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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 27, 2010
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: District Use of ARRA Funds; Campaign to Save SES; Survey Findings on How Teachers Use Specific Types of Technology Applications; New Gates Foundation Funding for Adoption of Technology; and State Profile Updates

Since Congress adjourned at the end of September, Capitol Hill activities have been limited to committee staff negotiations, while members and their office staff have been in their states and districts politicking for votes. Our Special Report focuses on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report which confirms that a significant portion of Title I, IDEA, and Stabilization stimulus funds were used to purchase computer technology, instructional materials and professional development for teachers in the 16 states. The study found that 25 percent of the districts spent more than 25 percent of their Title I ARRA and 22 percent of their IDEA (Part B) ARRA funds on computer technology, with 8 to 11 percent spending at least 25 percent of the same funds on instructional materials and professional development. GAO also found that 36 percent of LEAs took advantage of IDEA “maintenance of effort” flexibility and that some of the freed-up funds were used for professional development and purchasing computer technology. Virtually all of these states are taking advantage of a new waiver option that allows districts to carry over more than 15 percent of their regular Title I funds this year to next year. Different purchasing cycles are expected this year and next for Title I and IDEA.

Included in the Washington Update are items related to SES, teacher use of technology, new Gates competitive grant funding, SIG developments, and several miscellaneous items.

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A new coalition of civil rights groups and education industry SES providers was recently launched as “Tutor Our Children” to ensure SES provisions remain in the ESEA reauthorization and that further erosion through the regulatory process of SES set-asides for third-party private providers does not occur. Meta-analyses of the effectiveness of SES on student achievement suggest district-operated SES programs are three times more cost-effective than private providers.

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A new NCES survey describes how teachers are using specific types of technology applications with their students; this could have direct implications for targeting schools and types of teachers, depending on the nature of the instructional program/application. Other topics addressed include availability and use of computing devices and software, student use of technology, types of teacher preparation to use technology for instruction, and general levels of teacher satisfaction. Heaviest use of technology is generally in high-poverty-enrollment schools.

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The Gates Foundation created collaborative, “Next Generation Learning Challenges” (NGLC) will be providing \$20 million for projects to increase the adoption of proven technologies and practices to improve college readiness and completion, particularly among low-income young adults. Grants of \$250,000 to \$750,000 will focus on adopting blended learning models, improving learning analytics, fostering deeper learning and engagement through “richly interactive technologies,” and developing high-quality modular openly-licensed core coursework to improve student achievement. Similar to USED’s i³ Innovation Grants, it is not clear as to what role private for-profit firms can play in participating in funded projects.

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In October, USED announced grant awards to two consortia of states to improve alternative assessments for cognitively-impaired students (the so-called one percent group of students who receive special education services). One consortium is headed by the National Center on Education Outcomes at the University of Minnesota which will receive \$45 million; the other is led by the University of Kansas Center for Research funded at \$22 million. Like the two previously-funded consortia to develop the regular state assessments for Common Core Standards, the resulting alternative assessments will likely rely heavily on the use of “smart technology,” follow Universal Design Principles, and place a greater emphasis on formative assessments.

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Massachusetts Insight has published a toolkit on evaluating school turnaround initiatives which could have implications for external lead or support partners in school districts with schools receiving School Improvement Grants and directly related funding who adhere to the recommendations and suggestions. Some suggestions are counterintuitive. For example, initial needs assessments should focus on existing data at the district and school levels rather than collecting new data, and one might expect disciplinary actions to increase rather than decrease during the initial year. Student achievement test scores are not likely to show increases until after the second year.

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Based on recent discussions and school improvement panel discussions, most veteran superintendents who have been involved in successful school turnaround efforts have perceived solutions or at the least “key ingredients” for success which need to be taken into account as firms approach them to participate as lead or support partners.

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A New Jersey advocacy group for “fair” funding opportunities in public schools has recently released its “national report card” on states which assesses whether K-12 funding is fair in terms of funding, distribution, state fiscal effort, and public school coverage. In response to growing interest in Congress about ensuring greater fairness in state funding distribution among poor and wealthy districts, the Federal Fairness Campaign to increase fairness in the formula distribution of Title I funds to districts is also gaining momentum. “Fairness” may become a “burning issue” for debate in the reauthorization of ESEA.

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New National School Boards Association survey of district technology advocates finds professional development, not cost/funding, as major barrier to technology use.

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Proposed Head Start regulations could result in low-performing Head Start grantees re-competing for continuation grants and possibly be replaced by new grantees, which could open up new opportunities for firms with appropriate products.

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A number of miscellaneous items are also included:

- a) Interest in best practices using RTI approaches with English Language Learners continues to grow; NCEO researchers suggest the use of “dynamic testing” which assesses how well ELL students learn a specific task that is new to them.
- b) In September, the Johns Hopkins University School of Education’s Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education, in its Best Evidence Encyclopedia (September), identified a number of early childhood programs which meet its rigorous criteria of strong evidence. Increasingly, school district officials consider the Best Evidence Encyclopedia as an alternative to the USED/IES What Works Clearinghouse as a source of recommended research-based programs and practices.
- c) An E-Rate update on districts with potential E-Rate refunds for purchasing non-eligible products and services which we attempt to summarize at the end of each quarter.

The state profile updates focus on a number of topics including state budget issues, Federal funding, state assessments, released teacher evaluations, charter schools, and the upcoming elections.

Special Report:
**Latest Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report Confirms that
a significant portion of Title I, IDEA and SFSF Stimulus Funds Were
Used to Purchase Computer Technology, Instructional Materials, and
Professional Development for Instructional Staff**

A Technology Monitoring and Information Service (TechMIS)
SPECIAL REPORT

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October 27, 2010

The GAO report released on September 20th corroborates our own anecdotal findings and those reported by the Center on Education Policy (see August 19th TechMIS Special Report) that, after job retention and creation, Recovery Act funds (i.e., Title I, IDEA, and SFSF components) were spent on purchasing computer technology, instructional materials, and professional development in 2009-10. GAO's analysis of the use of ARRA stimulus funds in 16 states found that 25 percent of districts in the survey spent more than 25 percent of their Title I ARRA funds and 22 percent of their IDEA Part B ARRA funds on computer technology. About eight to eleven percent spent at least 25 percent of the same funds on instructional materials (not including computer software) or professional development for instructional staff.

Forty-one percent of LEAs reported "significant" to "moderate" progress in reforms related to increasing teacher effectiveness, while 33 percent made progress toward common standards and assessments. Only three percent reported using ARRA funds toward making "significant" progress in turning around low-performing schools, while 18 percent of the districts reported "moderate" progress. It should be noted that when the survey was conducted, only about half of the states had received approval and funding allocations of their School Improvement Grant Part g funds; however, as the GAO report notes, "a small and increasing percentage of LEAs expect to reduce reform efforts in 2010-2011 than reduced such efforts in 2009-10." While most LEAs reported that Title I stimulus funds allowed them either to expand or to maintain education reforms in both years, the percentage of districts that expect to expand reform is lower in 2010-11. For example, even with unspent Title I ARRA funds and a potentially larger-than-15-percent carryover amount of regular Title I funds to this year, 11 percent of LEAs expect decreased education reform efforts using these funds this year compared to only three percent who saw decreases last year. More reform efforts initiated using IDEA ARRA funds last year will continue this year relative to the use of Title I funds for reform efforts.

The GAO report also provided information on the percentage of districts which exercise flexibility by taking advantage of the option to reduce local spending by an amount equal to up

to 50 percent of the increase in IDEA regular and ARRA funds for 2009-10. GAO estimated that 36 percent of LEAs reported taking advantage of the maintenance of effort (MOE) flexibility under IDEA that allows them to reduce local or state and local funds spent on students with disabilities. As GAO notes, "Of the 36 percent of LEAs exercising the flexibility, an estimated 41 percent reported spending more than half of the 'freed-up' local funds on retaining staff. Other uses of the freed-up funds included professional development for instructional staff, purchasing computer technology, and hiring new staff."

GAO concludes with a cautionary comment which has implications for firms targeting the special education niche market: "Because LEAs are required to maintain their previous year's level of local spending on special education and related services to continue to receive IDEA Part B funds, LEAs which are taking advantage of the spending flexibility will only be required to maintain these expenditures at the reduced level in subsequent years. If LEAs that use the flexibility to decrease their local spending do not voluntarily increase their spending in future years, and federal IDEA Part B allocations decrease -- specifically by returning to levels comparable to those before the Recovery Act -- the total federal, state, and local spending for the education of students with disabilities will decrease compared to overall spending before the Recovery Act."

As of August 27th, in the 16 states in the GAO survey, 46 percent of Title I ARRA funds and 45 percent of IDEA ARRA funds had been "drawn down." As we noted in our July TechMIS issue, USED officials announced, in a June 15th webinar, that states could, upon request, receive waivers to carry over more than 15 percent of their regular FY 2010 Title I allocation to SY 2011-12 to minimize the impact of the "funding cliff." GAO reiterates this opportunity provided to states, stating, "We spoke to state officials in five states and the District of Columbia with relatively low drawdown rates and some of these officials told us they were encouraging districts to spread the funds over the 2-year period rather than try to obligate 85 percent of the funds by September 30, 2010." Massachusetts and New York also reported they are encouraging all districts to do so and/or are providing blanket waivers.

From the above findings, one can infer a number of probable implications for many TechMIS subscribers. Even though Title I and IDEA ARRA funds could continue to be used to retain staff, many LEAs will continue to spend their Title I and IDEA ARRA funds on computer technology and software, instructional materials and professional development, especially in those states that decide to distribute their portions of the \$10 billion Ed Jobs Fund this year to districts for the purpose of retaining staff positions. It is important to note that, when the survey and interviews were conducted, the Ed Jobs Bill had not been passed. Although school turnaround reform efforts did not constitute a significant portion of the use of Title I ARRA funds, some moderate increases could occur this school year as most states begin the implementation of the \$3.5 billion School Improvement Grant Part G initiative which will continue over the next three years. And, in states that received recent waivers to carry over more than 15 percent of their regular Title I funds for FY 2010 to next school year, one can expect accelerated draw downs and expenditures of Title I ARRA funds beginning soon and running through next summer.

