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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 30, 2007
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: Title I and Reading First Purchases Expand; Head Start Reauthorization;
Continued Rapid Growth of Online Learning and State Profile Updates

Several Washington Update items bring encouraging news as purchases of instructional materials, including instructional software, are continuing in Reading First and grew in Title I during the first five years of this decade. Trends also suggest that very probable increases in Title I funding in the future could be used to meet a pent-up demand for products that were not purchased in 2006-07 because of Title I funding cuts. Products and services which can be used in online distance learning configurations should also see significant growth, as the number of participants and courses offered continue to grow -- in some cases at rapid paces. Reauthorization of Head Start could also provide some new opportunities.

This Washington Update includes:

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Findings from this year's Center on Education Policy report on Reading First has confirmed that Reading First interventions and "Essential Elements" are being expanded into higher grades in Reading First schools and into non-Reading First schools through the use of Title I and reallocated IDEA funds in districts with disproportionality. In 2006-07 school year, almost 70 percent of Reading First districts reported they had to purchase new textbooks or other reading materials and a fourth stated they have added or changed student assessments.
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According to USED's Final Report on the National Title I Assessment, over 12 percent (or \$2 billion) of Title I funds was spent in 2004-05 on instructional materials, including computers and related technology and professional development. Since then, spending on professional development has increased several hundred million because the number of schools and districts identified for improvement, which have to set aside ten percent for staff development, doubled

to over 10,000. Title I expenditures in 2005-06 and 2006-07 went down because of Federal Title I reductions, but will likely once again increase as new funding will be used to satisfy pent-up demand. In the late 1990s, USED officials estimated that only about eight to nine percent of total Title I funds were spent on instructional materials -- including instructional software -- and professional development.

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Increased Federal funding and new reauthorization should breathe new life into the Head Start market niche. The Head Start legislation also attempts to define “principles of scientific research.” A similar definition will be included in the Senate version of NCLB reauthorization, allowing more flexibility than the definition of “scientifically-based research” in the current NCLB statute.

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On the heels of Senator Kennedy’s announcement that there would be no reauthorization of NCLB this year, Senator Lamar Alexander submitted a proposed NCLB amendment which would provide states almost unlimited flexibility in return for higher achievement standards and accountability. Senator Alexander, who also sponsored the recently enacted America Competes Act, is a leading candidate to replace Senator Trent Lott as Minority Leader; he and his staff are taking the lead role in NCLB reauthorization. While current set-asides for SES and staff development would no longer be required under the Alexander amendment, SEAs would decide the nature and extent of interventions that will be applied to schools in corrective action or restructuring.

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A new report from NACOL confirms continuing growth of online learning in a myriad of K-12 distance learning configurations, but at the same time foresees emerging problems which greater oversight and self-regulation could minimize. National standards could affect the demand for certain types of instructional materials and software, certain distance learning delivery configurations, and professional development and related services.

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The new USED final report on the National Assessment of Title I includes several additional noteworthy findings which could have implications for subscribers, including:

- The number of Title I schoolwide programs, which served almost 20 million Title I student participants, has increased from 5,050 in 1994-95 to 31,782 in 2004-05.
- Because of recent set-asides for SES and professional development, district allocations to Title I schools declined from 83 percent of districts’ total Title I funds in 1997-98 to 74 percent in 2004-05, which certainly points to more centralized decision-making and purchasing.

- Almost 90 percent of schools in “corrective action” and “restructuring” implemented new research-based curricula or instructional programs in 2004-05.
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Two reauthorization bills submitted in November could have both short-term and long-term positive impacts on education technology purchases and use. HR 3996 would reauthorize \$400 million to continue the qualified zone academy bond (QZAB) initiative, which increasingly has been used by eligible districts to replace curricula and upgrade technology. The Higher Education Act renewal, referred to as College Opportunity and Affordability Act, provides opportunities for professional development in the use of technology and would reauthorize and expand the TRIO and Gear-Up programs for K-12 students.
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Observations gleaned during the 2007 Education Forum, conducted by the State Education Technology Directors Association, are highlighted. Questions were raised whether 21st century technology literacy skills would be taught until conflicts with NCLB provisions are resolved and/or whether technology literacy should be included as part of statewide annual assessments. OECD official, Andreas Schleckler, attributed the higher ranking of a number of countries over the U.S. to a number of variables (e.g., how much is spent on education and how it is spent on instructional materials and individualized instruction) which conflict with the prescriptive nature of many NCLB provisions and a “one-size-fits-all” philosophy.
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E-Rate update potential E-Rate refunds for purchasing non-eligible products and services.

Several developments which occurred recently should be noted. The House was two votes shy of the two-thirds majority needed to override the President's veto of the Labor HHS FY 2008 appropriations bill. According to the Congressional Daily, the White House and Congress are negotiating a compromise which would be \$3.5 billion (or 2.4 percent) less than the current bill that was vetoed. It would be, however, 1.8 percent above the FY 2007 spending level. The continuing resolution will expire on December 14th; however, if before then, Congress fails to come up with an omnibus bill the President is willing to sign, then another continuing resolution will be passed through February 15th.

Several assessment developments which could have implications for subscribers have also occurred. In the November 28th Education Week, the National Assessment Governing Board is considering canceling scheduled NAEP exams in economics, foreign language, geography and world history if funding for NAEP administration remains flat. The Institute of Education Sciences last week invalidated the results of U.S. students taking the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) because of improper

administration of the test which is used to rank countries based on students' scores. During the recent Education Forum SEDTA conference, it was noted that the Administration had voiced its opposition to U.S. students taking the PISA. On the other hand, the Alliance for Excellent Education, in a recent letter, asked the Institute of Education Sciences to readminister the PISA.

On November 2nd, USED has launched a new website which is designed to facilitate the implementation of research-based best practices (<http://dww.ed.gov>). The online *Doing What Works* is similar to the *Best Practices Guides* developed by panels of outside experts (see September Washington Update). The first practice guide focused on teaching strategies for English language learners which is available in more detail on the new website. IES plans to add to the Doing What Works website best practices information on cognition and learning, early childhood education, high school reform, literacy, mathematics and science, and school restructuring, according to the November 14th Education Week.

The College Board recently announced that the number of schools nationwide that offered at least one AP course dropped by nearly 13 percent from last school year to this school year. Some officials speculate that the reasons why 2,081 fewer secondary schools failed to offer at least one AP course was the result of an extensive curriculum audit and review of more than 140,000 syllabuses because either syllabuses were rejected or some schools did not even submit syllabuses for the review approval process. The Administration's proposed budgets for the last several years have called for significant increases in new math and science AP teachers. The College Board has publicly stated its commitment to having at least ten AP classes available in every high school by 2010.

The next regular TechMIS issue is scheduled to be sent to you in mid-January; however, if developments occur regarding the FY 2008 budget, serious negotiations on NCLB reauthorization or funding occur, they will be sent out in the form of a special report or notice, if and when, they occur between now and mid-January. The TURNKEY offices will be closed between Christmas and New Years, but Blair and I will be checking our voicemails if you have any questions. In the meantime, all of us at TURNKEY wish you and your staff a happy holiday and prosperous new year.

State profile updates cover a range of areas including state K-12 education funding, high school exit/end-of-course exams, and state progress on NCLB requirements.

Washington Update

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Reading First Interventions and Essential Elements Being Expanded Into Higher Grades in Reading First Schools and to Non-Reading First Schools Through the Use of Title I and Most Likely Reallocated IDEA Funds in Districts with Disproportionality

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) in its third-year Reading First report has found that, indeed, more districts are expanding the use of Reading First interventions to upper grades in Reading First schools and in non-Reading First schools, a finding that was flagged as a probable trend three years ago. Districts are typically using Title I funds or some general funds for the expanded use of Reading First interventions, professional development and the adoption of Reading First “essential elements.” Almost 78 percent of districts reported that they are providing interventions to struggling readers similar to those required by Reading First in all or some of the upper elementary grades in Reading First schools, while slightly over 80 percent have increased the use of Reading First assessments and research-based reading materials in all or some upper grades. Moreover, CEP found that, in its survey of more than 300 districts, over 60 percent were using professional development, assessments, and research-based reading materials in all of the non-Reading First elementary schools in their districts. In addition, slightly over 70 percent of districts reported providing interventions to struggling readers similar to those required by Reading First in all or

some of the non-Reading First elementary schools in the district.

Although such expansions are being funded mostly through Title I, the survey did not ask whether some of the expansion is due to the use of IDEA funds set aside for early intervening services in districts with disproportionality. Based upon our own surveys and discussions with state and district special education officials and some Title I officials, we know that, in certain states such as Michigan, there is a growing use of IDEA set-asides to expand Reading First interventions and “elements” into Title I programs.

This year’s CEP report on Reading First also sheds some light on the question of whether or not Reading First schools that are now in their fourth or fifth year are still purchasing assessments, instructional programs, or professional development services. In the 2006-07 school year, 67 percent of Reading First districts reported they had to make changes, which is up slightly from 60 percent giving the same response last year. Moreover, two-thirds of districts reported purchasing new textbooks or other reading materials and about a fourth of the districts stated they had added or changed student assessment programs. “Other changes” mentioned by several districts included increasing or changing professional development activities and adding interventions for struggling students. During the 2003 and 2004 annual meetings of the Association of American Publishers (AAP), survey findings presented by several

groups estimated that between \$275 million and \$325 million were spent annually during that time frame on basal texts, some supplemental materials, some professional development, and Reading First-approved assessments such as DIBELS. Many Reading First observers believe that, since then, an increasing portion of instructional materials purchases have been supplemental materials (rather than basal texts) and that professional development purchases would generally level off or be devoted to hiring literacy coaches.

The CEP findings support the continuing need for professional development at either the district or state level, noting that one of the major implementation challenges is teacher turnover, which requires continued professional development of new teachers to implement the Reading First interventions and curriculum. Based on data from the 42 SEAs that responded to the CEP survey which asked the number of non-Reading First districts that participated in Reading First professional development provided by the state, slightly over 3,200 non-Reading First districts had participated in such Reading First professional development, well in excess of the 1,800 Reading First districts. This is another factor that could explain continued funding for professional development and also possibly a reason why Reading First interventions and elements are being integrated into non-Reading First schools.

