per school; a district with ten or more such schools gets \$25,000 per school. The differential is based on the assumption that districts with larger numbers of schools can achieve economies of scale.

The Detroit Free Press reports that Governor Jennifer Granholm has developed a plan to encourage the creation of new, smaller high schools. Under the plan, the State would provide zero-interest loans for districts to build high schools with enrollments of no more than 500 students. The Governor believes the smaller schools would foster closer student-teacher relationships that would improve learning in low-performing districts. Eligible districts must have low student test scores or high dropout rates and at least 800 high school students.

Approximately 27 Michigan districts will qualify for the \$180 million loan pool. Districts could borrow as much as \$30 million (\$15 million for districts with fewer than 20,000 students) and would not have to begin repayment of the loan for five years.

The Detroit Free Press also reports that Michigan's vaunted school laptop project is likely to die as a result of the State's continuing budget crisis. The program to give laptop computers to every sixth-grade student in the State was intended to be funded at a total of \$21 million -- \$3.7 million in State funds and \$17.3 million from Federal education programs. But the Federal component has been reduced by more than \$12 million and the State cannot afford to pick up the difference. The program, known as Freedom to Learn, has already provided laptops to more than 20,000 students and 1,200 teachers and has been praised by educators across the State.

The Education Leaders Council reports that Detroit, with 30 of its high schools designated as "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act, does not have space in other high schools to offer students a transfer option. Instead, students in the low-performing schools will be offered free tutoring services.

Minnesota Update – April 2005

The Minnesota legislature, as reported in Education Week, is considering a bill that would have the State opt out of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) if significant changes are not made in the Law. The bill calls for NCLB to be amended to permit "value added" accountability systems that focus on student test score improvement and to modify the way school districts are designated as "in need of improvement." If the State does opt out of NCLB, its Federal education funding of more than \$240 million could be in jeopardy.

As reported on Minnesota Public Radio, test scores for eighth-grade students in Minnesota have improved markedly from last year. Of the 64,000 eighth-graders who took the State Basic Skills Test in February, 85 percent passed the reading portion (up from 81 percent the prior year) and 74 percent passed the mathematics portion (up from 71 percent). Test results also showed a narrowing of the gaps between white and minority students in reading (but not in math). This year, the gap was 14 percentage points for Asian students, 23 points for American Indians, 27 points for Hispanic students, and 34 points for African-American students.

A recent outside audit of Minneapolis Public Schools, commissioned by the district superintendent, has compared Minneapolis with other major urban school districts. Among the audit's recommendations are more central control over student learning. For example, although the district has one official elementary reading program, individual schools use a variety of reading systems, creating a "fractured" system and causing confusion among students who transfer from one school to another. The audit identified 134 different high school mathematics courses suggesting inefficient spending and inconsistent rigor. The audit suggests that centralizing instructional control can help the district meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

As reported in School Reform News, a Republican-sponsored bill introduced in the Minnesota legislature would provide low-income families in Minneapolis and St. Paul the option of sending their children to an accredited public or private school. Transferring students would take with them a voucher in the amount of the State's basic per-pupil allocation.

Mississippi Update – April 2005

Education Week reports that Mississippi businessman has offered the State \$50 million in student performance incentives if the State legislature "fully funds" education. To be eligible for the incentives, the State will have to increase K-12 funding by \$200 million for the upcoming fiscal year. Jim Barksdale, formerly with Netscape, says he will provide \$5,000 to eligible students when they graduate from high school and again when they graduate from college. Eligible students would be drawn from the 70 schools in Mississippi that are served by the Barksdale Reading Institute. Over the next 6-9 years, several thousand students could qualify for the incentive awards.

Nevada Update – April 2005

Clark County (Las Vegas) has established a new web site that allows students to practice online for the State mathematics proficiency exam. The site also provides immediate feedback and remedial assistance. Last year, nearly 20 percent of the school district's seniors were not awarded regular diplomas because they failed the math proficiency test. With the required passing score increasing each year, the district believes the website will help students meet the district goal of having at least half of its tenth-graders pass the exam on their first try.

New Jersey Update – April 2005

Recent data show that, last year, 94 percent of New Jersey's teachers met the "highly qualified" benchmarks under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) -- a Bachelor's degree, a State-issued teaching certification, and demonstrated mastery of subject matter. On the other hand, only 85 percent of high school special education teachers Statewide were classified as "highly qualified" and only 65 percent of special education teachers in urban high schools met the standard. Similarly, in middle schools, Statewide 88 percent of special education teachers -- only 65 percent in urban middle schools -- meet the NCLB standard. By next June, all teachers will be required to be "highly qualified."