The implications of the above findings on the special education market niche are somewhat

different. In districts which used up to 50 percent of their increase in IDEA funds last year to free up that amount of local funds to pay for special education spending for technology products (with very low operating costs) which allow special education services to be provided to students with disabilities will continue or increase as local maintenance-of-effort requirements may be reduced. This will have particular impact in states which receive waivers from USED to reduce statewide MOE requirements (currently waivers have been provided for Iowa, West Virginia, and partial approval for Kansas). Unlike the Title I market niche, the remaining portion of IDEA ARRA funds which have not been drawn down, as well as this year's regular IDEA Part B funds, must be obligated by September 30, 2011; this leads one to believe that a major purchasing cycle will begin early next year through next summer.

Washington Update

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Campaign to Save Supplemental Educational Services Provisions Launched by Coalition of Civil Rights Groups and Education Industry SES Providers

On October 5th, the recently formed coalition of civil rights groups and SES providers officially launched their campaign on Capitol Hill to generate Congressional support to ensure current NCLB SES provisions are included in the ESEA reauthorization. Billed as a bipartisan grassroots coalition, Tutor Our Children (TOC) released the results of a recent survey of 1,000 likely voters which, according to its press release, “suggest strong support for tutoring among all likely voters.” Some key findings include: 69 percent of likely voters -- including 83 percent of likely Democratic voters -- support the current law that requires tutoring to be offered to low-income children who attend a school that fails to meet grade-level standards and 78 percent support parents with students in low-performing schools having the option to enroll their student in after-school tutoring. Of likely voters polled, 60 percent “do not want to see funds cut for tutoring programs that they can choose and 53% see the SES program as a support for students rather than a penalty for schools.” Noting that SES tutors are often the same private tutors that more affluent parents can use, the TOC argues, “The proposed change in the law would mean an end to this important program as funding would be redirected to the same school programs and policies that failed to improve outcomes for students in

the first place.”

On its recently created website, <http://www.tutorourchildren.org/>, the coalition has posted findings from studies and editorial support from newspapers, such as The Washington Post which reportedly stated, “Moreover, we worry that the administration is rashly scrapping the requirement that parents in failing schools be offered school choice and free tutoring.” One of the cited studies was conducted by the Rand Corporation which analyzed 2004-05 data on SES-participating students from nine large urban school districts. Rand found that, “On average, across seven districts, participation in supplemental educational services had a statistically significant, positive effect on students’ achievement in reading and math. Students participating for multiple years experienced larger gains.”

While subsequent studies conducted in districts or states found mixed results, a recent large-scale meta-analysis conducted by the Center for Educational Partnerships at Old Dominion University -- which included Dr. Steven Ross, a veteran national SES evaluation expert -- attempted “to determine the program’s overall effectiveness and to identify the provider characteristics that produced the most positive gains,” as reported in Education Week (August 17th). The study synthesized more than 400 provider effects in 17 states or large school systems with more than 140,000 students in math and reading achievement. The authors reported, “The overall results suggest that

the SES policy as currently designed and implemented is not meeting its primary goal of improving student achievement”; however, the researchers noted that the main effect size for reading and math were positive and statistically significant. In their sub-analyses, the researchers found that larger effect size gains in math occurred when providers hired tutors with four-year college degrees. Noting that the research findings did point to promising ways to improve the program, Ross et. al. stated, “We also found that district providers had much larger effects than commercial providers, obtaining an average math effect size of +0.09 vs. +0.02 for commercial providers...For example, as our own research indicates, when school districts were granted an exception and allowed to offer their own Supplemental-Service programs, the effects on math achievement were three times greater, relative to tutoring by external providers. The district programs also were offered at a fraction of the cost.” One of the first policy changes made by the new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in April 2008 was to allow districts which have been identified for improvement to provide their own SES programs, if their applications were approved by the SEA. Most states received waiver approvals to allow districts to provide their own SES using Title I ARRA funds; however, most states also received waiver approval not to apply the 20 percent SES/school choice provision to the ARRA portion of Title I, thereby minimizing the actual increase in funds set aside for tutoring during last school year and this year.

The Education Industry Association, for obvious reasons, opposed the policy change initiated by Secretary Duncan in the early days of the Obama Administration in order

to generate support for the new coalition and campaign. It is unclear what position the coalition will take on this policy change during the reauthorization debate. During a webinar last month, Dr. Richard Long, Executive Director of the National Association of State Title I Directors, summed up Congressional staffers and members’ feelings on SES by stating, SES “is seen as something that hasn’t worked well but may stay for schools in the bottom achieving levels.”

New NCES Survey Describes How Teachers Are Using Specific Types of Technology Applications with Their Students Which Could Have Direct Implications for Targeting Schools and Types of Teachers

The 2009 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), sponsored by the USED Office of Education Technology, describes the types of technology applications being used by teachers in different types of schools with their students and parents. This teacher-level survey, conducted in the winter/spring of 2009, includes information on: the use of computers and Internet access in the classroom; availability and use of computing devices and software; teachers’ use of school and district networks; student use of technology; and teachers’ preparation to use education technology for instruction. It also describes levels of teacher satisfaction with different types of professional development on technology use.

Across the board, almost 100 percent of teachers had computers in the classroom every day, with a ratio of one computer for 5.3 students; over 90 percent of computers

had Internet access. More than half of teachers also had additional computers with Internet access that could be brought into the classroom. Forty percent of teachers reported students use computers during instructional time in the classroom “often;” almost 50 percent of teachers who had 75 percent or more poverty students reported “often” use by their students. Twenty-three percent of teachers reported the availability of interactive white boards in the classroom every day with 28 percent reporting their availability as needed. Classroom response systems were reportedly available as needed by 22 percent of teachers whereas only six percent reported such response systems in the classroom every day. White boards were used mostly in math, computer science, and science courses and used “sometimes or often” by almost 70 percent of teachers with three or fewer years experience. Slightly over 70 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools and self-contained classrooms used handheld devices “sometimes or often.” While MP3 players/iPods were reportedly available as needed or in the classroom every day by slightly over 20 percent of teachers, 36 percent reported using these devices.

About 75 percent of all public school teachers reported entering or viewing results of students’ assessments in their school or district-wide network “sometimes or often;” 83 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools reported the same use. Over 90 percent of teachers in special education or ELL courses reported using district-wide systems “sometimes or often” for entering data or viewing student IEP plans relevant to interactions with students.

About 85 percent of teachers reported having remote access to school email

“sometimes or often,” while 49 percent had remote access to school/district software applications and used them “sometimes or often.” Teachers of students with disabilities or English language learners used remote access to district software applications the most. Ninety-six percent of all teachers reported using word processing software “sometimes or often” for presentations.

Among all teachers, 94 percent reported using the Internet “sometimes or often,” but only 16 percent and eight percent, respectively, used blogs/wikis and social networking websites “sometimes or often.” Drill and practice programs/tutorials were used “sometimes or often” by 50 percent of all teachers, but almost 60 percent of teachers with the highest poverty enrollments reported using these types of applications. Also, not unexpectedly, over 80 percent of high-poverty teachers reported that students use technology to “practice basic skills,” compared to slightly under 70 percent of teachers generally; and 31 percent of teachers reported students using technology to correspond with other students “sometimes or often,” while students contributing to blogs or using social networks were reported by less than ten percent of the teachers.

Almost 80 percent of teachers reported the use of email to address individual concerns of parents; and 30 percent do so with students “sometimes or often.” More use of email to send out group information was reported by secondary teachers and those in schools with 1,000 or more students. Less than eight percent of teachers reported using instant messaging with parents or students.

In terms of the kinds of education and

training which prepared them to make effective use of technology for instruction, 78 percent of teachers reported “independent learning” contributed to moderate or a major extent (“independent learning” included informal modes not included in the other modes such as tutoring, online, etc.). Slightly over 60 percent of teachers reported that professional development activities or training provided by staff responsible for technology support or integration at the school helped them to a “moderate or major extent.” Undergraduate or graduate teacher education programs were not nearly as effective in preparing teachers to use technology. Over the previous 12 months, 13 percent of teachers reported spending no time in professional development for using education technology; 53 percent reported having spent one to eight hours in technology related professional development activities and seven percent reported spending 33 hours or more in such professional development. Over 80 percent of all teachers made statements that professional development had met their goals and needs; supported the goals and standards of the state, district, and school; was relevant to the technology available in the teacher’s school; and was available at “convenient times and places.”

For a copy of the report go to: <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010040.pdf>

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Will be Providing \$20 Million to Increase the Adoption of Proven Technology and Related Practices to Improve College Readiness and Completion, Particularly Among Low-Income Young Adults

On October 11th, the Gates-created collaborative, entitled *Next Generation Learning Challenges* (NGLC), released RFPs to which eligible applicants will propose projects worth \$250,000 to \$750,000 to:

- foster adoption of blended learning models;
- improve learning analytics for students and instructors to improve students’ success;
- foster deeper learning and engagement through use of “richly interactive technologies;” and
- develop high-quality modular, openly-licensed, core coursework to improve student achievement.

In many respects, the NGLC solicitation (which was initially four separate RFPs) is very similar to the guidance solicitation for applicants under the validation and scale-up grants for the i³ program recently funded by USED, especially in the area of the potential role of for-profit firms. To our knowledge, only one for-profit firm was a substantial partner among the 49 i³ grantees. The NGLC RFP states, “Solution providers (whether technology providers or education-related product and service firms) play an important role in determining how quickly and cost-effectively a solution can scale. The right match between solutions and providers can accelerate scaling; the wrong match can hinder or block it. Consequently,

solution providers -- for-profit or nonprofit, proprietary, or open-licensed -- are welcome as team members in the NGLC proposals. Irrespective of whether providers are team members, proposals must discuss any plans for engaging with providers, including intellectual property arrangements under which such engagements will occur....Although it is not required that open-licenses be used for technology developed under an NGLC grant, preference will be given to projects that utilize and adopt open-licensed platforms and make technology available under an open-license.” Similar provisions in the i³ grant guidelines, which were prepared by former Gates Foundation employees employed by USED, created serious concerns/problems for many for-profit entities, many of which decided not to participate in applications submitted by non-profit entities.