The 2006-07 CEP survey also addressed, in some detail, the coordination that is occurring at the state and district levels between Reading First and Title I, noting that the NCLB statute does not require Reading First to be coordinated with other literacy initiatives. At the SEA level, about

half of the states in the survey reported that Title I and Reading First officials attended planning meetings together, worked on a common team, or reported to a common supervisor. During the initial years of Reading First implementation, with only a few exceptions, most SEAs created a separate office responsible for Reading First implementation, which was separate from the SEA Title I office. Districts were asked for the first time, "Has the district modified the Title I reading programs so that it is coordinated with the materials, instruction and/or assessment of Reading First?" Several districts reported that Title I reading activities have adopted all of the requirements of Reading First. Of the remaining districts responding to the question, slightly more than a third changed the Title I reading curriculum to match the Reading First curriculum. A similar portion adopted Title I interventions for struggling readers that are similar to the intervention systems used in Reading First.

From a marketing perspective, the most recent CEP findings strongly suggest that there is a growing demand for Reading First-type interventions, as well as assessment instruments, in non-Reading First schools, particularly Title I schools. Not only do SEA and district officials perceive the positive impact of Reading First on student achievement scores, but they are also taking overt initiatives to expand the use of Reading First interventions and elements and are using Title I and "district" funds for such expansions. From the CEP findings noted above, one can assume that Reading First schools will continue to purchase certain kinds of products for Reading First-type interventions -- particularly those which have one or more of the "essential elements" -- as well as

Reading First-related professional development. Because more and more districts are being required to set aside 15 percent of their IDEA funds for early intervening services, these funds -- typically allocated by the district to Title I programs offices -- will become a major source of funding for purchase of Reading First-type interventions and services. This use of IDEA funds to support Reading First-type interventions was evident in the initial drafts of IDEA in 2003 and 2004, reflecting the Republican Administration leadership priorities.

Last year's CEP report also identified a USED-funded initiative called "*Expanding the Reach*" which "aimed to bring Reading First instructional and assessment methods to non-Reading-First Title I schools and had the potential to increase collaboration between Title I and Reading First." Even though funding for the initiative has since been discontinued, CEP's study findings clearly show this objective is being achieved.

For a copy of the CEP report go to: www.cep-dc.org

According to USED, Over \$2 Billion of Title I Funds Was Spent on Instructional Materials, Including Computers and Related Technology, and Professional Development in 2004-05

In the final report entitled, "*National Assessment of Title I Volume I: Implementation*," USED reports that, in the 2004-05 school year, \$1.1 billion and \$313 million in Title I funds were expended on instructional materials and on student

computers and other technology, respectively. An additional \$988 million was spent on professional development, or eight percent of total Title I expenditures. The 12 percent (\$1.4 billion) for instructional materials and equipment, including student computers and other technology, was a higher percentage than USED estimated during the late 1990s that were about eight to ten percent. The proportion of Title I funds expended on teacher salaries and benefits and teacher aides in 2004-05 was approximately 60 percent, which is somewhat lower than previous estimates. Of the \$12 billion of total Title I expenditures in 2004-05, 11 percent was spent on administration and other support, two percent was spent on parent involvement programs and two percent for "other instructional support." According to one of the report's authors, but not reported separately, certain types of additional technology-related purchases were made under these functional components. For 2007-08, Title I funds received an increase of slightly over \$200 million of which \$125 million will be used to increase SEA capacity and for reallocation to districts with schools in "corrective action" and "restructuring."

In 2004-05, USED estimated that \$988 million was expended on professional development which is close to our previous estimate of approximately \$1 billion being so spent that year. In 2006, USED issued non-regulatory guidance which required districts identified for improvement to set aside ten percent of their total district Title I budget for professional development. This was in addition to the ten percent individual schools identified for improvement had to set aside for professional development. Since 2004-05, the number of schools

identified for improvement has doubled to more than 10,000. Hence, the amount of funds expended on professional development during the 2006-07 year has most likely increased by another \$100-200 million, even though Title I funding overall was reduced by about one half percent. An earlier USED study estimated that, in 2004-05, approximately 25 percent of the \$2.9 million for Title II A Teacher Quality was expended on professional development. Because many districts transferred a portion of the Title II A funds into Title I schoolwide programs which were commingled with Title I funds, there could have been some double counting; however, it is clear that Title I funds used for professional development exceed that portion of Title II A grants that are so used.

The report also found that the most commonly reported strategy for retaining highly qualified teachers was “fostering collegial and supportive professional environments” (82 percent) and “providing mentoring or induction programs” (69 percent).” One of the report’s findings was, “Research indicates that professional development that places a strong emphasis on academic content, and on how students learn specific content, is associated with gains in student achievement.” The report noted that achievement gains were greater in schools where teachers reported that professional development was “sustained and intensive.” While over 90 percent of Title I elementary teachers participated in at least one hour of professional development that focused on instructional strategies for teaching reading, 20 percent participated 24 or more hours during the 2003-04 school year and summer. Only ten percent of elementary teachers participated more than 24 hours in professional development that

focused on instructional strategies for teaching mathematics.

The report also suggests what types of schools should have a greater demand for professional development, noting that “elementary teachers in high-poverty schools (49 percent) were more likely than their counterparts in low-poverty schools (36 percent) to participate in professional development focused on the in-depth study of topics in reading during the 2003-04 school year.” Compared to previous USED studies, the definition of professional development for this report was much broader, including consulting services, mentoring teachers, curriculum or instructional improvement staff, and literacy in math coaches.

For a copy of the report go to: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20084012.pdf>.

Increased Federal Funding and New Reauthorization Should Breathe Life in the Head Start Market Niche

The recent reauthorization of Head Start, along with increased funding this year and most likely next year, could breathe a new life into the Head Start market niche. The slight increase to \$6.8 billion for this school year (FY 2007) comes on the heels of a one percent cut in Federal funds last school year, with much larger annual increases expected over the next three years. The opportunities will, however be limited to certain types of Head Start programs and to areas such as professional development. In our March 2007 TechMIS Washington Update, we summarized an earlier National Head Start Association survey which found that, in over half the states, services to children were

reduced last year. Almost 70 percent of the states indicated staff development and training were reduced or eliminated as a result of the one percent Federal funding cut. The survey also found that programs have reduced instructional time and instructional materials purchases. The funding level for FY 2008 in the reauthorization is \$7.35 billion, with a \$300 million increase for FY 2009.

Several potential opportunities are suggested in the recent reauthorization. One new requirement that could provide several purchase opportunities is that “ineffective” Head Start programs would have to reapply for funding alongside new applicants. In many cases, ineffective programs will likely propose to use a variety of existing “best practices” instructional and other materials, while Head Start programs funded for the first time provide the greatest opportunities for purchases of a variety of new products, ranging from furniture to instructional and other materials. Knowledgeable observers estimate that the typical classroom in a new Head Start grantee will have approximately \$10,000 to spend on such products.

The new “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” would also terminate the use of “an inappropriate and ineffective testing regime for four-year-old students, a regime known as the National Reporting System.” A new national assessment would be designed by the National Academy of Sciences; in the meantime, a provision in the Act calls for the implementation of classroom “observation tools that will improve teaching practices.” An example cited in the joint conference report is an instrument that was developed at the University of Virginia; however, knowledgeable Head Start

officials believe that Head Start will most likely develop its own, more comprehensive, observation tools. In addition, the current early learning standards and assessments will be updated and will be aligned with state early learning standards, which could provide opportunities for firms providing such alignment services. The new reauthorization also “requires the use of best practices to support children’s emerging literacy and vocabulary skills,” according to the conference report summary. Also, to strengthen comprehensive services for families of Head Start children, grantees are required to implement “research-based best practices for family service workers.” Community-based, for-profit firms can compete for grants along with non-profit groups.

The current definition of “scientifically-based research” in NCLB or in the Law creating the Institute of Education Sciences calling for randomized trials is not used with Head Start reauthorization. Rather, the Head Start legislation attempts to define “principles of scientific research” as including seven types of appropriate approaches, including:

- (i.) use of systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- (ii.) use of data analyses that are adequate to support the general findings;
- (iii.) reliance on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and generalizable findings;
- (iv.) strong claims of causal relationships, only with research designs that eliminate plausible competing explanations for observed results, such as, but not limited to, random assignment experiments;

- (v.) presentation of studies and methods in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, to offer the opportunity to build systematically on the findings of the research;
- (vi.) acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or critique by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review; and
- (vii.) consistency of findings across multiple studies or sites to support the generality of results and conclusions.

This is the same definition that is included in the Senate “discussion draft” of several components of the NCLB reauthorization. Comments on the Senate version suggest disagreement in several quarters that strong claims of causal relationships can only be attributed when random assignment experiments are used. Without question, the definition of “principles of scientific research” will have to be clarified in subsequent regulations.

The reauthorized Head Start Law also requires that more funding be targeted for improving teacher and classroom quality, especially for professional development. A limited number of universities have developed online professional development and support for Head Start teachers, as well as teacher assistants, especially those who do not have child development associate degrees. Some of the other priorities that would expand under Head Start in the future include Early Head Start that serves children from birth to age three and the infant and toddlers program (partially funded under IDEA through “enhancements” for children with disabilities to participate in Head Start

programs). Other priority expansions would include increased enrollment of migrant, Native American, and homeless children.

Under the new reauthorization, local management of Head Start programs, particularly as related to fiscal activities and reporting, would be strengthened, while several provisions attempt to delineate the shared responsibilities of “local governing boards” and “policy councils.” During the early phases of implementation there could be some confusion regarding who makes the key decisions on selecting and purchasing services and materials at the local level.