The Center for American Progress reports that New Jersey provides support to its low-performing schools through parallel Federal/State channels. The State's school support teams target Title I schools designated for corrective action under the No Child Left Behind Act and the State's school finance unit provides support to high-poverty (Abbott) districts. The Center also reports that New Jersey allocates its school improvement funds based entirely on the number of students in each school in improvement who meet poverty requirements (free and reduced price lunch).

The New Jersey State Board of Education has voted to ease the required passing scores of the State's GED exams. The old standards were among the toughest in the nation -- only about half of those taking the tests pass. The new minimum scores are in line with the requirements in the other states. It is estimated that as many as 3,000 New Jersey citizens who failed the GED last year would have passed under the new requirements.

New York Update – April 2005

Education Daily reports that the number and percentage of students in New York State who graduate from high school in four years has increased in recent years. However, the gap in graduation rates between white and minority students remains wide. Statewide graduation rates for white students (81 percent) and Asian students (69 percent) who enrolled in the ninth grade in 2000 and graduated in June 2004 were significantly higher than the rates for black students (45 percent) and Hispanic students (42 percent).

As reported by the Center for American Progress, New York's five percent set-aside from school improvement funds supports the Regional School Support Centers to help low-performing schools. The funds are allocated among the regions based on their share of Title I schools. Federal IDEA and Comprehensive School Reform money also support the regional Centers.

As reported in Education Week, New York has made major changes in the State's high school mathematics requirements. Starting in the 2006-07 school year, the State's curriculum will call for three years of math (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II/Trigonometry) and will recommend a fourth year (precalculus). All courses will, according to the State education department, follow a problem-solving approach.

Also reported by the Center for American Progress, New York (outside of New York City) allocates school improvement funds to schools based on the number of years the school has been in improvement (\$65,000 for improvement years 1 and 2), corrective action (\$75,000 for years 1 and 2), or restructuring (\$85,000 for the planning year and initial restructuring year). The district has the flexibility to reallocate these funds to other schools if, for example, the targeted school has received school improvement funding from another source.

As reported in The New York Times, the union for New York City's teachers -- the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) -- has been approved as a supplemental educational service provider under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and will initially serve more than 1,000 students. This year, more than 80,000 City students are receiving tutoring under NCLB,

provided by nearly 50 private and community-based organizations. Platform Learning is the largest with 32,000 students. Modeled after the Rochester (N.Y.) UFT affiliate program, the NYC tutoring operation will, because it is not-for-profit (it is claimed), devote more funds to instruction; because the teachers are familiar with school expectations, the tutoring will be more closely aligned to school district standards. The April 19 issue of U.S. Equity Research, Class Notes, stated, "New York State has approved the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) as a 'preferred provider' under supplemental services provision of NCLB. With an insider's advantage, the UFT will represent a meaningful competitor in the market so their participation arguably violates the spirit of the law."

North Carolina Update – April 2005

North Carolina's rigid licensure standards for teachers are making it difficult for the State to hire enough teachers who are "highly qualified" under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The State's rapid growth necessitates the hiring of 10,000 new teachers each year. State rules allow teachers moving into the State two years to get a North Carolina license; under NCLB, they must be "highly qualified" before setting foot in the classroom.

North Carolina allocated school improvement money to school districts based on the number of schools in need of improvement -- \$15,000 for a district with one such school up to \$60,000 for a district with ten. As reported by the Center for American Progress, these base amounts are supplemented by per-pupil allocations for students in the Title I schools in need of improvement.

As reported in [eSchool News](#), Governor Mike Easley has announced the development of the State's Center for 21st Century Skills designed to prepare North Carolina's students for the global economy. Operated out of the Governor's Office by the North Carolina business Committee for Education, the Center will enlist educators and business leaders from across the State to redesign curricula, improve teacher professional development, and implement Statewide assessments to monitor student progress. Details of the center's operation have not been worked out, but it expects to collaborate with school districts, community colleges, and teacher colleges to pilot test its programs.

Ohio Update – April 2005

In late March, Republican legislators called for a comprehensive study of Ohio's charter schools. The number of students served by charter schools has increased by 35 percent over last year and funding for these schools has increased by 90 percent (more than \$200 million). The proposed legislation is intended to bring more accountability to charter schools. It would also extend, past July 1, 2005, the deadline capping the number of charter schools in the State at 250.