It also appears that the NGLC RFP provisions are less rigorous than those included in the i³ guidance on the prerequisite quality of evidence. It states, “Your proposal must document the fact that the solution you propose to scale has generated meaningful and promising results in a context sufficiently similar to the context of your proposal that you plan to transfer and scale it is *prima facie* credible....NGLC recognizes that few perspective solutions will have, for example, published, peer-reviewed studies based upon clinical trials; evidence from internal studies and other non-peer-reviewed investigations will be accepted. NGLC will evaluate carefully the credibility of your evidence, so please be thorough.” The Gates-funded NGLC grants will be administered by the non-profit higher education group EDUCAUSE whose focus is the use of information technology. Other members of

the NGLC collaborative include: the League for Innovation in the Community College (another non-profit group whose focus over the last several decades has been college remediation), the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Also involved in the collaboration is the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which according to eSchool News (October 12th) “helped conceptualize and design the Next Generation Learning Challenges.”

One key concern still remains about what opportunities are available for, if any, for-profit organizations in any of the four RFP projects. In the Application Instructions section, the RFP guidance notes, “For example, it is acceptable (but not required) for a team of higher education institutions to include one or more for-profit or nonprofit technology platform/hosting solution providers for the course(s) to be constructed and shared.” Officials who have been involved in the RFP development process have explained that there is a role for for-profit entities who share the overall goals and who meet the requirements in the RFP. Before the November 19th deadline for proposals, EDUCAUSE will host two 2-hour webinars offering prospective applicants the opportunities to ask questions and learn about the NGLC and the proposal process. Date, time and registration information are available at <http://nextgenlearning.com/the-community/events> and <http://nextgenlearning.com/>. During a recent conference, in a discussion with Susan Patrick, CEO of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, noted that the RFP which focuses on innovations at the K-12 level (mostly middle and high schools) will be available next Spring.

According to sources cited in Education Week (October 20th), total spending for post-secondary and K-12 project could range between \$60 and \$80 million.

On October 4th, USED Announced Grant Awards to Two Consortia of States to Improve Assessments for Cognitively Impaired Students with Disabilities, the So-Called One Percent Group of Students Who Receive Special Education Services

Two new alternative assessments are expected to align with two assessments keyed to the Common Core State Standards being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). In his September 2nd speech announcing the awards to the PARCC and SBAC consortia, Secretary Duncan emphasized that “smart technology,” following Universal Design Principles, would be used to accommodate the so-called “two percent” group of students for which states had been developing modified objectives and tests beginning in 2005-06, but which were approved for only one state -- Texas (see September TechMIS Washington Update).

Not surprisingly, one of the alternative assessment consortia is headed by the National Center on Education Outcomes at the University of Minnesota which will receive \$45 million; the Center is a strong advocate of fidelity of implementation of Response-to-Intervention approaches, as well as the use of accommodations with students with certain disabilities. The NCEO states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Connecticut, District of Columbia,

Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Wyoming, and six U.S. territories in the Pacific Rim. Headed by the University of Kansas Center for Research, the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternative Assessment System consortium will receive \$22 million and includes: Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Wisconsin, and West Virginia. In the press release, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services Alexa Posney stated, “Because of their emphasis on improving curriculum and instruction and the development of both formative and summative assessments, both of these winning applications provide a comprehensive approach to assessment design that will move the field forward and significantly enhance the quality of education for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.”

A high-level official of a testing firm which has specialized in development of alternative assessments indicated that the use of various technologies, including smart/mobile devices, could have a very important role in implementing all of the state assessments being developed by the four consortia. Some of the high-level association advocates of Common Core State Standards adoptions have acknowledged that the adoption of the assessments being designed by the four consortia will be as, if not more, important than the adoption of the Common Core Standards themselves, because many states who may not even be members of the assessment consortia will be forced (because of the costs of developing their own

assessments) to adopt the Common Core assessments being developed by the several consortia; this will drive instruction in those states to be aligned over time with the content of Common Core State Standards.

Massachusetts Insight School Turnaround Group Publishes Toolkit on Evaluating School Turnaround Which, if Followed by School Districts and Schools Receiving SIG and Directly-Related Funding, Could Have Implications for External Lead or Support Providers

The School Turnaround Group (STG) Toolkit on Evaluation represents a combination of promising practice research and lessons learned from the field, and, if followed by districts and schools, should have direct implications for district partnerships with external lead and support providers. Some of the suggested approaches and metrics appear to be counterintuitive, a factor which firms should take into account when submitting proposals and/or implementing components of one of the four School Improvement Grants (SIG) intervention models.

Early on, the STG evaluation toolkit acknowledges the lack of research surrounding the evaluation of turnaround activities and relies heavily on interviews with data/performance managers and lessons from the field which, it notes, have very “striking” commonality. After presenting an overall “logical model,” it acknowledges that it takes three to five years to turn around an historically failing school; however, leading indicator metrics on progress can allow practitioners to make mid-stream adjustments. In the initial process, the

toolkit states, “Schools, LEAs, and SEAs already collect and report a tremendous amount of data. Therefore, evaluating turnaround should not introduce significant, new data collection processes. Conversations with school- and district-level staff revealed that schools use similar tools and methods to gather data.” It notes that schools have replaced home-grown Excel tools with more robust technology, “such as PowerSchool and Naviance.” The initial emphasis on collection of data appears to be surveys and focus groups of students, staff, and community members to collect quality data on a school’s culture. Use of extant data collected through local, state, and Federal assessments could be a challenge for partners participating in initial needs assessments. Also, lead partners and school leaders should have shared responsibilities in collecting school-level data and using data to inform decision making.

The toolkit also suggests that gains might be expected for leading and lagging indicators over a growth timeline. For example, school attendance in the vast majority of cases is a leading indicator, along with positive perceptions of school culture and community understanding of turnaround. However, disciplinary actions may rise in year one of a turnaround regimen for several reasons including previously under-reported data and significant staff turnover. Behavior should improve dramatically after year one. Student achievement test scores, according to the toolkit, are lagging indicators with schools typically experiencing “a slight bump in year two or three.”

While focusing specifically on SIG requirements for evaluation beyond reporting requirements on accountability measures such as AYP, among others, the

toolkit identifies other leading indicators which require reporting under School Improvement Grants. These include:

- minutes in school year;
- participation rates and dropout rates;
- student attendance rates;
- disciplinary incidents and truancy rates; and
- distribution of teachers by performance level.

The toolkit also reports that many districts and schools produce and utilize user-friendly “dashboards” showing demographic, instructional, school environment, and student achievement data, including graduation rates. In its concluding section, it notes that the “last, and most critical step, is to act on the information produced from the evaluation.” Turnaround school leaders and partners must continue to modify plans in response to data, and must “balance the need to be patient while interventions begin to work with the need to be dynamic and course correct quickly if strategies are not working.”

For a copy of the report go to: http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg_-_resources/117/file/1/pubs/2010/10/14/STG_-_Evaluating_school_turnaround_Sept_2010.pdf

Most Veteran Superintendents Involved in Successful School Turnarounds Have Perceived Solutions or Key Ingredients for Success Which Need to Be Taken into Account as Firms Approach Them

Recent discussions and presentations indicate that seasoned superintendents who have been successful in turning around lowest-achieving schools -- such as Tier I and Tier II schools under SIG funding -- have preconceived notions of what works best and what are the critical ingredients that should be taken into account by firms when approaching superintendents if they wish to partner as lead or support providers. During October, successful turnaround superintendents identified key ingredients and/or perceived best approaches for turning around lowest-achieving schools during sessions at a number of conferences and during follow-up individual discussions. They also offered recommendations and suggestions for their counterpart districts officials with Tier I and Tier II schools receiving School Improvement Grants and for firms which are seeking to partner with districts as lead or support providers. Some of these perceived effective practices are significantly influenced by local contextual factors and “climate” conditions; most also supported the notion of “unshackling” or “freeing-up” experienced educators to do what they think is right. The vast majority of these superintendents were moderately to severely critical of the School Improvement Grants (SIG) guidance and prescribed activities.

In the context of discussions about the recent release of the movie *Waiting for Superman*, one superintendent questioned

the probable effectiveness of “overnight quick fixes” which have been recommended. Differing from the Administration’s guidance, one superintendent flatly stated that there are no “Babe Ruth homeruns” under successful school improvement; more moderate steps like Ty Cobb stealing one base at a time will be more effective and realistic. The superintendent of a large West Coast district expressed the need for a “fifth” intervention model which allowed a school to start from scratch allowing innovation to ensure that “equity” was achieved for all students. Such an approach would take time for revising collective bargaining agreements, particularly ways of replacing and rewarding teachers to gain buy-in from teacher groups. The area superintendent in a large western district felt that an effective alternative to replacing teaching staff would be to “unshackle” school officials from state regulations and collective bargaining agreements to allow them to proceed with best practices based upon their experience. A large-district East Coast superintendent felt a key ingredient in successful turnarounds would be to change state collective bargaining agreements to allow him to retain young, effective, non-tenured teachers while being able to replace older, tenured, ineffective teachers if additional squeezes on his budget occur next year. He also noted that the school budget process used in most districts “is all about history and does not reflect what should happen in the future.”

An energetic superintendent in an Appalachian district argued that, if bureaucratic procedures and state policies impede doing what needs to be done, then superintendents should go ahead and buck the system, working hard to increase student performance. They should then use the

demonstrated student performance results as a rationale for working with local and state politicians to revise state laws and bureaucratic procedures. He also noted that it is nice to have new supportive state leadership which can provide “political cover” in such situations.

A deputy superintendent who was involved in successfully implementing reforms, including extensive use of charter schools, in a southern district took a slightly different tack by noting that one key ingredient for school turnaround is having “positive competition” integrated into the overall process. The CEO of one of the fastest growing charter school chains felt that a key ingredient to the success he has had in turning around failing schools and implementing new charter schools in low-achieving school attendance areas is an effective principal and freedom for all school staff to “have control over their lives and what they can do.”

Several superintendents also had specific suggestions for new types of products or services which they would welcome. One suggested that firms would be wise to do research on the targeted district and schools by analyzing data available on her websites so that, when they meet with her and other key decision-makers, the firm can talk intelligently about how the proposed instructional program or application fits into the district’s overall reform plan or otherwise addresses specific needs. Another superintendent cautioned firms who sell supplemental instructional and other materials that they need to ensure that these materials can easily fit into the district’s core curriculum, or even better, that they be embedded in the core curriculum through customization.

An area superintendent in a large Midwest district also cautioned districts officials who are implementing SIG intervention models to “give them time to work as one can expect staff turnover to occur; however, it is important to ensure that the greatest degree of teacher buy-in is maintained.” Another advised firms that could serve as support partners to be flexible in working with other support partners or lead partners in School Improvement Grants in order that the overall solution is “seamless.”