New Proposed Senate Amendment to NCLB Would Provide States Almost Unlimited Flexibility in Return for Higher Achievement Standards and Accountability

Within a day after Chairman Ted Kennedy stated that NCLB would not be reauthorized this year, leading Republican Senator Lamar Alexander, who was Secretary of Education under the first Bush Administration, proposed an amendment (S. 2312) which would give up to 12 states much greater flexibility in return for increasing the rigor of their subject matter standards and proficiency levels for meeting NCLB benchmarks. The Alexander proposal is designed not only to generate greater support among Republicans in Congress for the core principles of NCLB, but also to address criticism in several recent reports that states have been “gaming” the NCLB system to show that more districts and schools are meeting AYP through the use of USED-approved “loopholes.” This proposal at this time strongly suggests that Senator Alexander will become the lead Republican

senator in the education legislation arena; Minority Leader Representative John Boehner will play an increasingly critical role in NCLB reauthorization on the House side, as noted in last month's TechMIS Washington Update. Behind the scenes, Senator Alexander's staff person David Cleary, who had a major hand in drafting NCLB in 2000-01 and the IDEA reauthorization in 2004 while on the staff of Representative Boehner who was Chairman of the House Education and Work Force Committee, will also become more involved in the NCLB reauthorization process than in the past.

The Alexander proposal would allow up to twelve states the ability to enter into a five-year "state student achievement contract" with USED which would require states to meet achievement goals of NCLB as determined by annual "peer reviews" and the Secretary of Education. Federal funds can be withheld if contract provisions are not met. Senator Alexander noted that the state contract would "hand control back to the states and local school boards while ensuring higher standards for our nation's students." States and districts would also be provided greater flexibility in how to use Federal funds, how a state determines annual student progress, and what methods are used to raise student achievement when goals are not met. In the contract, states would agree to ensure that all students meet rigorous college and career-ready academic standards (which is also required in the recently enacted America Competes Act also sponsored by Senator Alexander). In return, states would allow districts to combine Title II, Title IV, and Title V funds with Title I and do away with set-asides for supplemental educational services, parent choice, staff development and other current

requirements in USED regulations. However, a number of "cornerstones" of Title I could not be waived by the states, including maintenance of effort, comparability of services, serving eligible school attendance areas in rank order, and the supplement, not supplant provisions. States would continue to administer state assessments that have been approved by the Secretary of Education and would be allowed to use additional student academic assessments that are consistent with current NCLB provisions. The assessments would have to be aligned with career and college-ready standards for secondary school graduation and also be aligned with rigorous national tests (such as NAEP) or international education standards and objectives (such as PISA). While states would still have to meet the state-determined projections for having all students reach proficiency levels by 2014, states would have the flexibility of determining the "N size" while calculating AYP for subgroups of students. Moreover, states would determine how and when to offer the equivalent of parent choice and supplemental educational services, as well as more serious interventions for schools identified for corrective action or restructuring.

The proposed "State Student Achievement Contracts Act" would not go as far as the A+ Act proposal in the House by Representative Hoekstra (R-Michigan) which would allow states to "opt out" from under NCLB requirements; it would, however, provide more flexibility than the current Ed-Flex authority which allows the Secretary to provide waivers to states. At the same time, it would require states to meet core principles of NCLB, such as disaggregation of student test scores into

subgroups, meeting the 2014 trajectory level, and annual testing.

As reported in the press, the proposal has been endorsed by Secretary Spellings who will likely double her efforts to ensure reauthorization before the President leaves office. The S. 2312 proposal does have accountability “teeth” in that there are checks and balances through the use of peer reviews and the Secretary of Education approval process in determining: (a) whether a state should be selected for participation, and (b) the potential withholding of Federal funds which could occur three years into the contract and which would apply to all Federal funds the state receives, not just the 25 percent of the state set-aside for administration as is currently applied to states out of compliance with certain NCLB provisions. As S. 2312 states, the purpose is not only to improve academic achievement standards and state accountability systems by ensuring achievement of all students in their own achievement gaps, but also to “eliminate barriers to implementing effective education reforms.” One of the major barriers to NCLB reauthorization, exemplified in mounting opposition by the NEA, is teacher pay based on student performance. The November 6th press release states that Senator Alexander is not only a former U.S. Secretary of Education, but also the Governor of Tennessee and that “Under his leadership as governor, Tennessee became the first state to pay teachers more for teaching well.” Senator Alexander is a leading candidate to take retiring Senator Trent Lott’s place as Minority Leader.

New Report Confirms Continuing Growth of Online Learning in a Myriad of K-12 Distance Learning Configurations, But at the Same Time Foresees Emerging Problems Which Greater Oversight and Self Regulation Could Minimize

This year’s annual report from the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), “*Keeping Pace With K-12 Online Learning: A Review of State Level Policy and Practice*,” prepared by Evergreen Consulting Associates for a number of virtual schools and several other members of NACOL, indicates that the number of online programs is growing quickly, with enrollments increasing between 10-50 percent annually. At the same time, however, a small number of programs have generated (because of audits) significant interest among many state-level policy makers which could stymie future growth unless the “industry” develops standards and self-regulates itself with increased oversight. Increased scrutiny, particularly of full-time online programs in a few states, have raised questions about finances, quality, and the ways in which programs adhere to existing regular education laws and regulations. The questions raised could create a backlash that would impair all online programs.

This year’s “Keeping Pace” report focuses primarily on major program and policy developments that occurred during 2006-07, including:

- Florida Virtual School, the largest online program, had more than 100,000 course registrations, 90,000 course completions, with more than 50,000 students participating;

- Missouri’s virtual instructional program, led by the State, began offering both elementary and high school classes;
- Michigan continued implementing its “online experience” requirement in which high school students must participate in order to graduate; and
- 42 states had significant supplemental online learning programs or significant full-time programs or both, and half of these programs reported growth of 50 percent or more over the previous year.

In another major development, auditors in Colorado, Idaho and Kansas released audits of online learning programs in their states which have contributed to increased state-level policy scrutiny. Several auditors expressed their concern that questionable practices in a few programs could threaten the sustainability and growth of online learning for all programs. This year’s survey asked online program officials about the need for regulation and concluded, “many online programs believe that some regulation of online learning is appropriate, as long as it relies on transparency, primarily measures outcomes data instead of mandating inputs, and is flexible enough to allow for innovation and developing practices.” In the concluding section, the report reiterates, “Given that state policies have not yet caught up to the online learning landscape, and the possibility that the actions of a few programs could threaten the larger online learning landscape, the need of online programs to *assure* quality (to policymakers and other stakeholders) is as important as their ability to *ensure* quality. Online program officials were asked if

NACOL or some other national group created a standard for measuring “course completion rates,” 29 of 32 or over 90 percent said they would consider adopting such a standard; 36 of 37 programs indicated they would consider using a national standard in reporting “retention rates.” Currently, definitions of completion and retention rates vary considerably among the programs, thus making it difficult to aggregate any national trends.

The need to evaluate online versus face-to-face instruction is hampered by different definitions, an issue that needs to be addressed; however, the report does state that district-level supplemental online programs are capable of tracking scores on state assessments, but few actually do so. Other areas identified in several audits which need increased oversight and self-regulation include: curriculum development procedures, teacher training and evaluation, tracking of attendance in courses, and participation of special education students in online learning.

The report also addresses some of the public perceptions of online learning and found that they were mostly myths. While the perception is that most students in online programs are honors or AP students, programs with high school courses reported that only 15 percent of their course registrations were for AP courses. Almost 60 percent of respondents who knew had 15 percent or less of their course registration in credit recovery courses, while about one-third had 30 percent or more in credit recovery. Information on participation rates of students with disabilities, English language learners, or at-risk students was hampered by the lack of student demographic data on these variables and the

lack of uniform reporting across programs.

This year's report contains state profiles of online programs in more than 40 states and is an excellent source of information for firms with products or services that could be used in the emerging online K-12 instructional industry.

For a copy of the report go to: <http://www.nacol.org/docs/KeepingPace07-color.pdf>.

Other Noteworthy Findings and Implications From Final Report of National Assessment of Title I

In addition to findings related to how Title I funds are expended (see related item), there were some other "noteworthy" findings in the National Assessment of Title I Final Report which could have implications for targeting, pricing, and types of schools to target, as highlighted below.

Eighty-seven percent of the 20 million Title I student participants were served in 2004-05 in Title I schoolwide programs, which have increased from 5,050 in 1994-95 to 31,782. In Title I schoolwide programs, the intent is to improve instruction for all students, not just those from low-income families. Other Federal program title funding can be commingled with Title I and how funds are spent do not have to be reported separately; however, our recent survey found that about 70 percent of district officials are aware that such "commingling" can occur, but slightly less than half actually do commingle funds. Because USED places a high priority on schoolwide programs, the number of "participants" continues to increase, even

though district Title I allocations are level or even slightly reduced. Seventy-two percent of Title I participants were in grade pre-K through six, 15 percent of Title I participants had limited English proficiency (2.8 million), while 13 percent had disabilities (2.3 million) which is about a third of all students placed in special education programs. About 12 percent of Title I schools are "targeted assistance schools" where Title I services focus only on Title I eligible students. While only one percent of Title I participants are served by private schools, Title I pays for a third-party provider (28 percent of the cases) and computer-assisted labs (16 percent) that are dedicated for use to serve Title I eligible students.

Districts in the highest-poverty quartile received 52 percent of Title I funds in 2004-05, although these districts had less total funding per pupil than did low-poverty quartile districts -- \$467 Title I funds per pupil, compared to \$59. However, the highest poverty districts received 10 percent less in total per pupil funding from state, local and Federal sources (\$6,200 compared with \$6,967 in the lowest poverty districts).

At the school level, in 2004-05, 76 percent of Title I funds went to schools with 50 percent or more students eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. Those schools with 75 percent or more eligible students received almost 40 percent of Title I allocations. While low-poverty schools account for 14 percent of the Title I schools and six percent of Title I funds, the average Title I allocation per low-income student is \$763 compared to \$558 schools in the highest poverty schools, (i.e. 75 percent or more poverty). Because of set-asides for supplemental educational services,

professional development and other required set-asides in schools identified for improvement, the district allocation to Title I schools declined from 83 percent of districts total Title I funds in 1997-98 to 74 percent in 2004-05. Such set-asides increased from eight percent in 1997-98 to almost 20 percent in 2004-05. District Title I allocations to schools are typically based on the number of students receiving free and reduced price school lunches and not the census poverty measure which is used to determine district allocations. As a result, the average amount of dollars per low-income student using the “free lunch count” is much smaller, \$606 in 2004-05, compared with census poverty data count for district allocations of \$1,499.