As reported by the Center for American Progress, Ohio employs district coaches who help design services for low-performing districts, establish effective professional development plans, implement standards-based instructional practices, and analyze the effectiveness of improvement practices. Specifically, some district coaches may, in some districts for example, address high teacher attrition rates that impede schools' ability to meet State reading and mathematics targets. Ohio has recently reorganized its operation to include a new "field services unit" to provide technical assistance to districts with many low-performing schools. The new unit selects and trains instructional coaches. Ohio is also redesigning its regional service centers to oversee more effectively the various school improvement initiatives ongoing in the State.

Governor Bob Taft has included in next year's budget proposal funding to expand the Cleveland voucher program and a new vouchers program for children in failing schools Statewide. The new set of vouchers are budgeted at a total of \$9 million -- \$3,500 in State funds for 2,600 eligible students -- and would go into effect in the 2006-07 school year.

As reported in Education Week, on April 12 the Ohio House of Representatives passed a budget plan that includes a large increase in the availability of public school vouchers. The \$51 billion budget contains up to \$81 million that could be allocated for 18,000 vouchers for students in low-performing schools. The State's existing voucher program provides vouchers worth as much as \$2,700 to 4,000 students in the Cleveland school district. Governor Bob Taft's budget proposal offered vouchers to only 2,600 students outside of Cleveland.

Oklahoma Update – April 2005

In FY 2004, Oklahoma spent \$412 million through 27 categorical programs providing support for the State's local school districts. Among these are programs for reading initiatives, professional development, teacher retirement, employee health benefits, and textbooks.

According to Education Week, the Oklahoma legislature failed to meet Governor Brad Henry's deadline of April 1 to approve the State's public education budget. The deadline was intended to allow school districts enough time to make budget decisions and renew teacher contracts. Although there is no penalty for failing to meet the deadline, the Governor has asked the legislature to approve his \$144 million public education package which includes pay raises and State-funded health insurance for teachers.

Oregon Update – April 2005

The Oregon House is considering a total of 35 bills that could have an effect on education in the State. Among those bills are proposals to: (1) eliminate annual State reports as schools; (2) reduce the number of education service districts; (3) eliminate bilingual education; and (4) tie teacher pay to student test scores. Most of the bills are not expected to be approved by the House and many of those that are approved are likely to be rejected by the Democratic-controlled Senate or vetoed by the Governor, Democrat Ted Kulongoski.

According to The Oregonian, the State Education Department has opposed a legislative proposal to increase high school graduation requirements because the State does not have enough math teachers. House Bill 3129 would raise graduation requirements in reading and math by one year, to three and four years, respectively. This change would bring Oregon in line with most other states. But State officials have said that rural schools, already hard-pressed to hire qualified math teachers, would be unable to hire enough to meet the requirement.

Pennsylvania Update – April 2005

As reported by the Center for American Progress, the U. S. Congress included in the FY 2005 budget a school improvement grant of \$18 million to the Pennsylvania Department of Education whose purpose was to: (1) improve the management and operation of school districts; (2) assist in curriculum development; (3) provide after-school, weekend, and summer programs; (4) provide professional development for teachers; and (5) purchase and use effectively instructional technology.

Rhode Island Update – April 2005

According to the Providence Journal, Governor Donald Carcieri has, at least for this year, abandoned his plan to create a Statewide teacher evaluation system in favor of a simpler system of teacher standards. His bill to create both standards and an evaluation process received a tepid reaction from the legislature. Both are components of the Governor's goal of a comprehensive system of merit pay for teachers.

Education Week reports that, effective for the Class of 2008, State rules require the adoption of graduation policies that use measures other than tests to assess the abilities of high school seniors. State educators are trying to avoid narrowing the secondary curriculum to fit a State assessment. Rather, they are encouraging schools to emphasize such skills as time management, organizations, and working with others. Some districts -- such as North Providence -- have as a graduation requirement 15 hours working with an adult in the community.

Texas Update – April 2005

The Dallas Morning News reports that former Presidential candidate Ross Perot is calling for a greater emphasis on technology in Texas' schools. He testified before the State legislature in support of a bill that would ensure that technology-based teaching materials are made available to students in all grades and in all subjects. The proposed bill would also change references to "textbooks" in the State education code to "instructional materials" which would include high-tech learning tools.

As reported in the Houston Chronicle, there is a bill pending in the Texas legislature that would provide \$200 million in new funds annually to schools for the purchase of laptop computers and software. Under the bill (H.B. 4), State law would be rewritten to streamline the textbook review process, allow schools to use alternative instructional materials, and shift emphasis from traditional textbooks to electronic materials. The legislation is, in part, based on a report entitled "The Texas E-Learning Initiative" which recommended an increase in school technology funding from \$30 to \$300 per student. One of the report's authors was Tom Burnett, an executive for Apple Computer.