Most of the district superintendents who were members of the Council of the Great City Schools also reiterated and strongly agreed with Jeff Simmering, Council of the Great City Schools Director of Legislation, who in the October 2010 Urban Educator pointed out a missing link in the Federal education reform agenda, overlooked by “experts,” is the school district. He stated, “Instead the Federal agenda is typically defined around individual low-performing schools, but often misses the need for system-wide reform in capacity building.”

Many of the comments of the experienced superintendents above are in sync with some of the research findings on school turnaround efforts. In her ASCD article entitled “Drastic School Turnaround Strategies Are Risky,” Dr. Jane David highlighted some of these findings. For example, she emphasized the Center on Education Policy studies of schools exiting restructuring in six states. The CEP found neither replacing staff or hiring CMOs or EMOs were generally effective (see November 2009 TechMIS). Based on decades of directly-related research, David’s concluding advice to districts: “A realistic approach would include key components identified by researchers: carefully

determining the starting place with the most promise and building the skills and knowledge of those responsible for student learning. It would also, from the beginning, seriously engage teachers and the community in setting goals and putting them into practice and it would acknowledge the importance of resources and patience....Replacing staff or redefining their roles may be necessary, but starting with a presumption that communicates contempt for the practitioners responsible for carrying out the work will undermine whatever follows.”

Some of the suggestions and key ingredients mentioned above were also noted in the recently published Massachusetts Insight Tools for Evaluating Turnarounds (see related Washington Update item). Based on our discussions with district and CMO officials with experience in turning around lowest-achieving schools, sales staff should be made aware of the varying perceptions of experienced superintendents in terms of best approaches and key ingredients by researching district websites, proposed “scopes of work,” and other district information sources prior to approaching these decision-makers.

The types of advice or tips that one could offer depends on the type of external partner role -- either lead or support and the types of products that a firm wishes to provide. If anyone has any suggestions, please call Charles Blaschke directly to discuss such possibilities.

To review Dr. Jane David’s brief but thoughtful article, go to: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct10/vol68/num02/drastic-school-turnaround-strategies-are-risky.aspx>

The Education Law Center, a New Jersey Advocacy Group for Equal Funding Opportunities in Public Schools, Recently Released a National Report Card on States, Assessing Whether State and Local School Funding is “Fair” in Terms of Funding, Distribution, State Fiscal Effort, and Public School Coverage

Focused on 2007 pre-recession Census data, the report from the Education Law Center at Rutgers University has found that “many states do not fairly allocate education funding to address the needs of their most disadvantaged students, and the schools serving high numbers of those students.” Among the findings:

- The states doing well on all four indicators were: New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa, and Wyoming.
- The four states below average on all indicators were: Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, and North Carolina.
- States that have high levels of education spending that allocate less funding to higher-poverty districts are: New York, Maine, New Hampshire, and Michigan.

Distribution includes the amount and “effort” placed on state-funded compensatory education programs through either categorical programs (e.g., California has more than 50 such categorical programs), or formula-weighted programs (which exist in about half of the states). The report notes, under funding “distribution,” that states in which districts with higher poverty rates actually received less funding than more well-off districts include: New Hampshire, Illinois, New York, and

Pennsylvania; states in which high-poverty districts receive significantly more than low-poverty districts include: Utah, New Jersey, Minnesota, and Ohio. To the extent that state funding was primarily allocated through categorical programs, it is not clear how many of such programs were reduced as a result of the recession beginning in 2008 and whether Federal ARRA Stabilization Funds were allocated to districts under such categorical programs. In an October 12th Education Week article, the study’s authors were asked whether subsequent Census or other data after 2007 were analyzed; the authors indicated that such data were taken into account, but that “their report’s conclusions changed little.”

As soon as the recession began affecting state budgets in 2008, many states figured out ways to reduce categorical funding to districts to pay for remediation and online test-prep courses for students who initially failed exit exams. While the ELC report could have an impact on the ESEA reauthorization and its analysis and findings have been praised by some researchers, more data on current state funding distribution related to fairness and equity needs to be collected and analyzed for state policy-making purposes. Jennifer Cohen of the New American Foundation notes, in her *Education Funding* blog, that “the report does go on to determine which states progressively fund districts with higher poverty levels and which states serve a higher proportion of their school age children in public schools. But overall, the focus seems to be on which states spend more, rather than which states spend that money most effectively, particularly for its low-income students. Clearly we still have some work to do on how we measure and quantify school funding fairness.”

At the Federal level, the Federal Fairness Campaign, headed by the Rural School and Community Trust and AASA has, building on numerous studies conducted by such groups as The Center for American Progress, addressed the unfair distribution aspects of Federal Title I funds. The Campaign shows that the current Title I formula components clearly favor large urban districts at the expense of small, rural, and small suburban districts. Even though the Title I formula was not a point of debate during the debates over the 2007 reauthorization of ESEA, it appears that there may be mounting support to allocate Title I funds on the percentage of poverty students in a district versus the current formula which provides additional weightings based on the absolute number of poverty students in a district. If such a change occurs, it would have a dramatic negative impact on large urban districts. In a tight overall K-12 budget situation, one can expect hotly-contested debates pitting some education groups against others with respect to the Title I formula.

For a copy of the ELC report go to: <http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org/>

New National School Boards Association Survey of District Technology Advocates Finds Professional Development, not Cost/Funding, as Major Barrier to Technology Use

Differing from most surveys of technology survey use in public schools which we have conducted, or which have been conducted by other groups over the last decade, a National School Boards Association survey has found that funding for technology is not

the single biggest challenge facing school districts in the area of technology use; rather respondents reported that “Helping teachers effectively use technology” was much more of a challenge by 47 percent versus 25 percent for “Funding for technology.” At the same time, however, about 60 percent of respondents reported “Delaying hardware purchases/upgrades” and 40 percent reported “Fewer professional development opportunities” due to the current economic conditions. When asked to identify any specific technology purchases or staffing changes that have been enabled by recent Federal funds, almost 53 percent of respondents reported expanded purchases of Classroom devices (hardware, interactive boards, etc.), while almost 46 percent reported being able to expand “Professional development for staff/teachers.”

The survey also found “A growing number of districts (37 percent) have 1:1 technology learning initiatives, and 35 percent of respondents said netbooks will likely be the device purchased in the greatest volume to implement those programs. Traditional laptops (28 percent) and the recently released iPad (16 percent) are also popular options. Only 22 percent say they are leveraging students’ personal devices by allowing them to access the school network, a trend that is likely to increase in the years to come.”

When asked about whether the use of technology in the classroom has increased education opportunities for students, an overwhelming 96 percent said “Yes,” with 93 percent reporting “More engaged learning.” Sixty percent reported “Enhanced curriculum for students with special needs” and 50 percent reported technology provides “Additional support for ELL students.”

On the issue of replacing textbooks with digital content, the report states, “Many educators appear ready to cut their ties with the traditional print textbooks in a move to more digital content if equity concerns about student access to devices can be resolved. Thirty-five percent say textbooks are still necessary because all students do not have access while an equal number believe the money could better be spent on other instructional resources.”

Forty-four percent reported that the district had revised or revamped its academic curriculum by developing “New assessment measures for 21st century skills (problem-solving, teamwork, critical thinking) followed by creating “Higher math, science and technology standards” (39 percent). Seventy-three percent of respondents felt that technology has played a part in supporting curriculum changes related to the use of “Collaboration tools for project-based learning,” with 61 percent reporting expanded “Virtual or distance learning classes for students.”

While 77 percent of respondents felt home access to the Internet is a problem for low-income students, 46 percent reported that their district has “Provided access in before- or after-school programs”; 37 percent reported not taking any steps to improve access for low-income students.

Several questions related to connectivity and bandwidth issues: 41 percent reported their district was currently delivering state assessments online, while slightly over 30 percent said they did not have “current capacity” for online testing or had “no idea” whether their district had such capacity. More than 70 percent felt the E-Rate program has helped the district set and meet

technology goals, while 75 percent felt that the E-Rate application process and notifications of funding decisions should be simplified or made more timely.

When asked what should be the two top priorities of the Obama Administration and Congress related to education technology, more than 30 percent of respondents felt priorities should be placed on:

- Assessing 21st century skills (35 percent)
- Improving bandwidth/Implementing the National Broadband Plan (31 percent)
- Supporting/Funding the National Education Technology Plan (32 percent)
- Focusing on STEM subject areas (32 percent)
- Funding E²T² (33 percent).

For a copy of the report go to: <http://onlinepressroom.net/nsba/new/>

Proposed Head Start Regulations Could Result in Low-Performing Head Start Grantees ReCompeting for Continuation Grants and Possibly be Replaced by New Grantees, Which Could Open Up New Opportunities for Firms with Appropriate Products

As a result of new provisions in the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start and proposed new regulations, the number of new grantees to replace low-performing grantees could increase dramatically, thereby creating opportunities for firms with appropriate products and services. Total purchases of instructional and related materials are significantly greater when new grantees

receive funding compared to purchases by existing grantees. The proposed rules are much more restrictive than those recommended by Head Start advisory committees, as well as many officials' interpretations of Congressional intent as reflected in Committee Conference Reports. Over a three-year period, the proposed regulations would likely result in the replacement of as many as 500 low-performing Head Start grantees based on monitoring/audit reviews.

Under the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, which became law on December 12, 2007, the Department of Health and Human Services was provided authority to re-compete Head Start grantees not providing high-quality services or meeting program and financial management requirements and standards. Citing the Congressional Conference Committee report, the proposed rules state, "Furthermore, the Conferees believe that the policy to limit open competition to underperforming Head Start agencies will improve the overall program performance." High-performance grantees would be exempt from such re-competitions every five years as "the Conferees believe that in most instances, stability and continuity within Head Start promotes better quality and greater efficiency." In its interpretation of Congressional intent, the regulation states, "However, given the importance of the provision of quality services for Head Start children and families, we believe that setting a minimum 25 percent standard for recompetition is appropriate to ensure the best services for Head Start children." The re-competition requirement would apply to those Head Start grantees whose performance of requirements and standards used by monitoring/auditing teams over a

three-year time frame is low. Hence, over a three-year period, about 500 of the 1,800 Head Start and early Head Start grantees will be required to re-compete. The review teams will assess the performance of selected grantees in meeting seven conditions in three areas: quality, licensing and operations, and fiscal and internal controls. In any one year, if the 25 percent minimum of grantees are not required to compete based on the above conditions, then the Secretary could establish other criteria to identify additional low-performing grantees that would be required to re-compete "such that the total number of grantees required to re-compete meets the 25 percent requirement." Comments are being invited on the nature of the above conditions and discretionary criteria available to the Secretary.