The new report found 9,808 schools were identified for improvement in 2005-06, of which one-third had not made AYP for four or more years and were identified for “corrective action” or “restructuring.” Regarding the findings on accountability and support for school improvement, the final report reinforced some of the preliminary findings released a year and a half ago by USED and recent GAO findings. The most common improvement strategies reported by identified schools were using achievement data to inform instruction (82 percent), providing additional instruction to low-achieving students (78 percent) and using new instructional approaches or curriculum in reading and math (61 percent and 59 percent respectively). For the approximately 2,100 schools in corrective action or restructuring in 2004-05, almost 90 percent of these schools reported they implemented new research-based curriculum or instructional programs as a strategy, and about 45 percent created or expanded after school programs. In 2006-07, the number of

corrective action or restructuring schools increased to more than 4,000 and is expected to continue increasing over the next few years under current accountability revisions in NCLB (see September [Washington Update](#)).

Reauthorization Bills Which Would Support Education Technology Introduced in the House

Two reauthorization bills were introduced in the House in early November that could create opportunities for technology related purchases, in both the short-term and long-term. On November 9th, the House passed the Temporary Tax Relief Act (HR 3996) which would reauthorize approximately \$400 million to continue the Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) initiative which began 10 years ago; this could have an immediate impact, as many districts use these funds to upgrade their curricula, particularly with technology used to deliver instruction or as the “object of instruction.” The Higher Education Act (HEA) renewal, referred to as the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, introduced by Chairman George Miller, includes a new initiative which would integrate technology into teacher preparation courses to help teachers use technology more effectively once they begin their teaching careers; this could have a moderate long-term positive impact on purchases.

When QZAB was created, the interest-free bonds, for which districts had to apply, could be used only for school renovation; however, several years into the program it was changed to allow such funds to be used for purchasing equipment, and replacing or upgrading curriculum in eligible schools

located in Empowerment Zones, which had poverty enrollments of 35 percent or more. After that change, some districts received interest-free loans that were used for several purposes including:

- six schools in Ysleta Independent School District, Texas, used the funds to purchase laptop computers for all students;
- 20 schools in Miami Dade County, Florida, used funds to upgrade technology, wiring, computers and software; and
- Memphis, Tennessee used funds to enhance career and technology programs through purchases of new equipment.

As more and more districts found out about the program, the carryover amounts from year to year were substantially reduced; however, last year, the Republican leadership attempted to provide some limitations on the use of funds by investors which reduced the amount of funding actually available for QZAB issuances in several states including Maryland, New York and California. The reauthorization has removed such limitations which most observers believe will stimulate the demand for bonding authority.

While most of the HEA reauthorization bill would affect Pell grant funding levels and the student loan industry oversight in higher education generally, several provisions will have a direct impact on K-12 programs. The Enhancing Teacher Quality program would continue to fund partnerships between universities and districts, but also could provide some opportunities for technology vendors, especially those programs that can improve teacher quality through training and

the use of technology. Compared to the last reauthorization which was almost eight years ago, the use of education technology is encouraged in several component programs, especially its role in boosting science, technology and foreign language education opportunities, including one program which is designed to prepare teachers to more effectively provide instruction for the “digital students” which they will be instructing. It would also reauthorize and expand the number of students eligible to participate under TRIO and Gear-Up which help K-12 students, beginning as early as grade six, prepare for college and for low-income high school students transitioning into college. It would also incorporate some of the initiatives in the America Competes Act, signed into law in August, relating to science, technology and mathematics, teacher training and retention initiatives.

The proposal submitted by Chairman Miller would not reauthorize the Teacher Incentive Fund, a Bush initiative which would provide competitive grants for states who wish to set up programs whereby teachers receive financial incentives based in part on student achievement and other performance measures. Republican leaders, such as ranking committee member Buck McKeon, will likely negotiate for its inclusion in the full committee mark. Without its inclusion, the White House has indicated that the President will veto the bill.

Notes and Observations Gleaned During the 2007 Education Forum Conducted by the State Education Technology Directors Association

On November 6, 2007, the SETDA Education Forum entitled "*What it Takes to Compete*" provided a good opportunity to network with state education technology directors and panelists who addressed issues related to the role of technology in making the U.S. more competitive in the global economy. Below are some notable comments from speakers and observations gleaned from personal discussions.

Andreas Schleicher, of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), presented data which his group has compiled over a decade on the ranking of countries primarily based on the international PISA test which clearly showed how the U.S., once number one ranking, has dropped to the lower half on most dimensions. He also presented findings from the OECD analysis of why schools in some countries are doing a better job according to PISA test results. About a third of the reasons why schools in certain countries are better than others can be attributed to how much funding is allocated to education and how the money is spent on instructional materials. Another important factor is a school's access to best practices, especially those practices that allow for personalized or individualized instruction for students. Other important factors include whether students can provide input into school-based learning and whether the school is the "center of action within a community." Technology is necessary to individualize instruction and attract better teachers.

Michael Flanagan, Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction, in the tradition of former Michigan superintendents such as John Porter and Phil Runkle, felt a need to "jumpstart" Michigan education when he was appointed several years ago. To do so, he relied on several initiatives, including the requirement that every high school student take at least one online course before graduating. Using a recently found authority in the State Constitution, he is requiring that all of the 32 teachers colleges in the state apply every five years to receive their accreditation and, hence, State and other related funding. This year SETDA recognized Superintendent Flanagan as their policy leader of the year.

David Johns, Education Policy Advisor to the Senate HELP Committee chaired by Senator Ted Kennedy, confirmed during the panel session what Senator Kennedy announced over the prior weekend: that there would not be any NCLB reauthorization bill passed by the Committee this year, but reaffirmed that the reauthorization bill would be passed by the Senate before the Presidential election. When he was asked if there is a "Plan B" to fix some of NCLB's troublesome provisions (which virtually most groups would support), he indicated they were still betting on a bipartisan reauthorization of the whole bill which would ensure a proper balance of Federal/state relations as most state policy makers feel that NCLB is too intrusive. He indicated that the most important changes of emphasis in the proposed ATTAIN bill, supported by groups such as SIIA, ISTE, and SETDA, were expanding the amount of Title IID funds set aside for professional development and a high priority placed on eighth-grade technology literacy.

Ken Kay, who directs the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, discussed the recently revised "Framework for 21st Century Learning." He noted that "learning and innovation skills" -- which include critical thinking and problem solving as well as team collaboration -- were new emphases and were not given the highest priority by the SCANS Commission which submitted its report on 21st Century foundations, competencies, and skills in 1992. Interestingly, the day following the Education Forum, Arnold Packer who directed the SCANS Commission, stated in a commentary in Education Week, "Critical thinking, oral communication, using technology, and working in teams are the common skills sought; responsibility, the work ethic, and integrity are common behaviors employers value." Kay was correct in noting that the SCANS Commission report, which developed under the U.S. Department of Labor, was directed more to vocational and technical education, while the 21st Century Skills framework was directed to students in all education programs. As Arnold Packer has noted on several occasions, the successful adoption of SCANS by all state departments of vocational education offices within six months after the Commission report was released could be attributed to the more than 5,000 business leaders who testified before the Commission and who fostered buy-in to promote SCANS within their communities - - which resulted in a grassroots movement for the implementation and adoption of the components of the framework.

The forum panelists were asked whether many of the skills would be adopted unless certain changes in NCLB were made and to what extent certain NCLB provisions conflict with states implementing the

framework. Kay argued that, over time, NCLB changes would take into account technology and literacy skills more seriously and changes in assessments would be made. Brenda Williams, who directs technology and related activities in the West Virginia Department of Education, noted that her State Superintendent identified very early in their planning some of the potential conflicts and constraints, but was able to minimize "challenges" in implementing the State's initiative over time. These major challenges related to provisions affecting Reading First programs and treatment of special education students. Discussions with other state technology directors indicated that another challenge was competition for time; most resources and time were devoted to teaching mathematics and reading at the expense of 21st century skills in the framework. As a side note, OECD's lists of factors contributing to high-performing schools clearly indicated numerous conflicts with NCLB provisions (e.g., flexibility and individualized instruction versus "one size fits all" prescription). Interestingly, the 17-page report released by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, entitled "*Maximizing the Impact: The Pivotal Role of Technology in a 21st Century Education System*," does not address directly any of the specific challenges to the implementation of its action initiatives which are attributable to current NCLB provisions.

All of the panelists agreed that the major challenge is the nature and extent of assessing whether appropriate skills are taught and learned. In his article, Packer noted, "If performance skills are not tested, they will not be taught." Kay argued that 80-85 percent of current assessments focus on content and not skills and that a focus on both is critical.

Cognizant that its methods of assessment must change, the West Virginia Department of Education has begun a pilot program using self assessments in 22 sites and is requiring nine days of professional development be provided to teachers to, among other things, ensure “a common language” is understood and used correctly. North Carolina is assessing alternative means of assessing students, especially in the 21st century skills arena (versus content), including the use of the ICT (developed by Education Testing Service) and integrating such tests into state tests used for NCLB state assessments. In his article, Packer noted that, by 2011, North Carolina students will have to demonstrate research skills, make an oral presentation, and work well in teams before graduating from high school. He noted that Western Carolina University, with whom he is currently affiliated, began teaching these performance skills this fall to students who plan to teach in middle schools.

Overall, the mood of this year’s SETDA Education Forum compared to last year was much more upbeat, especially because of the likelihood that E²T² funds will not be eliminated or receive further cuts. Several informative reports prepared by ISTE and SETDA, along with the Alliance for Excellent Education, were distributed during the meeting and copies are available from most of the above groups’ websites or from SETDA. Contact Mary Ann Wolf 410/647-6965 or go to www.setda.org.