Educational Marketer reports that H.B. 4 could cause a major change in the State's textbook adoption process. Currently, the State pays for textbooks for all students in the first year of an adoption. Under the proposed plan, funding for textbooks and instructional technology would be combined into a per-pupil aid package to school districts who would make decisions about what instructional products to purchase. The State would still approve textbooks, but schools and districts would not be required to purchase from the State adoption list. There is a strong lobbying effort in action to modify the bill in a way that retain the existing adoption process.

The Dallas Morning News reports that the number of charter schools in Texas wanting to be labeled "alternative" has jumped to 166 from only 62 four years ago. Under State law and regulations, schools designated as "alternative" must be dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out of school. These alternative schools -- 60 percent of Texas' charter schools -- are currently exempt from the State's accountability standards. The Texas Education Agency is

giving consideration to a new accountability system that would limit the way charters receive the "alternative" designation (at least 65 percent of students must be "at risk") and impose stricter requirements on those that do.

As reported in The Dallas Morning News, Texas has approved a new accountability system which will raise the passing rate schools must achieve to be considered "academically acceptable" by ten percentage points in reading, writing, science, and social studies, and by five percentage points in mathematics. The new system is expected to increase sharply the number of schools labeled "unacceptable." Last year, 92 of the State's 7,700 public schools were identified as unacceptable. Had the new standards been in effect, more than 1,200 schools would have been so labeled. A bill is pending in the State Legislature that would require that any school rated unacceptable for two years must be assigned to "alternative management," which could include private, for-profit companies, as well as colleges or universities. The legislative proposal is designed to favor established organizations as "alternative management" by requiring "documented success in whole school interventions."

Utah Update – April 2005

According to Education Daily, an Act passed by the Utah legislature would place compliance with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) secondary to the State's accountability system. Utah has been warned that passage of the bill would make the State out of compliance with NCLB and could result in the State losing up to \$76 million in Federal funds -- \$55 million in Title I funding, \$19 million in Title II (Teacher Quality and Technology), and \$2 million in title V (Innovative Programs).

Governor John Huntsman has signed into law the bill which says that State education goals have priority over Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and that State funds are not to be spent in order to comply with NCLB.

Earlier this year, the legislature denied a request from the State education agency for \$6 million to pay for tutoring services for students who failed the State's U-PASS high school exit exam.

Virginia Update – April 2005

According to the Center for American Progress, Virginia has a pilot program called Turnaround Specialists to provide support for low-performing Title I schools. Ten licensed school administrators with experience in improving low school performance have been credentialed to act as principals of chronically low-performing schools for a period of three years. The business and education schools at the University of Virginia are jointly offering a program leading to a School Turnaround Specialist credential.

The Virginia SEA requested several months ago a waiver such that the State would not have to test kindergarten and first grade students who was recent immigrants to determine whether or not progress is being made in their English language acquisition. The SEAs argument is that these students do not have to take the State assessment until the third grade and that testing immigrant kindergarten and first grade students for English language proficiency is very costly, taking time away from English language instruction. The USED has turned down the request in a preliminary manner, but indicated that it is still considering additional waivers requested by the Virginia SEA. Other waivers would be to allow schools identified for improvement for the first time to offer SES tutoring and not just parent transportation option.

Washington Update – April 2005

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer reports that the Washington State legislature is considering creation of an alternative high school graduation requirement for students in trade or technical fields. According to existing requirements, by 2008, all graduating seniors must pass reading, writing, and mathematics components of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Under the plan being considered, would establish industry-certification assessments -- just as rigorous as the WASL -- focusing on students in vocational fields. Critics of the proposal question whether the new assessment would have the same rigor as the WASL and express concern that the test could create a two-tiered system divided on economic or racial lines.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer reports that budget deficits in the Seattle school district have led to a cost-cutting plan that calls for the closure of ten schools. Currently, the district is facing a \$20 million shortfall in its \$440 million budget for 2006-07. District officials estimate that the restructuring plan would save \$2.6 million in year one and \$3.2 million per year thereafter. The plan calls for more emphasis on neighborhood schools and elimination of a district-wide busing program.

Wisconsin Update – April 2005

On April 15, Elizabeth Burmaster was reelected as State Superintendent of Public Instruction with the strong support of the State teachers' union and Democratic Governor James Doyle. As reported in Education Week, Burmaster defeated Republican State Representative Gregg Underheim with 62 percent of the vote. A former school principal, Burmaster portrayed herself as a lifelong educator and her opponent as a career politician. Underheim accused the incumbent superintendent as "too cozy" with the State's teachers' union.