As Christina Samuels, reporter for Education Week, wrote on October 5th, "The 25 percent requirement would go beyond a recommendation from a federal advisory committee that 15 to 20 percent of grantees be required to re-compete in any given year." Ron Haskins, a member of the Head Start Advisory Committee and Steven Barnett, Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University wrote in The Washington Post Op-Ed section (October 11th) that the Obama Administration has gone beyond the 2007 recommendations to shut down failing programs: "The solution, in other words: Use the market to get rid of underperforming Head Start programs and fund new programs that hold more promise....Now it seems likely that within a few years, the worst Head Start programs will be shut down, replaced by energetic programs built on the realization they must perform or lose their funding." Discussions

with Christine Samuels and veteran Head Start consultants suggest that, if proposed regulations become final, the real question is how much “accountability teeth” will be realized through audit reviews and “closed loopholes.”

Knowledgeable observers generally believe that the percentage of grantees which are currently required to re-compete for continued funding is less than five percent; hence the increase up to 25 percent could represent a significant increase in new grantees over a three-year period. Prior to the re-competition process currently under review for public comment—Head Start and Early Head Start programs were de-funded, because of monitoring results that indicated inadequacies in meeting requirements outlined in the performance standards. If a program was de-funded then the agency was not permitted to apply for a HS or EHS grant again. An entirely new entity would be selected to run Head Start and or Early Head Start.

Over the last decade, the estimated average cost to furnish a new grantee Head Start classroom is about \$10,000 of which around 50 percent is facilities, furniture, and non-instructional items; of the remaining \$5,000, about \$3,000 is spent on instruction/evaluation and related materials by grantees. Additional related materials and technical assistance are provided to grantees under national Head Start office contracts. Currently there are about 36,000 Head Start teachers/classrooms whose primary role is instruction and general education/developmental activities. Most other staff -- child development specialists and paraprofessionals -- focus on a variety of health, parent, and related activities. A recent report by Education Market Research

estimated that the amount of money spent on instructional materials for each preK-grade 2 teacher was approximately \$1,100. The estimated amount of potential purchases over three years by new Head Start grantees for instructional materials, evaluation/screening applications/instruments, and directly related materials is between \$18-20 million, or about \$6-7 million each year. Purchases by existing Head Start grantees are estimated to be between \$30-35 million annually.

Even if a large percentage of the low-performing grantees that are forced to re-compete have their applications approved for continued funding, it is likely that there would be some increased funding for replacing instructional materials. Hence, the best prospects for firms with appropriate products would be newly approved Head Start grantees, or those who were forced to re-compete and who have decided to upgrade their curriculum.

Almost all Head Start grantees were non-public schools when Head Start was created in the mid-1960s. Now about a third of the Head Start current grantees are public schools which have received, in addition to Head Start funding, some increases in Federal ARRA Title I and IDEA funding for early childhood activities, including early intervention services for three- to five-year-olds in special education. And, according to *Pre-K Now*, although Federal non-Head Start funding for preschool programs has increased slightly beyond small increases in Head Start’s funding, state funding for pre-K students has actually declined on a per-student served basis over the last four or five years, partly because of increased enrollments. The proposed regulations are in the October 6th Federal Register.

Miscellaneous

- a) Over the last several months there appears to be an increased focus on how to apply response-to-intervention approaches to the English language learner (ELL) population, especially among education policy-oriented groups within university centers. In our July 2010 TechMIS issue, we provided highlights of an article by Alba Ortiz et. al. in which she identified some of the pitfalls in applying RTI approaches to this population. In her *Learning the Language* blog for Education Week, Mary Ann Zehr pointed to several articles in a special response-to-intervention issue of the journal, *Theory Into Practice*, which focused on providing interventions to struggling ELL students in an attempt to prevent them from being placed in special education programs. One article by Manuel Barrera, a research associate at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), University of Minnesota, and Kristin Liu, also at the Center, suggests that RTI approaches could be risky unless ELL students are properly assessed. As Zehr reported, the NCEO researchers called for the use of “dynamic testing” that assesses how well ELL students learn a specific task that is new to them, rather than assessing what a student already knows or doesn’t know. Such “dynamic testing” assesses the student’s ability to learn more than prior knowledge.

The article by the NCEO researchers is important for several reasons. As we reported in the July Washington Update, Dr. James Ysseldyke former NCEO head in a recent Congressional briefing on

RTI, recommended that the RTI concept be codified into ESEA regulations in order to ensure it is implemented with “fidelity.” Moreover, the NCEO recently was awarded a \$44 million contract to develop new alternative assessments for cognitively impaired students. The article by Barrera and Liu argues that school districts, in many cases, don’t have the capabilities and capacity to assess ELL students that may also have disabilities. Previous studies have estimated that there are more than 500,000 ELL students who also have learning and other disabilities.

For a copy of the article, go to NCEO’s *Theory into Practice* journal.

- b) In September, the Johns Hopkins University School of Education Center for Data Driven Reform in Education, which received some funding from the Institute for Education Sciences, published the results of its “systematically applied consistent methodological standards to evaluate programs that early childhood educators might consider adopting to prepare children for success in elementary schools.” In addition to rigorous criteria, all of the studies have to include valid measures of language, literacy, phonological awareness, mathematical, and/or cognitive outcomes. The 38 studies evaluated 27 different programs. Of these programs, six had strong evidence of effectiveness, and five had moderate evidence of effectiveness. The six programs with strong evidence meeting the rigorous criteria of the Best Evidence Encyclopedia were: Curiosity Corner, Direct Instruction, Early Literacy and Learning Model (ELLM),

Interactive Book Reading, Let's Begin with Letter People, and Ready, Set, Leap. The five programs which met the criterion of moderate evidence of effectiveness included: Breakthrough to Literacy, Bright Beginnings, PreK Math Plus DLM Software, DLM Express Plus Open Court, and Project Approach.

The full report is available at: www.bestevidence.org

c) **E-Rate Update on Districts With “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 that recently received funding commitments from the SLD for applications submitted over a year ago. We believe that most of the funding commitment letters 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 2010, Quarter 2 (Apr-Jun) Commitments			
(greater than \$50,000)			
Applicant	City	State	Amount Committed
2005 Commitments			
SAN ANTONIO INDEP SCHOOL DIST	SAN ANTONIO	TX	\$516,187
2006 Commitments			
CAMDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	CAMDEN	NJ	\$1,405,828
SUNNYSIDE UNIF SCHOOL DIST 12	TUCSON	AZ	\$111,273
2007 Commitments			
CAMDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	CAMDEN	NJ	\$1,386,891
CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	CHARLESTON	SC	\$987,630
SUNNYSIDE UNIF SCHOOL DIST 12	TUCSON	AZ	\$816,979
JASPER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	RIDGELAND	SC	\$201,682
PUERTO RICO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	SAN JUAN	PR	\$118,686
HAMPTON COUNTY SCHOOL DIST 1	VARNVILLE	SC	\$91,368
2008 Commitments			
SOUTHWEST INDEP SCHOOL DIST	SAN ANTONIO	TX	\$4,186,706
PUERTO RICO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	SAN JUAN	PR	\$4,098,341
PARAMOUNT UNIF SCHOOL DISTRICT	PARAMOUNT	CA	\$2,536,390
PLACENTIA-YORBA LINDA UNIF S D	PLACENTIA	CA	\$1,844,104
CAMDEN CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	CAMDEN	NJ	\$1,031,350
SUNNYSIDE UNIF SCHOOL DIST 12	TUCSON	AZ	\$758,251
SC DIVISION OF THE CIO	COLUMBIA	SC	\$596,995
BRIGHT BEGINNINGS	WOODSIDE	NY	\$525,134
RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DIST	SAINT LOUIS	MO	\$513,415
ALL MY CHILDREN (1)	JAMAICA	NY	\$346,184
INTERMEDIATE UNIT 05	EDINBORO	PA	\$340,214
FLORENCE COUNTY SCHOOL DIST 3	LAKE CITY	SC	\$225,696
DECATUR CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	DECATUR	AL	\$216,959
JASPER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	RIDGELAND	SC	\$207,099
STAR AMERICA (1)	BROOKLYN	NY	\$192,691
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	MONTGOMERY	AL	\$172,454
MARSHALL COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	GUNTERSVILLE	AL	\$172,044
HOOVER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	HOOVER	AL	\$170,184
DALLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SELMA	AL	\$163,699
LIMESTONE COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	ATHENS	AL	\$151,200
FLORENCE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FLORENCE	AL	\$145,260
MORGAN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	DECATUR	AL	\$139,551
CHARLTON COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM	FOLKSTON	GA	\$137,475
KUSPUK SCHOOL DISTRICT	ANIAK	AK	\$117,618
CHOCTAW COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	BUTLER	AL	\$115,770
CHAMBERS COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	LAFAYETTE	AL	\$111,840
FAREST PARK	FAREST HILLS	NY	\$106,636
UNIVERSAL ACADEMY	IRVING	TX	\$104,074
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL	CORONA	NY	\$103,828
ROUND ROCK INDEP SCHOOL DIST	ROUND ROCK	TX	\$103,254
FAIRFIELD COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	WINNSBORO	SC	\$86,014
OPELIKA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	OPELIKA	AL	\$83,028
BOAZ CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM	BOAZ	AL	\$76,230
EAGLE ADVANTAGE SCHOOLS, INC.	DALLAS	TX	\$64,274
TAYLOR INDEP SCHOOL DISTRICT	TAYLOR	TX	\$61,010
ALEXANDER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ALEXANDER CITY	AL	\$55,440
ALBERTVILLE CITY SCHOOL DIST	ALBERTVILLE	AL	\$50,544

Alabama Update

October 2010

According to the New America Foundation, 35 of Alabama's 132 school districts had to borrow money in September (the last month of the fiscal year) to meet payroll obligations because of a two percent across-the-board cut in the State's budget. State officials attribute the shortfalls in State revenue to the BP oil spill and BP's unwillingness to pay the State's \$148 million claim for damages. It is likely that similar cuts will continue into the new fiscal year.