E-Rate Update Potential E-Rate Refunds for Purchasing Non-eligible Products and Services

As we attempt to do every quarter, we have included a list of districts which recently received funding commitments from the SLD for applications submitted over a year ago. We suspect that most of the funding commitment letters from 2005 and earlier represent appeals that were filed by districts when they were notified that certain requests in their applications were denied. In many cases, these districts went ahead and purchased the product in question, paying the whole pre-discount price. Because the SLD eventually found many of these appeals to be meritorious, these districts can request a check instead of a credit through the so-called BEAR process. Those districts doing so can use the discount refund to purchase non-eligible E-Rate products and services such as instructional software and professional development. If a district staff person is interested in purchasing a non-E-Rate eligible product or service, then he or she should contact the district E-Rate office to determine whether a check was requested for the refund amount through the BEAR process and, if so, whether some of that money can be used to purchase the desired product or service.

The accompanying chart shows the funding commitments greater than \$50,000.

E-Rate			
Funding Year 2007, Quarter 3 (Jul-Sep) Commitments			
(greater than \$50,000)			
Applicant	City	State	Amount Committed
2006 Commitments			
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	LOS ANGELES	CA	30,672,198
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	MIAMI	FL	10,305,694
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUB SCHS	WASHINGTON	DC	9,379,454
GEORGIA STATE DEPT OF EDUCATION	ATLANTA	GA	9,043,815
MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS	MILWAUKEE	WI	1,981,104
CLINT INDEP SCHOOL DISTRICT	EL PASO	TX	557,093
WAUKEGAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL	WAUKEGAN	IL	280,436
TRENTON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	TRENTON	NJ	258,046
ADVANCED EDUCATION SERVICES	COLTON	CA	131,468
ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS	NEW YORK	NY	117,631
BUTLER INDEP SCHOOL DIST 46	BUTLER	OK	95,318
CEDAR HILLS SCHOOL	KINGMAN	AZ	58,934
MIDWEST CITY-DEL CITY SCH DIST	MIDWEST CITY	OK	58,050
2005 Commitments			
GUAM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	AGANA	GU	\$966,710
MUHLENBERG COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	GREENVILLE	KY	\$889,683
ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ORLANDO	FL	\$633,380
HOPKINS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MADISONVILLE	KY	\$419,299
HUNTINGDON SPECIAL SCHOOL DIST	HUNTINGDON	TN	\$397,433
BRADFORD SPECIAL SCHOOL DIST	BRADFORD	TN	\$87,699
2004 Commitments			
none			
2003 Commitments			
YESHIVA KEHILATH YAKOV SCHOOL	BROOKLYN	NY	\$123,003
2002 Commitments			
none			
2001 Commitments			
VICKSBURG WARREN SCHOOL DISTRICT	VICKSBURG	MS	\$126,732
2000 Commitments			
NORFOLK PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	NORFOLK	VA	\$403,440

Alabama Update

December 2007

As reported in Education Daily, Alabama has received a \$79,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation to expand the Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX), the State's online instructional database (<http://alex.state.edu>). ALEX includes more than 55,000 lesson plans and other curriculum materials aligned with State standards. The Verizon grant will be used to develop teacher training materials in all core content areas across all grade levels.

Alaska Update

December 2007

The Anchorage Daily News reports that Alaska's performance incentive program for teachers and other school staff will allocate more than \$1.8 million to 770 staff in 42 schools. The system has, however, been criticized as unfair because all of the schools rated as outstanding or excellent were very small (1 or 2 teachers) or were selective in their student bodies.

Arizona Update

December 2007

The Arizona Department of Education has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the design, development, and implementation of an e-learning pilot program that would deliver digital middle school math content aligned to Arizona State Academic Standards. Proposals are due on or before December 14. The RFP is available at: www.ade.az.gov/procurement/Opps/ED08-0020.pdf

Arizona's legal problems over the education of English language learners (ELLs) continue. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) recently conducted case studies of five Arizona school districts which found that:

- only 8 to 30 percent of ELLs passed tenth-grade math compared with 36 to 64 percent of non-ELL students;
- only 6 to 15 percent of ELLs passed tenth-grade reading and writing compared with 49 to 61 percent of non-ELLs;
- even after multiple attempts no more than half of ELLs passed the high school exit exam in any of the standard schools.

Among CEP's recommendations for addressing the issue are better teacher training, improved student tracking, and more funding. A copy of the CEP report is available at: www.cep-dc.org.

Unhappy with the State's low ranking on education lists, Arizona is planning to implement a new series of core courses designed to make every student ready for college or the workforce, beginning with the Class of 2012. According to the Tucson Citizen, the new more rigorous high school requirements in math, science, and economics are likely to cause districts to scramble for qualified teachers and adequate lab space. Arizona currently requires that high school students earn 20 credits to graduate, including two years each of math and science. The State Board, in addition to approving the new courses, may also approve a "regents diploma" for students who complete regular requirements plus two years of a foreign language and a third and fourth year of math. The Board is meeting on December 10 for final approval.

Arkansas Update

December 2007

Arkansas has adopted, for all its public schools, PD360, an on-demand professional development resource developed by the School Improvement Network (SINET). PD360 provides educators with full-time, on-demand access to research-based professional development that will enhance teacher training activities and support common language and practice Statewide.

California Update

December 2007

According to [The San Francisco Chronicle](#), anecdotal evidence suggests that some California high schools are artificially inflating their Academic Performance Index (API) by shunting struggling students into alternative programs that have separate tests. A new law will require that test scores of students sent to alternative schools be counted in the original school's API. Under the new law, which won't become effective for at least four years, also requires dropout rates for eight- and ninth-graders to be incorporated into each school's API. The law will take effect only when the State has in place a data system that lets schools calculate dropout and graduation rates accurately. The Governor allocated \$65 million in his original budget for such a system, but the funds were cut during negotiations with the legislature.

California has launched a \$44 million program known as 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment (ASSET), in 100 schools and community centers across the State. As reported in [Education Daily](#), the ASSET grants will provide support for core enrichment programs, family literacy activities, and giving at-risk students access to after-school programs. The grants range in amount from \$20,000 to as much as \$7.5 million for core after-school programs in Los Angeles Unified School District.

According to [Education Week](#), an audit by California's State Controller has found that most of the State's 1,000 school districts, charter schools and county offices are in good or improving financial condition. However, the audit also determined that about a quarter of the districts operated with budget deficits during the 2005-06 fiscal year.

As reported in [The Sacramento Bee](#), Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to reform California's education system is facing a deteriorating State budget situation. In preparation of his 2008-09 budget, the Governor has directed all State agencies to cut their budgets by ten percent. If enacted, such a budget could reduce K-12 education funding by at least \$5 billion next fiscal year. Under the State's Proposition 98, the budget for the current fiscal year included

a \$2.1 billion increase for K-12, a 3.9 percent increase over the previous year.

A report by the Human Resources Research Organization (HUMRRO) has found that, in 2006 (the first year the State exit exam was required for graduation), the number of high school dropouts jumped drastically. According to the analysis, 24,000 seniors dropped out in 2006, 10,000 more than in 2002. The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which measures English and math skills, is first given to tenth-graders who have multiple chances to pass the exam. HUMRRO's study also found that poor or minority students did less well when they were in schools with high concentrations of similar students. The report recommends that California develop alternative ways by which students can demonstrate subject matter proficiency (e.g., portfolios).

The San Diego Union Tribune reports that the California School Boards Association (CSBA), along with several school districts, have sued the State of California for \$1 billion claiming districts have been required to provide programs for which the State has not provided funding. Specifically, the lawsuit challenges the State's authority to defer payments for 38 mandatory programs, including pupil health screenings (\$4 million per year), State graduation requirements (\$16 million), and attendance reporting (\$3.8 million). The CSBA says the State owes districts \$475 million for programs it never funded, \$415 million for programs it underfunded, and \$160 million for this year's operational expenses. Currently, the State is facing a potential \$10 billion budget shortfall over the next two years.

Education Week reports that California has developed the country's first Statewide academic standards specifically for preschool English language learners (ELLs) as part of the set of draft competencies for preschool students -- known as "learning foundations." Other states, including Maryland, have included preschool children in their English language development standards and a consortium of 15 states (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment), located at the University of Wisconsin, have developed English language development standards for prekindergarten and kindergarten combined. Overall, about a quarter of California's K-12 students are classified as ELLs, as are nearly 40 percent of the preschoolers.

Colorado Update

December 2007

The Rocky Mountain News reports that Governor Bill Ritter has asked the Colorado legislature to increase next year's funding for higher education by close to \$60 million, an eight percent hike to \$806 million. The increased funding would include \$7.3 million more for need-based financial aid and \$1.7 million to restore cuts in work-study programs. The proposed budget also includes \$800,000 for "precollegiate" programs and scholarships (both to improve access for disadvantaged students).

Connecticut Update

December 2007

The Hartford Courant reports that the Connecticut Board of Education has recommended more rigorous high school graduation requirements, including end-of-course exams, 24 credits, and an independent study project. The recommendations come from a committee consisting of school officials, teachers, business leaders, and representatives of higher education in reaction to the growing number of high school graduates unprepared for college or the workforce. The next year will be spent soliciting public comments on the recommendations and then the legislature must approve any changes in graduation requirements. So implementation of the changes is, at best, a number of years away.

Delaware Update

December 2007

A group of Delaware educators and community leaders has petitioned the U.S. Congress to allow multigrade, computer-adaptive testing to measure student progress under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Delaware is one of ten states to pilot test a growth model for determining if schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The group argues that the existing Delaware Student Testing Program, with its simple grade-level exams, cannot show true growth, particularly for students performing far above or below grade level. Adaptive testing adjusts the difficulty of the question based on student responses, allowing a better determination of the grade level a student is performing at.

District of Columbia Update

December 2007

The Washington Post reports that D.C. will purchase 6,356 Dell desktop computers (at a cost of \$628 per unit) to be installed in each of the District's 141 regular public schools. The \$4 million Federal technology initiative will also be used to repair the schools' power strips, network cables, and access points which will give all teachers and administrators access to a computer. The District's charter schools are not eligible for grant funds.