The *On Special Education* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Alabama has asked the U.S. Department of Education for a waiver that would allow the State to reduce the amount of money it spends on special education due to an "unforeseen decline" in the State's financial resources. Because the waiver is for FY 2010 -- which is already ended -- it is unclear what USED's response will be or if it will have any effect. Such one-year waivers are possible as a result of "exceptional or uncontrollable" circumstances. Iowa, Kansas, South Carolina, and West Virginia have requested similar waivers.

A recent report by the American Institute for Research has found that, between 2003 and 2008, Alabama lost more than \$170 million on college students who did not return to school after their first year. Most the money -- \$165 million -- went directly to public universities in the form of State appropriations. Another \$3 million was given to private institutions and \$3.4 million was given as direct grants to students.

Arizona Update

October 2010

According to Education Week, Arizona's November ballot will contain an initiative that would shift tobacco revenue currently directed for early childhood education and health services to the State's general fund. Assuming the amendment will pass, the Arizona legislature has already included \$385 million of tobacco money into this year's budget. If the measure fails, they will have to rework the budget.

According to Arizona Daily, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded Arizona one of 11 State grants under the new Safe and Supportive School program. Other states receiving the funding are California, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Worth \$5.8 million, the Arizona share of the program may be used to "develop measurement systems to assess conditions for learning" at individual schools. Using data from such systems, the State will collaborate with local school districts to improve the safety of learning environments in high-risk schools.

The Arizona Republic reports that a new, online portal is available to help high school students prepare for college. The High School Portal -- available at AZ-Transfer.com -- streamlines information from all public colleges and universities, describes steps needed to attend college, and helps to identify career paths. The High School Portal is a component of Arizona's Getting AHEAD (Access to Higher Education and Degrees) which is funded with a \$1.5 million grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education.

The Arizona Republic reports that Arizona's State university system has made major changes to the system by which students could earn college scholarships based on their scores on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). Beginning with the Class of 2013 (this year's high school sophomores), students will have to earn an "exceeds" rating on all three parts of the AIMS (the same as in the past) and will have to score at least 28 on the ACT college entrance exam or at least 1300 on the SAT. They will also have to meet specific GPA

requirements. The AIMS scholarship will also be lowered from 100 percent of freshman college tuition to 25 percent. State Superintendent Tom Horne agrees with adding the ACT/SAT requirement, but has expressed opposition to reducing the amount of the scholarship.

At the recent Summit on Hispanic Education, officials from the Tucson school district described the process by which nearly every school in the district has transitioned from schoolwide Type I consolidation -- only Title I funds support the schoolwide program -- to Type 3 consolidation which combines nearly all Federal, State, and local funding streams. District officials say that the Type 3 consolidation minimizes supplanting issues and eliminates most payroll compliance paperwork.

California Update

October 2010

The *State EdWatch* blog on [Education Week](#) reports that two measures on the November ballot in California could have consequences for education funding in the State. Proposition 24, which would close a number of tax breaks for corporations, is supported by California's teachers unions who say the item would avoid cuts to public schools. Foes of the measure say it could put California at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining businesses. Proposition 25, also supported by State teachers unions, would lower the legislative threshold for passing State budget from two-thirds to a simple majority. California is one of only three states that require a supermajority to pass budgets.

The *State EdWatch* blog also reports that governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has used a line-item veto to cut \$6.8 billion from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), the State's struggling school data system. CALPADS is designed to analyze student test scores, demographic data, teacher course assignments, and student course enrollment. School districts have found that CALPAD is difficult to enter data into. The Governor -- who leaves office after the November election -- has asked the State legislature to put "an appropriate entity" in charge of managing the system in the future.

The [Mercury News](#) reports that Governor Schwarzenegger has also vetoed a bill that would allow school districts to reduce art and foreign language requirements for high school graduation. Currently, high school seniors must take one year of either a foreign language or visual/performing arts. Under the vetoed measure, students would have had the option of taking a vocational education course instead.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing plans to establish a new credential for secondary-level teachers of English language learners (ELLs). The new credential is designed to prepare teachers to work in special English language development (ELD) classes. English and foreign language teachers are the most likely candidates for the credential. The new credential is

expected to become available starting in the Fall of 2012.

As reported in Education Week, seven large California school districts have teamed up to form a non-profit organization called the California Office of Education Reform (CORE) whose purpose is to implement a number of reforms including accountability procedures for teachers, common standards, sharing of data, and turning around failing schools. The seven districts -- Los Angeles, San Francisco, Long Beach, Fresno, Sanger, Clovis, and Sacramento -- all had agreed to pursue reforms as part of California's application under the Federal Race to the Top competition. Although the State did not win RTTT funding, in large part because of resistance from some districts and teachers unions, the process provided impetus for cooperation and coordination among reform-minded districts.

THE Journal reports that an \$11.96 million grant from the National Science Foundation's Math and Science Partnership program will fund the San Francisco Bay -- Integrated Middle School Science Project which will serve low-income and minority students in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties. Researchers from California State University -- East Bay will develop academic content in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) areas that utilizes technology-delivered, real-time data from many government agencies including NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The program is intended to serve as a national model designed to encourage underserved students to pursue STEM subjects in college and their careers.

The Los Angeles Times reports the Los Angeles school district has reached a court settlement that limits the traditional policy of laying off teachers based solely on seniority. The agreement would cap the number of seniority-based dismissals at nearly all district schools. Under the plan, teachers with less than two years of experience could still be laid off on a seniority basis, but seniority-based layoffs would be distributed evenly among district schools. The settlement also creates an incentive program that will encourage teachers and principals to work at hard-to-staff schools.

Colorado Update

October 2010

As reported in [Education Week](#), Colorado voters will see three measures on the November ballot that could have a significant impact on education funding in the State. Amendment 60 would reduce the property taxes paid by individuals and businesses. One provision would reduce property-tax rates for public schools by half over the next ten years and replace the lost revenue with State funding. Amendment 61 would prohibit new local government borrowing after 2010 unless specifically approved by the voters. Yet another ballot measure, Proposition 101, would reduce a number of taxes and fees resulting, in the view of critics, in less funding for a range of government services, including education.

A new report from the non-profit group, Colorado Succeeds, urges Colorado to adopt many of the educational reforms implemented in Florida over the past decade. Entitled “Proving the Possible,” the report recommends grading schools based on performance, holding back third-graders who are unable to read at an appropriate level, and awarding bonuses to teachers whose students pass Advanced Placement tests. As reported in [The Denver Post](#), the Colorado Succeeds report emphasized fourth-grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Colorado’s scores have been largely unchanged over the past decade while Florida’s have steadily risen. And the scores for Colorado’s Latino fourth-grade students has gone up three percentage points compared with a 25 percent improvement in Florida.

Connecticut Update

October 2010

The New Haven Register reports that Connecticut school districts have, over the last two years, received nearly \$890 million in Federal stimulus money. These stimulus allocations have included \$542 million in State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF), \$133 million for special education programs, \$71 million for Title I (economically disadvantaged), \$22 million in School Improvement Grants, and \$5 million for Enhancing Education Through Technology (E²T²). The State has allocated the ARRA (stimulus) funds almost entirely to local schools through June 30, 2011. A new piece of extra Federal education support has come in the form of \$110 million from the Federal Ed Jobs program. The State expects to use this money to ease the “funding chill” effect next summer when the stimulus funding ends.

Delaware Update

October 2010

As reported in The News Journal, Delaware has begun implementation of its new annual assessment in reading and math. The Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System is a computer-based exam intended to help teachers and parents better track students' progress and to measure whether students are meeting goals under the Federal No Child Left Behind law. The new system is also expected to raise the passing score on the State assessment; the percentage of student scoring at "proficient" or higher on the assessment is expected to drop by ten to 28 percentage points. The new online tests were created under a five-year, \$24.6 million contract with the American Institutes for Research.

Florida Update

October 2010

In 2002, voters approved an amendment to the Florida Constitution, supported by teachers unions and the Florida PTA, that placed very specific limits on class sizes in Florida public schools. The class-by-class limits are scheduled to go into effect for the current school year and local school districts are taking drastic actions to comply with the limits. Among the measures being used are recalling laid off teachers, hiring lower-paid “associate teachers,” encouraging students to take online classes, and putting students from two grades in a single classroom. Some are raising local taxes. The November ballot contains a measure -- Amendment 8 -- that would loosen the requirements by raising the cap for individual classes by three students in grades K-3 and by five in higher grades. Schools would still have to meet the same average class size restrictions as last year. The Florida Supreme Court has rejected a challenge to the ballot measure, filed by the State teachers union. Proponents of Amendment 8 -- which requires 60 percent voter approval -- say it would “make class sizes more manageable without making them overcrowded.” Opponents argue Amendment 8 is intended only to save between \$350 million and \$1 billion per year in class-size costs. Placed on the ballot by Republicans in State legislature, the measure is supported by the Florida Chamber of Commerce, most business interests, many local school officials, and both major candidates for governor.

Georgia Update

October 2010

As reported in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia has had, for the past two years, a program that allows Georgia citizens to designate part of their State income taxes to private school scholarships through dollar-for-dollar credits. The schools -- 300 of which now participate -- can then use the money to offer tuition help for public school students who switch to the private school. Under State law, total donations are capped at \$50 million a year. In 2009, they totaled about \$25 million; the amount is expected to increase to \$35-40 million this year as more donors and schools participate. Critics of the program argue it deprives the State of revenue. In the upcoming gubernatorial election, Democrat Roy Barnes has said he wants to repeal the program while Republican Nathan Deal supports it.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution also reports that the Georgia Supreme Court is considering a case that could have significant implications for charter schools in the State. Filed by seven local school districts, the lawsuit questions whether the Georgia Charter Schools Commission has the legal authority to approve and fund charter schools. The districts, which include Atlanta and a number of other large districts, are urging the Court to overturn a lower court ruling which upheld the Commission's constitutionality and its ability to approve charter schools -- even those rejected by school districts. The districts say that money going to charter schools is largely local dollars and matching funds that should go to the districts that lose students to charters.

Education Week reports that, effective in the Fall of 2011, schools in the University System of Georgia will not be allowed to accept illegal immigrant applicants if the school has rejected any academically qualified applicants in the two most recent years. The schools involved are the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, Georgia State University, the Medical College of Georgia, and Georgia College & State University. Preliminary State data from the Fall of 2010 indicate that, of more than 310,000 students in the University System, 501 are in the country illegally or have incomplete documentation.

The Gwinnett County school district in suburban Atlanta has been awarded the 2010 Broad Prize for Urban Education. Sponsored by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, the prize will provide \$1 million in college scholarships for high school students graduating in 2011. The four other Broad finalists this year, each receiving \$250,000 in scholarship money, were Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina), Montgomery County (Maryland), Socorro (Texas), and Ysleta (Texas).

Illinois Update

October 2010

The Chicago Tribune reports that Illinois has been lowering the scores on annual achievement exams required for students to be rated “proficient.” For example, in 2006, 36 out of 56 points (64 percent) were needed to pass the fifth-grade reading test; now only 31 points (55 percent) are required. Similarly, in fifth-grade math the proficiency score dropped from 36 of 76 points in 2006 to only 32 points this year. State officials say the changes represent a standard statistical process designed to ensure that tests -- in which the difficulty of questions varies -- are comparable across years.

A new report from Advance Illinois, a bipartisan educational policy group, says that Illinois is doing an inadequate job of monitoring students’ progress from grade to grade and of closing the achievement gaps among the State’s economic and racial groups. The report found that the State has improved the quality of its preschool programs but is behind other states in K-12 education and does not adequately prepare high school students for college and careers. According to the report, only about a third of the State’s fourth- and eighth-graders meet national standards in reading and math and only about 22 percent of high school students are ready for college-level work.

The Peoria Journal Star reports that Federal Ed Jobs funds, intended to retain teacher jobs, will not be used to bring back laid-off teachers largely because it arrived at school districts after staffing decisions for the current school year were already made. Totaling \$415 million for Illinois, the Ed Jobs money will go toward paying salaries for existing teachers and for reducing the amount districts would otherwise spend out of reserves.

According to Education Week, the Chicago school district has been awarded \$34 million in the latest round of grants under the Federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program. TIF grants must include plans for performance-based teacher compensation; but the Chicago Teachers Union, under new leadership, has declined to support the plan saying they have never agreed to merit

pay. Illinois law requires that, by 2012, half of Chicago teachers will have a significant portion of their evaluations tied to student outcomes.

The Wall Street Journal reports that Ron Huberman, the superintendent of the Chicago school district will step down at the end of the current school year. Mayor Richard Daley, who appointed Huberman to the post, has said he will not seek reelection. The new mayor will appoint the next school leader. Huberman has said that, before he leaves office, he plans to restructure the district's debt and extend the school day at many of the city's schools.

Indiana Update

October 2010

The Indiana Department of Education is implementing a pilot program by which at least 35,000 middle and high school students will receive online math tutoring. Conducted by Apangea Learning, the after-school tutoring program will cost the State \$1 million and will serve nearly 200 schools. If results are positive, the contract could be renewed.

As reported in the [Indianapolis Star](#), seven struggling Indiana schools, including four in Indianapolis, will receive more than \$29 million in Federal School Improvement Grants. Two Indianapolis schools -- John Marshall and George Washington Community High Schools -- will receive about \$2 million each over three years to develop and implement plans to improve student and teacher performance. Another two Indianapolis schools, both charters -- the Challenge Foundation Academy and Indianapolis Metropolitan High School -- will also receive funding this year. Another four Indianapolis schools -- Arlington, Northwest, Howe, and Manuel -- could be identified for SIG funds next year.

Iowa Update

October 2010

According to the Des Moines Register, Iowa has close to \$755 million in surplus and reserve funds as of the fiscal year that ended in June. The State has \$419 million in a number of emergency or “rainy day” accounts and \$336 million in surpluses. The surplus is \$235 million more than expected because of higher-than-anticipated State revenues. The data was released by Governor Chet Culver to counter arguments by his challenger in the November election that the State has a deficit.

Kentucky Update

October 2010

A new report by the Kentucky Department of Education says that only 34 percent of the State's 2010 public high school graduates were ready for college or employment. Moreover, only six of the State's 174 school districts had at least one school at which half of its graduates were college or career ready. The readiness measures included the number of students meeting State-established benchmarks on the ACT college-entrance exams and the number of graduates receiving career readiness certificates. The State's goal is 66 percent college readiness by 2014. Currently, nearly half of the entering freshmen at State colleges and universities need remediation in at least one course.

Louisiana Update

October 2010

According to The New Orleans Times-Picayune, Louisiana plans to implement a number of initiatives to improve special education services in New Orleans schools. With 4,500 special education students (nine percent of the City's public school enrollment), the district will establish a central enrollment office that will match students with appropriate schools to meet their needs. The State will also create an office to monitor and improve training for special education administrators, particularly related to compliance with special education laws.

Education Week reports that New Orleans is in the early stages of a construction boom for public schools keyed by a \$1.84 billion settlement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to cover hurricane-related damages to schools. Currently, the Recovery School District (RSD), which oversees 70 of the City's 86 public schools, houses about 6,000 out of its total 36,000 enrollment in portable classrooms. The current plan calls for about 85 school campuses across the City. The first phase of construction includes 22 new schools and complete renovation of ten others by 2014. The FEMA settlement will provide the State and districts with an unusual amount of flexibility as to how and where the money is spent.

Maryland Update

October 2010

As reported in [The Washington Post](#), Maryland's higher high school graduation requirements have resulted in very few seniors (0.06 percent) failing to receive diplomas because of their test scores in English, algebra, biology, and government. Nearly nine percent of the senior class graduated only after completing alternative projects. More and more students are using alternative assessments because they are having difficulty passing the regular High School Assessments. Moreover, the tests are affecting the performance ratings of local schools. In Montgomery County, for example, 10 of 25 high schools missed Federal benchmarks largely because of the scores of students with disabilities or English language learners. In nearby Prince George's County, 17 of 22 high schools failed to meet Federal standards for similar reasons.

A new study by the Century Foundation suggests that policies that integrate income levels across schools or an entire district could be more effective as school improvement strategies than directing extra resources to high-poverty schools. As reported in [The Washington Post](#), the study tracked the academic performance of 858 elementary students who lived in Montgomery County public housing from 2001-2007. After seven years, students in lower-poverty schools performed eight percentage points higher on standardized math tests than did students in high-poverty schools that had received extra district resources. The lower-poverty schools also scored higher in reading but the results were not statistically significant.

[Education Week](#) reports that a proposed Baltimore City teacher contract calls for all schools, within three years, to implement a plan under which 80 percent of teachers in a school could help set working conditions including longer work days and more planning time. The contract's pay structure would give the districts' 6,000 teachers an automatic two-percent pay increase in Year 1 and a one-time \$1,500 signing stipend pay for with Federal Ed Jobs money. The contract has been applauded by both district officials and national teacher union representatives. However, teachers in Baltimore have rejected the new collective bargaining contract that would have based their pay, not on seniority and academic degrees, but rather on student scores and professional

development.

Massachusetts Update

October 2010

Education Week reports that the Boston school district has reached a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Education and Justice to fix longstanding violations of the civil rights of English language learners (ELLs). The agreement requires that all 135 Boston schools provide services to ELLs and that the district offer “compensatory services” to students who previously had erroneously been reported as “opting out” of Federally required language services. The district will have spent \$10 million last year and this year on improving ELL services; about \$8.2 million of that will come from Federal stimulus funds. It is estimated that 8,300 ELLs have not received appropriate services. Under the agreement, ELLs must be taught core academic content using “sheltered-content instructional technologies” by certified English-as-second language teachers or teachers who have received a minimum of 70 hours of training in ELL strategies.

Michigan Update

October 2010

During a Washington meeting on School Improvement Grants (SIG), hosted by Learning Point, a Michigan education official indicated that only 28 of the State's 108 SIG-eligible schools actually received money. The eligible schools requested a total of \$850 million, but the State only received \$119 million for allocation to the schools. The State official said that the schools to which SIG funds have been awarded are those that "looked like they already began work to improve." She also noted that almost all SIG schools use external (often private sector) funding in addition to State and Federal funds.

As reported in the Detroit Free Press, Michigan has been allocated \$316 million in Federal Ed Jobs money to hire and retain teachers. However, the formula for allocating the funds passed by the State legislature violates Federal rules as indicated by the U.S. Department of Education. Accordingly, Governor Jennifer Granholm has vetoed a large part of the State's education spending bill and the legislature will have to reconvene -- after the November elections -- to pass a new allocation formula.

The Detroit News reports that Michigan is withholding \$5 million in Federal special education money from the Detroit school district because the district is out of compliance with IDEA.

According to State officials, Detroit has failed to:

- monitor the progress of its students with disabilities;
- develop inclusion protocols;
- demonstrate that special education staff are appropriately trained;
- provide a list of qualified special education staff; and
- compile a list of students who did not receive evaluations or services.

This is the first time a Michigan district has had funds withheld for IDEA noncompliance.

Mississippi Update

October 2010

According to The Jackson Clarion-Ledger, home-schooling in Mississippi has grown by about 28 percent over the past nine years -- from 10,271 in 2000-01 to 13, 225 in 2009-10. This is far greater than the national increase of between seven and 12 percent over the same period.

Mississippi has almost no requirements for home-schooling -- only that parents provide the local school district with child's name, birth date, and a "simple description" of the education program to be used.

Montana Update

October 2010

According to the New America Foundation, Montana received \$31 million in Ed Jobs money intended to prevent teacher layoffs. But it appears that the State will distribute the money through the State's basic school aid formula, supplanting State funds. This is not in violation of Federal law because Montana maintains certain education funding levels.

New Jersey Update

October 2010

The Newark Star-Ledger reports that Governor Christie has proposed a six-point plan for reforming education in New Jersey:

- merit pay;
- changes to teacher tenure;
- completion of a Statewide data system that tracks student achievement;
- a teacher evaluation task force;
- creating a “master teacher” designation; and
- allowing alternate route certification for principals.

The Governor’s merit pay proposal would prohibit seniority or degrees in fields other than math and science from influencing teacher salary increases. The funding for the merit pay system, according to the Governor, would come from firing bad teachers through tenure reform.