Florida Update

December 2007

During the Education Forum 2007, attended by state education technology directors and other policy makers, several knowledgeable Florida policy influencers painted a picture somewhat different from media reports as to education funding and other developments in the State. While numerous media reports pointed to special sessions called by the Governor to cut K-12 spending this year, several of these officials indicated that the proposed cuts in State K-12 funding were approximately one half to one percent, after a six and half percent increase already approved by the legislature. In reality, overall state funding for this year would reflect slightly over a five percent increase. However, because contracts and teacher raises were finalized before the cuts, some of the opportunities for using the increases to purchase products and services may have been reduced, because these funds will be going to teacher salaries. Some observers believe that, under the new leadership of Eric Smith who was recently selected as Education Commissioner, current restrictions on how certain categorical grants can be used may be lifted or become more flexible. This could include the Instructional Materials Fund, which has been used to purchase supplemental materials and instructional software, funded at about \$200 million annually over the last several years. Other Florida observers indicated that a reorganization is likely with some of the current department directors being replaced by members of the new Commissioner's team.

Georgia Update

December 2007

Georgia has established a one-stop shop for the State's online classes. The website -- www.georgiaonmyline.org -- will provide a searchable database of online courses and programs at all 35 of Georgia's public colleges and universities. The website currently lists more than 2,000 courses and 50 degree programs, including six new online Master of Education Programs (with classes starting December 1).

As reported in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, last Spring the Georgia legislature established a special-needs "scholarship" (meaning voucher) program that allowed students with disabilities to attend private schools. A recent State report indicates that approximately 900 disabled students took advantage of the program which provided families with vouchers worth between \$2,000 and \$15,000 per year, depending on the severity of the student's disability.

As reported in Education Week, the Atlanta school district has received a \$22 million grant from the GE Foundation to overhaul its math and science curriculum. District officials say the grant funding will be used to develop a rigorous, district-wide math and science curriculum and to provide appropriate professional development for teachers. Other districts that have been awarded grants from the GE Foundation include Cincinnati, Ohio; Erie, Pennsylvania; Jefferson County, Kentucky; and Stamford, Connecticut.

Idaho Update

December 2007

According to the Idaho Statesman, the Idaho State Board has agreed to delay, until the Class of 2012 (this year's entering ninth-graders), the requirement that seniors must have passed the Statewide science exam in order to graduate. The graduation requirement to pass the State assessments in language arts, reading and math -- with testing begun in the tenth grade -- remains in effect. The reason for the delay in the science requirements rests primarily in the fact that, last Spring, only 42 percent of the nearly 19,000 tenth-graders who took the pilot exam passed.

The Idaho Statesman reports that State education officials in Idaho are pleased with a scholarship program in Eastern Idaho and would like to expand it Statewide next year. The Greater Pocatello Chamber of Commerce Education Scholarship Fund helps local high students take dual enrollment at Idaho State University. It is estimated that three-quarters of the high school students who take dual enrollment classes go on to college. The State is asking the legislature for \$3.5 million to expand the program.

The Idaho Board of Education is conducting a review of the State's dual enrollment system which allows high school students to earn college credits. As reported in the Times-News, most students, school districts, and community colleges are pleased with the existing dual-credit system. The Board, however, believes it should be reviewed to ensure that there is "equity" between the college classes taken by high school and college students. Moreover, some believe there should be more dual-credit options, particularly for students in rural areas.

Illinois Update

December 2007

The Chicago Tribune reports that, of the 297 Illinois schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind Act, almost a third failed because of the performance of their special education students. Although some special education students are given an alternative test or other accommodations, most are tested in the same way as their non-special education peers. In Illinois, the minimum “N” size for measurement against AYP is 45 students so many schools with fewer than 45 special education students in a grade are not measured.

According to reports in the Chicago Tribune, next year, Federal rules will require all English language learners (ELLs) in Illinois to take the regular State achievement exams. In the past, ELLs in the State were permitted to take the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) in reading and math. Last year, nearly 60,000 students (about six percent of all test-takers) took the IMAGE; almost all were in the Chicago area. The State will spend the next two years developing a replacement for the IMAGE. State officials are currently determining the degree to which ELLs can receive accommodations on the State assessment.

The Chicago Tribune reports that the Chicago school district is planning to establish 100 new schools by 2010, replacing low-performing schools. Known as the Renaissance 2010 program, the project has already closed 32 underperforming or underutilized schools and opened 50 new ones. One of the 19 proposed Renaissance 2010 schools proposed for next year is the Community Services West Career Academy in the North Lawndale community. Expected to enroll 120 students in the Fall of 2008, the Academy would target dropouts and students at risk of dropping out and would focus vocational training specifically in the field of culinary arts.

As reported in the Chicago Daily Herald, the total debt of Illinois’ public schools has grown from \$6.6 billion at the end of the 1996-97 school year to \$16 billion by the end of 2005-06, a 144 percent increase over the decade. This means that the average cost in long-term debt per

student is \$8,755 compared with \$3,728 ten years ago. The large increase in school debt can be attributed, in large part, to construction costs associated with replacing or renovating aging facilities.

Indiana Update

December 2007

Indiana University's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy has received a \$3.1 million Federal contract to conduct a study of the best ways information technology can be used in the classroom. Scheduled for completion in April 2009, the study is expected to address the approaches that work best in the classroom, including the Internet, laptops, and iPods.

Kentucky Update

December 2007

The Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center has developed a ranking of the 50 states based on 11 educational indicators such as student scores on standardized tests and percentage of citizens who are graduates of high school and college. Findings from the State-funding Center showed Kentucky ranked 34th nationally, a level that corresponds exactly with the State's rank in Education Week's "Quality Counts 2007." This represents a marked improvement over the State's 43rd place ranking in 1994.

Governor-elect Steve Beshear has recommended reopening the State's search for a new education commissioner. A Democrat, Beshear unseated Governor Ernie Fletcher in the November election. He believes the State's uncertain political climate may have caused some qualified not to apply for the now vacant position.

The Louisville Courier-Journal reports that Jon Draud, a State legislator, has been selected as Kentucky's new education commissioner. Chosen four months after a prior failed attempt to fill the job, Draud is expected to be in place by the first of the new year. Draud has said he believes all Kentucky schools can reach proficiency by the Federal deadline of 2014, although currently only 40 percent of the State's public schools are on track to do so.

Louisiana Update

December 2007

As reported in Education Week, a study of 22 teacher-preparation programs in Louisiana suggests that the programs -- redesigned between 2000 and 2003 -- can produce teachers who are as effective as more experienced teachers. The first of what will be annual reports, this study collected data on three alternative certification courses that produced 155 new teachers in math, science, and social studies. Evidence indicates that these new teachers performed at levels equal to or better than experienced teachers.

Louisiana Governor-elect Bobby Jindal has set forth an education agenda that includes continued support for the Orleans Parish school district through charter schools, the State-operated Recovery School District, and the district's regular schools. The Governor-elect has emphasized remedial programs for struggling students, greater student access to career-training, dual-credit courses, and incentives for teachers.

Maine Update

December 2007

A recent study of the Maine laptop project -- known as the Maine Learning Technology Initiative -- indicates that the project has led to improved writing skills for both students and teachers. The project, which gave laptop computers to every seventh- and eighth-grader in the State in 2002 and 2003, has resulted in higher writing scores for eighth-graders on Maine Educational Assessment. In 2005, 49 percent of eighth-graders were rated proficient in writing compared with only 29 percent in 2000. During the same period, reading scores dropped slightly, math scores remained the same, and science scores went up slightly. The study found that students' writing skills improved, not just when using the computer, but also when using pen and paper.

Maryland Update

December 2007

After months of debate and disagreement, the Maryland State Board has approved a plan that allows students who are unable to pass the State's graduation tests to receive a diploma by completing special projects. As reported in the Washington Post, students who have twice failed at least one of the High School Assessments (HSAs) in English, algebra, government, or biology would graduate if they complete a project in the subject. The HSAs are scheduled to become graduation requirements with the Class of 2009. The new alternative to the HSAs is expected to affect between 2,000 and 3,000 seniors Statewide.

Massachusetts Update

December 2007

As reported in Education Week, Massachusetts is one of a handful of states that have widely adopted an executive training course for principals developed, at a cost of \$11 million, by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). The courses 14-unit curriculum uses computerized simulations to prepare principals. Massachusetts pays for NISL training at the district level, supports 25 “principal coaches” Statewide, and is developing a facilitation guide for principal trainers. Lesley University (Cambridge) will give 24 credits toward a doctoral degree for completion of the NISL training.

Michigan Update

December 2007

The Detroit Free Press reports that Michigan's 31 teacher preparation institutions will soon be required to earn national accreditation. The requirement is part of the State's plan to improve teacher quality, other features of which are new standards and changes to the State's licensing system that would make career advancement dependent on performance rather than experience. All teacher preparation programs would have to become accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Currently, 12 Michigan programs have NCATE accreditation. The others would have to complete accreditation by January 2013.

Mississippi Update

December 2007

The Jackson Clarion Ledger reports that Mississippi is hoping to cut its 26 percent dropout rate in half by 2013. The State estimates that the 14,000 Mississippi students who drop out every year lose a total of \$4 billion in lifetime earnings. Among the general changes the State is making are: (a) implementing a new curriculum and assessment this year; (b) pushing for more qualified teachers; (c) encouraging better school leadership; and (d) beginning the State's high school redesign project.

Missouri Update

December 2007

According to the Columbia Tribune, Missouri's two largest teachers' organizations say they will accept the concept of merit pay as long as base salaries are increased. Traditionally in opposition to merit pay in any form, the Missouri State Teachers Association and Missouri's National Education Association also said that teachers must play a key role in the development of the evaluation used to assess performance. Current State law requires that teacher salaries be determined by a fixed schedule.

As part of his priorities for next year, Governor Matt Blunt wants to expand the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP) to offer more education choices. The Governor is planning to recommend an additional \$1 million to MoVIP's budget, bringing total funding to \$6.2 million.

Nebraska Update

December 2007

The Nebraska Department of Education and the State legislature have had ongoing differences over the State's accountability system. The State School Board has approved new Statewide reading and math tests in three grades that would implement the State's current system of district-based exams. As reported in the [Omaha World-Herald](#), the dispute is over whether test results should be compared among schools and school districts. The State Education Department is considering creating tests to cover reading comprehension and math problem-solving, while local assessments would address other reading and math skills.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Title I, Nebraska is the only state on schedule to have all of its students reach NCLB's grade-level proficiency goals by 2014, as called for by NCLB's provisions. Interestingly, Nebraska is also the only state that uses a system of local assessments -- rather than statewide exams -- to measure performance under NCLB's accountability standards. This, of course, has caused USED to question whether Nebraska's approach is appropriate.

New Jersey Update

December 2007

The Newark Star-Ledger reports that 44 school districts and nine charter schools have been classified as “in need of improvement” under the Federal No child Left Behind Act. The “improvement” list includes large urban districts like Trenton, New Brunswick, and Plainfield, as well as such suburban districts as Morris Hills, Warren Hills, and East Windsor. Six districts on the list have been failing for four consecutive years making them subject to such sanctions as replacing staff, overhauling the curriculum, or State takeover. Information on the “improvement” districts and schools is available at:

www.state.nj.us/education/news/2007/1018dini.html.

New Mexico Update

December 2007

A recent study conducted by the American Institute for Research determined that New Mexico schools were underfunded by 15 percent (\$320 million) during the 2006-07 school year. The State is considering a new funding formula that would maintain equity across school districts while infusing more money into the State's schools. Under the proposed new formula, "basic" funding would be \$4,875 per student (vs. \$3,600 currently) to which would be added specific funds for poor students, special education students, English language learners, and other factors. It is estimated that some districts would have received significantly more money if the proposed formula were in place. Santa Fe, for example, would have gotten an additional \$8 million for the 2006-07 school year.

New York Update

December 2007

The New York State Board of Regents has proposed an increase of \$1.94 billion in school aid for FY 2009 -- up to a total of more than \$20 billion. Education Week reports that the proposal includes a \$100 million dual-enrollment program that would allow disadvantaged students to graduate from high school with as many as 30 college credits.

A study of the small high schools that are part of New York City's New Century High Schools initiative indicates that the small schools opened in 2002 graduate 78 percent of their students in four years compared with 58 percent for the City as a whole. The results are particularly significant because the New Century schools tend to enroll disproportionately large numbers of poor and minority students who often have weaker academic skills. As reported in Education Week, however, the new schools had higher suspension rates than other schools and had more students earning a "local" diploma rather than the more rigorous Regents and advanced diplomas.

The New York Times reports that, under New York City's new rating system, 50 schools received failing grades and another 99 got "Ds." The 29,000 students attending the "F" schools are eligible to transfer to other schools. A number of City schools with good reputations have fallen into the low rating categories because the complex rating system assigns great weight to improvement (not score) on standardized tests and compares schools with similar demographics and incoming students' test scores. The City is prepared to close, or replace staff in, many of the "F" and "D" rated schools.

The Albany Times Union reports that this year's State K-12 budget includes \$1.8 billion in increased spending. As part of the overall education plan, 55 school districts -- including some of the State's largest (e.g., New York City, Buffalo) -- have signed on to the State's Contracts for Excellence program. Under the Contracts, participating districts will share an additional \$428 million in State aid and will agree to select from a group of State-approved strategies for

increasing student achievement. Among the options are expanding prekindergarten programs, reducing class sizes, providing more teacher training, creating extended day programs to provide homework help, or assigning master teachers to coach and mentor new teachers.

North Carolina Update

December 2007

According to State data, 97 percent of the North Carolina's 75,870 teachers met the "highly qualified" designation at the end of the 2006-07 school year, an increase of four percentage points over the year before. "Highly qualified" means teachers are fully certified, have at least a four-year degree, and have demonstrated competence in each subject they teach.

As reported in The News & Observer (Raleigh), North Carolina currently has a Statewide cap of 100 on the number of publicly funded charter schools. In reaction to public demand for more charters, the State's Blue Ribbon Commission on Charter Schools is attempting to create loopholes that would allow more charter schools without officially raising the cap and thus antagonizing opponents of charters. Under the Commission's proposal, up to six schools per year could apply for charter status, but existing charter schools that achieve high academic performance ratings would not be counted against the 100-school cap. The Commission's recommendation must be approved by the State legislature and the State Board of Education.

Education Week reports that, in the November election, voters approved a \$516 million bond issue for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district. The funds will be used for 40 projects including the construction of 12 new schools. Gaining about 4,500 new students each year, the district estimates that it needs at least \$1.4 billion in construction funds.

North Carolina's Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability has agreed that there is too much time spent on testing in the State's public schools and has recommended that the fourth-, seventh-, and tenth-grade writing tests and the eighth-grade computer test be eliminated. The Commission has also recommended a reduction in the number of end-of-course exams from ten to five by eliminating the exams in physical, physical science, chemistry, geometry, and algebra II. The Commission will present its final report and recommendations to the State School Board in January.

Ohio Update

December 2007

According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Ohio's system for evaluating the tutoring for low-performing schools is inadequate. The State does not collect sound data on how much is being spent, who gets it, and how effective the tutoring is. Currently, each tutor is rated in a number of categories, but ratings are calculated almost totally on information provided by the tutors. The State is considering ways to improve the tutoring program, including updating tutors' status every year instead of every two years.

The New York Times reports that Ohio is beginning to look more closely at the performance of the State's 328 charter schools. The State's school report card indicates that 57 percent of the charters are in the two lowest (out of five) categories -- academic watch or emergency; most of them are in large cities. By comparison, only 43 percent of Ohio's traditional public schools in cities fall into the two low categories. Currently, the State is suing to shut down three failing charter schools and is in the process of investigating many others.

According to The Cincinnati Enquirer, Ohio has added a top category -- "Excellent with Distinction" -- to its State ratings of schools and districts and is using a new, "value-added" measure of student progress in reading and mathematics. The changes are intended to highlight student progress over each school year based on State assessment scores.

Oklahoma Update

December 2007

According to Education Daily, the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation has added a language certification exam in Cherokee as part of the Certification Examinations for Oklahoma Educators program. The language tests are designed to ensure that all teachers seeking certification in the State have entry-level educator skills.

Oregon Update

December 2007

Pre[K] Now reports that the State-funded Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten program has seen its appropriation increase by \$14 million for FY 2008 and \$11.8 million for FY 2009, bringing its total budget to \$53.5 million. Currently serving three-and four-year-olds from families earning up to 100 percent of the Federal poverty threshold, the Oregon prekindergarten program is tied to the Federal Head Start program which, when reauthorized by Congress, will raise eligibility to families earning 130 percent of the Federal poverty level.

As reported in [Education Week](#), 19 Oregon high schools are participating in the three-year-old Oregon-Mexico Education Partnership that provides students with free Spanish language resources (textbooks, CDs, DVDs, website) for math, science, and other subject required for graduation.

As reported in [The Oregonian](#), the Oregon legislature allocated a record \$6.245 billion for education during the 2007-09 biennium. Of this, \$260 million was designated for school improvement (equal to three percent of each district's regular allocation). School districts, who cannot use the money for textbooks, must apply for the funds, describing their spending plans in detail and agreeing to measure the plans outcome. Of the \$120 million available this year, most is being used to reduce class sizes, particularly in early grades and in high school core subjects. Portland, the State's largest school district, is taking a different approach, using \$8.5 million out of its \$10 million allocation to send 3,000 former dropouts and struggling students to alternative schools with the intent of reducing the district's 24 percent dropout rate.

As reported in [Oregonlive.com](#), the issue of merit pay for teachers -- rejected by Oregon voters in 2000 -- is likely to appear on the ballot in the 2008 election. A plan backed by anti-tax advocates would make all teachers raises dependent, not on seniority, but on some measures of "classroom performance." The performance criteria could include, in addition to test scores, peer review, supervisor evaluations, or general measures of student improvement. It is expected

that teachers' unions will spend as much as \$5 million to fight the measure.

Pennsylvania Update

December 2007

As reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Pennsylvania is developing a battery of nine end-of-course exams to replace local tests in English, math, science, and social studies. The new tests would be effective starting with the Class of 2013 (freshmen entering in 2009). The proposed “graduation competency tests” would be given starting in the ninth grade to allow teachers to identify struggling students and to give students multiple chances to retake the exams. A number of organizations are, however, lining up in opposition to the graduation exams. Teachers’ unions, advocacy groups, and some local school boards have stated that graduation should not be solely determined by a standardized test.

Last summer, the Pennsylvania legislature enacted a requirement that, in order to retain their certification, new principals must complete an induction and development program based on nine school leadership standards. The legislation included funding for the training which is being delivered, in large part, through facilitators trained under the \$11 million executive training course for principals developed by the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). As reported in Education Week, NISL charges \$15,000 per person to train a leadership team that is certified to train other principals. Training participants receive a kit of professional books and instructor guides, as well as access to the online component of the NISL curriculum.

A study prepared for the Pennsylvania legislature says that the State spends \$4.6 billion less on education than it should. According to the Statewide Education Costing-Out Study, Pennsylvania spends an average of \$9,512 per K-12 student in 2005-06. Adequate education funding would allocate \$12,057 per student. The study also found that high-wealth, low-need school districts spent more and incurred a lower tax burden than low-wealth, high-need districts, and that State aid has been unable to balance out this disparity.

A study by the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University has found that second through eighth grade students in 30 Philadelphia schools operated by for-profit companies

learned about two-thirds of year more in math -- over a four-year period -- than they would have if the schools were managed by the district. They also improved by a quarter year more in reading, considered to be statistically significant. The research was funded from a number of sources including the U.S. Department of Education, two independent foundations, and Edison Schools, the operator of 20 of the 30 schools in the study. The study's author emphasized that Edison's funding support had no bearing on the findings. Another report (released last February) by the Rand Corporation and Research for Action found that the district's 41 privately-operated schools (at a cost of \$90 million) did not outperform other district schools.

Education Daily reports that, according to State data, nearly 25 percent of Pennsylvania's special education students qualify as gifted. As a consequence, the State is considering a number of changes to its gifted program to provide better screening and support for students who fall within both gifted and special education programs. The changes include: (1) requiring districts to create a process for screening all students for gifted special needs within five days of a parent's written request; and (2) having a single individualized education program covering both gifted and special education goals.

Rhode Island Update

December 2007

Facing a \$450 million budget deficit for the coming year, Rhode Island has proposed a FY 2009 spending plan that would eliminate 21 State-level administrative positions and cut \$1.3 million in existing services, including a reduction of services at GED centers, less technical assistance to local districts, and scaling back of a school evaluation program. According to The Providence Journal, the total budget actually represents a \$52 million increase over last year, half of which is a four-percent increase in local aid. Another \$2.8 million will go to opening two new charter schools. The State wants to keep the \$1.3 million in savings and use it for high school reform, improving teacher quality, and programs for English language learners.

South Carolina Update

December 2007

South Carolina State Education Superintendent intends to establish a public school choice program in the State despite the fact that a similar effort last year met defeat. The new plan would encourage schools to create magnet programs with specialized curricula and would allow students to attend any school in their district. Under the new plan, districts would use the first to consult with parents in the design of their school choice program. By the second year, schools would be required to offer at least three magnet, charter, or Montessori programs.

State data show that 77 percent of the students who took South Carolina's High School Assessment Program passed both the English and math sections, up from 74.9 percent last year and 71.8 percent the year before. The test is given to high school sophomores; those who fail one of the sections have multiple chances to retake the exam. The reported pass rates were based on State standards -- a "2" on a scale of 1 to 4. Under Federal standards, passing is "3;" only 59.8 percent and 52.3 percent, respectively, passed the test's English and math sections.

According to a report entitled "Making Opportunity Affordable," prepared by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, South Carolina has the second lowest public high school graduation rate in the nation at 52.1 percent. The national rate is 68.8 percent (calculations of graduation rates are often muddled by state-to-state differences in definitions). Conversely, the State is among the top four in the proportion of high school graduates at 66.9 percent; the national rate is 55.5 percent.

Tennessee Update

December 2007

As reported in the Tennessean, the Tennessee Department of Education has contracted with a company called Edvantia to provide education specialists to help struggling schools and school districts. Under the five-year, \$21 million agreement, System Targeted Assistance Teams (STATs) -- comprised of retired educators -- go into schools or districts, analyze data, interview staff, and then make suggestions as to how the school or district can improve. STAT members -- known as “exemplary educators” -- are typically assigned to districts in “corrective action,” that is, they have failed to meet standards for at least four consecutive years.

Also reported in The Tennessean, the scores of Tennessee schools and school districts under Federal and State rating systems differ greatly. The Federal -- No Child Left Behind -- system rates schools and districts according to the performance of sub-groups. The State’s progress reports -- called “value-added” grades -- are intended to show how much progress individual students (in grades K-8) make in a single year. Many of Tennessee’s large school districts received “As” or “Bs” on the State system, but faced sanctions for failing to meet Federal standards. State officials acknowledge that the high State scores often mask problems with special education students and English language learners.

Texas Update

December 2007

As reported in the San Antonio Express-News, Texas education officials are considering making the State's K-12 curriculum more rigorous by incorporating higher-level reasoning and writing skills. Faced with a large number of unprepared students entering college, the TEA and legislature hopes to integrate the new standards into the public school curriculum within a few years. Among the new standards will be four years each of math and science (instead of the current three years) and a replacement of the existing Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) with end-of-course exams.

As reported in The Dallas Morning News, a recent study by the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation has identified 39 Texas schools that have been successful teaching math and science as measured by a number of tests (e.g., ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement). A total of 28 schools were cited for their performance in math and 29 were cited for science; 18 performed well in both subjects. The study identified key characteristics of these successful schools, including:

- larger than average class sizes;
- higher pay -- about \$3,000 per year -- for math and science teachers, through incentive pay or bonuses;
- lower per-pupil spending (by nearly \$1,000), but a larger than average percentage for instruction (68.4 percent vs. 57.8 percent Statewide); and
- less time preparing for annual State assessment

The Foundation's recommendations included additional stipends for math and science teachers and district policies to reduce class time spent for test preparation.

A study by the Commission for a College Ready Texas, appointed by the Governor, has found that Texas high school graduates are less prepared for college than others across the nation. The Dallas Morning News reports that almost half of the State's college freshmen are in need of remediation, largely because the State's curriculum standards lack rigor and because a passing score on Texas' high school graduation test is so low that many who pass are not college-ready.

The Commissions study determined that 50 percent of Texas' college freshmen are enrolled in remedial or development courses compared with only 28 percent nationwide. Moreover, only 18 percent of the college freshmen who took the ACT were rated as college ready.

As reported in the Austin American-Statesman, the teacher training program at the University of Texas is considered to be a national model. Known as UTeach, the ten-year-old program recruits non-education majors -- often math and science students -- in expectation of long-term teaching careers. Since the beginning of UTeach, the University has graduated twice the number of math and science teachers. Data indicates that UTeach graduates stay in the classroom longer; after five years, 70 percent of UTeach graduates are still teaching compared with 50 percent nationwide. Under a \$125 million grant from Exxon Mobil, ten colleges and universities across the country are planning to replicate the UTeach model.

Education Week reports that less than half of Texas school districts have agreed to participate in District Awards for Teacher Excellence program, the State's new merit pay plan. The State has allocated \$148 million and participating districts are required to match up to 15 percent of the State contribution in the form of local funds or in-kind support. Currently, only 443 of the State's 1,033 districts (43 percent) have opted to take part and it is expected that, when teachers vote later this year, more districts will opt out of the program.

The Urban Educator reports on teacher pay programs in two Texas school districts. Houston's one-year-old incentive pay plan has been revised based on input from a panel of teachers and national experts. The new ASPIRE Award plan will give academic subject teachers bonuses of up to \$7,300 if their students show continual improvement over three years. Other bonuses of as much as \$5,000 are available to elementary teachers and other secondary teachers. Austin will be pilot testing -- in nine schools -- the Strategic Compensation Initiative which will give bonuses to teachers in schools that show improvement on State assessments. The Initiative is expected to be phased in over five years with implementation in all schools by 2012.

In the November election, Houston voters approved an \$805 million bond issue that is intended

for the construction of 24 new schools. As reported in Education Week, the district will establish a standing committee to ensure that district officials are responsive to the public.

Utah Update

December 2007

According to data from the National Assessment of Educational Programs, Utah showed the poorest academic performance among states with similar demographics. As reported in the Deseret Morning News, Utah ranked the lowest among nine states with similar poverty (Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Ohio, Maine, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) in reading and math, and ahead of only Delaware in science. Among states with similar parental education levels, Utah again ranked last in reading and math and ahead of only New Jersey and Maryland in science. Utah also is the lowest spending state in the nation (only about \$5,200 per student) on education and has the largest class sizes. Prepared by the Utah Foundation, the report can be accessed at: www.utahfoundation.org

In the November elections, Utah voters rejected the proposed universal school voucher program that was supported by the State legislature and the Governor. The program would have been the nation's first voucher program available to all families. The debate over the voucher program was heated and expensive. As reported in Education Week, supporters of the program spent more than \$3.8 million in hopes that the program would be approved in the November election. The biggest voucher proponents are Overstock.com founder Patrick Byrne (\$1.5 million), Byrne relatives (\$1.2 million), Milton & Rose Friedman Foundation (\$231,000), and Advocates for School Choice (\$350,000). Opponents of the voucher referendum are headed by the National Education Association (\$3.15 million), and include a number of NEA state affiliates.

As reported in the Deseret Morning News, Utah is facing a critical shortage of teachers. Among the proposals being considered by the State legislature are:

- encouraging districts to change to year-round schedules, thus increasing teachers' income (\$32 million);
- establishing scholarships for teacher programs at State colleges and universities;
- streamlining teacher licensure procedures;

- targeting State funds at teachers in “critical need” areas (e.g., science \$7 million); and
- reconsidering merit pay plans.

Virginia Update

December 2007

As reported in Education Week, Virginia has received a \$500,000 grant from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices to be used to establish up to six Governor's Career and Technical Academies by next Fall. These academies will employ a rigorous curriculum emphasizing math, science, technology, and engineering and will be designed to produce graduates who leave high school ready to work in technical fields. As many as six grants of \$120,000 (which cannot be used for facilities or equipment) will be awarded. More than 20 proposals -- from school districts, community colleges and career/technical centers -- have already been received.

The Washington Post reports that Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission has completed a study of public preschool education in the State. Findings indicate that children who participate in State-funded preschool have made strong progress in literacy and most are ready for kindergarten. However, the Governor's plan to expand the program is likely to be far more expensive than current estimates suggest because of a lack of classroom space, limited local funding, and generally higher costs of education. Currently, four-year-olds from a family (of four) making less than \$27,000 a year are eligible for the Virginia Preschool Initiative. The State pays about \$50 million per year and local districts contribute another \$39 million. The Governor wants to expand the program to families making less than \$38,000 at an estimated (by the Governor's office) cost of \$125 million. The Commission report concluded that, rather than the Governor's estimate of \$5,700 per student, the real annual cost is likely to be between \$6,790 and \$7,920 -- an increase in State expenses of \$10-18 million.

West Virginia Update

December 2007

The Charleston Daily Mail reports that West Virginia, unhappy with the Federal system of rating schools based solely on test scores, has devised its own achievement index for the State's schools. The State argues that the Federal ratings are unfairly skewed against schools with high numbers of students with disabilities. The State's new system will consider a number of factors beyond State assessment scores, including graduation rates, advanced placement offerings, attendance, and SAT/ACT scores. Under this system, only nine of the State's 739 public schools are identified as low-performing.

Wisconsin Update

December 2007

According to Madison.com, the University of Wisconsin is developing a plan to test a sample of freshmen and seniors in order to measure students' growth in such basic skills as communication and problem-solving. University officials are finding it a challenge to devise a test that can accurately measure the diverse kind of learning college provides. The UW System is working with two national higher education associations on the Voluntary System of Accountability initiative. Two UW campuses -- Oshkosh and Stout -- expect to pilot test the program over the next three or four years.

A study by the Economics Policy Institute has questioned the efficacy of the ongoing vouchers program in Milwaukee Public Schools. Called *Vouchers and Public School Performance: A Case Study of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program*, the study found that there were significant improvements in fourth-grade test scores during the voucher program's first two years, but little improvement thereafter. The study found little correlation between high test scores for fourth- and fifth-graders and the use of vouchers.