As reported on njspotlight.com, New Jersey has created an expedited process by which charter schools can win State approval. The State expects to receive a record number of applicants -- as many as 50 -- under its new fast-track approval process, including at least three national networks. The process is intended to attract established operators who can open schools quickly. Among national operators, KIPP already has a large presence in New Jersey and hopes to double its enrollment. Mastery Charter Schools and Imagine Schools have applied to operate in the State. The New Jersey Charter Schools Association believes the new, friendlier environment will attract many established operators. Charters are expected to be among the beneficiaries of Mark Zuckerberg’s \$100 million donation to the Newark school district if it is consummated.

As reported in The Newark Star-Ledger, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority is making up to \$30 million in low-interest bonds available to the State’s 73 charter schools. To be awarded competitively, the low-cost financing is to be used “to construct new facilities, repair dilapidated buildings, modernize classrooms, and address health and safety issues.” Applications

are due by November 19.

The much-publicized \$100 million donation from *Facebook* founder, Mark Zuckerberg, to transform Newark's failing school system may never be implemented in the way Governor Chris Christie and Mayor Cory Booker have been promoting. The plan, which calls for the Governor to appoint the Mayor as a "special assistant" to oversee education in the district, is apparently not permitted under State law. According to the Newark Star-Ledger, responsibility for education in Newark's schools resides solely with the State's Commissioner of Education. The Mayor is in the process of developing a reform plan for Newark schools in anticipation that the State legal issues can be resolved.

New Mexico Update

October 2010

As reported in Education Week, New Mexico has become the 40th state to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The State plans to delay implementation to 2012 in order to prepare for the changes in assessment, instructional materials, and professional development reflecting the new standards.

New York Update

October 2010

The New York Times reports that the New York State Board of Regents has voted to exempt school districts from a State requirement to provide extra help to all students who fail the State's standardized exams. Easing the requirement is intended to reduce the financial burden on districts who have seen the numbers of such students grow dramatically after the State made it harder to pass the exams. New York City school officials say that the ruling would not change their requirement that schools must have plans to help struggling students. Data from New York City indicate that, of the 239,000 students who failed the English test, 108,000 would have passed last year. And, of the 196,000 City students who failed the math test, 125,000 would have passed under the easier standard. A survey indicates that, statewide, about half of the districts plan to use the new flexibility not to offer remediation for students who would have passed in 2009.

The Ithaca Journal reports that many New York State school districts have expressed frustrations about the amount of paperwork involved in their funding from the Federal Race to the Top competition. New York won a total of \$700 million in RTTT funding over four years, \$348 million of which is being passed on to local school districts. State requirements call for 75 percent of district RTTT money to be spent on network teams consisting of curriculum, instructional, and data analysis specialists. The other 25 percent must be spent on the State's new teacher/principal evaluation system. Many smaller districts are finding that the amount of RTTT money they could receive is not enough to do what the State requires.

PC World reports that a joint effort by the New York Institute of Technology in partnership with education organizations in the State, will make *Google Apps* software available to teachers and students in all of New York's public and private K-12 schools. The *Google Apps* package includes email, instant messaging, office productivity applications (e.g., word processing), and Microsoft's *Live@EDU*, a free, hosted collaboration and communication suite. Other participants in the partnership are the New York State Teacher Centers, BOCES, State teacher

unions, and other professional organizations. *Google Apps* is also available to K-12 schools in Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, and Oregon.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has declared war on the City's seniority system for teachers which is strongly supported by the teachers union. Like many school districts across the country, New York City will likely have to lay off public school teachers when Federal stimulus money runs out at the end of the current school year. Under current State law, teachers with the least seniority would be the first to go. A similar effort last year to change the law went nowhere.

North Carolina Update

October 2010

The Winston-Salem Journal reports that the North Carolina State Board has voted to eliminate performance standards on end-of-course and end-of-grade tests as requirements for grade promotion or high school graduation. Known as “gateways,” the performance standards required students to pass end-of-grade reading and math exams in third, fifth, and eighth grade to be promoted. High school students had to pass five core end-of-course tests to graduate. Although eliminated as graduation requirements, the end-of-course tests will continue to count for 25 percent of each student’s course grade.

As reported in Newsweek, since 2008, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district has been implementing an innovative school turnaround strategy called the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI). The district held a competition to identify the most effective principals based on hard data such as student achievement scores. The chosen principals were then given the “opportunity” to turn around one of the districts’ failing schools. Each principal would get a ten percent raise, freedom from many district rules, the authority to “transfer out” up to five teachers, and the right to pick an eight-person transformation team. Every one of the winning principals accepted the opportunity. All seven of the original seven SSI schools showed increases in student proficiency as did the second wave of SSI schools. The \$3 million SSI is now in its third year in 20 schools.

Ohio Update

October 2010

Starting in 2014, the current Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) -- required for a high school diploma - will be replaced by a three-part series of assessments. Approved by the legislature in 2009, the three-part system will include:

- passing a college entrance exam such as the ACT;
- passing end-of-course final exams in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies classes; and
- a senior project.

The Columbus Dispatch reports that nearly 14,000 students from low-performing public schools are using State-funded vouchers to attend private schools. The five-year-old Educational Choice Scholarship Program provides high school students with vouchers worth up to \$5,000 a year and younger students with vouchers up to \$4,250. The State is required by law to gather data and report on voucher student performance by private school. According to the State, voucher students in private schools performed no better on State tests than public school students. About 85,000 students in 199 public schools will be eligible to apply for vouchers for next school year.

Despite the fact that no new online charter schools have opened in Ohio in the past five years, virtual school enrollment has continued to grow. According to The Columbus Dispatch, the number of students in Ohio's 27 online charter schools has risen by 46 percent since 2005 -- up to more than 29,000 students. The State's first online school, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) started in 2000 with 2,200 students; it now has 9,300. Only one virtual charter -- Ohio Connections Academy -- has received an "A" grade on the State's accountability system. Nearly two-thirds are rated "C" or better, an improvement over past years. Ohio's online students must meet the same academic standards and pass the same State exams as traditional public school students.

Oklahoma Update

October 2010

Last June, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry signed into law a program that would provide public money that would allow students with disabilities to attend private schools. Such a scholarship (or voucher) program is similar to those in place in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Ohio, and Utah. Thus far, 22 private schools -- nearly all affiliated with some religion -- have been approved by the State to receive scholarship money. But, as reported in Education Week, a number of Oklahoma school districts in the Tulsa area (Bixby, Broken Arrow, Jenks, and Union) have voted not to comply with the State law. These districts have cited as reasons, cost (estimated at \$4,000 to \$11,000 per student per year) and the fact that private schools are not obligated by Federal law to honor students' individualized education programs (IEPs).

Oklahoma's November ballot includes two conflicting measures that could affect public school funding, according to Education Week. Question 744 would require the State to increase per-pupil spending up to the average of surrounding states (currently, Oklahoma ranks 49th nationally in per-pupil expenditures). The other measure, Question 754, would include in the State constitution language stating that the legislature is not required to spend a specific amount on any one government program and that legislators are not required to make spending decisions based on other states' appropriations.

Oregon Update

October 2010

The Oregon legislature has allocated nearly \$18 million from the State's emergency funds to offset an eight percent across-the-board cut to agency budgets for the 2009-11 biennium. K-12 education received \$7 million of the emergency money which, along with \$118 million in Federal stimulus funds should prevent school districts from having to cut budgets through January when the State's new legislative session begins. According to the New America Foundation, it is expected that the legislature will allocate an additional \$34 million to prevent teacher layoffs or reduce the number of school days in the 2010-11 school year.

According to Education Week, the November ballot in Oregon contains Measure 75 that would authorize a new resort casino and establish the Oregon Job Growth, Education, and Communities Fund. If the measure is approved by the voters, 25 percent of the casino's revenues would go to the Fund and, each year, 50 percent of the Fund's revenues would be given to public school districts for classroom instruction, including staff salaries, textbooks, and classroom technology.

South Carolina Update

October 2010

As reported in Education Week, South Carolina has launched the first phase of a new student information system that will track student progress and help find ways to improve instruction. Known as *PowerSchool*, the system will analyze individual students' performance on standardized tests and other measures, as well as demographic data and link it to the teachers and types of instructional methods that were used in each of the subjects. It will then suggest possible teaching approaches that would work best with each student.

Texas Update

October 2010

As reported on Stateline.org, Texas is facing a possible \$21 billion budget shortfall over the next two years. The unexpected shortfall can be attributed to a number of factors, the most significant of which is sales tax revenues which have been \$2 billion short of projections for 2010. A second factor is the State's continued growth; the population is up 1.2 million since 2006 and school enrollment has grown by 800,000 in the past decade. In addition, Texans used \$6 billion in Federal stimulus funds to balance its current budget thus delaying the need to address the shortfall until this year. The State has more than \$8 billion in a rainy day fund. And State agencies have been told to prepare ten-percent cuts from their current budgets, which could bring \$4 billion in savings (with thousands of laid-off employees). State officials have said they will try to protect K-12 education from the cuts.

The [Dallas Morning News](#) reports that affluent, generally high-performing school districts have adopted a policy of not ranking students who are not in the top ten percent of their graduating classes. Officials from these districts believe that ranking the lowest 90 percent of students -- some of whom may outperform top students in other districts -- can hurt students applying to college. Among the districts already implementing such a policy are the Carroll, Coppell, and Highland Park districts; Plano is considering a similar plan.

Utah Update

October 2010

According to The Salt Lake Tribune, Utah State education officials have indicated that the State should spend more in such areas as early childhood education and learning technology. With the State's public school enrollment expected to grow by 50,000 students over the next five years, other areas in which the State should invest more heavily include aligning curriculum to meet workforce needs and improving teacher capabilities. Currently, a State task force is developing recommendations for ensuring high school seniors have appropriate counseling and student planning. The State also plans to invite school districts and charter schools to apply for \$50,000 each to conduct pilot projects that demonstrate innovative applications of technology.

Virginia Update

October 2010

As reported in [eSchoolNews](#), Virginia is working with Pearson Education to implement a pilot program that would put the State's fourth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade social studies curriculum on an iPad. The pilot program is part of the State's "Beyond Textbooks" initiative which includes products and services donated by many private sector partners, including textbook publishers and software developers. A total of 230 iPads will be purchased through a \$120,000 grant from the Governor's Productivity Investment Fund. Among the private firms providing content, platforms, or applications at no cost to the State or schools are: Pearson, Five Ponds Press, Victory Productions, Adobe, MashON, McGraw-Hill, and Inkling.

The [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#) reports that a Virginia commission is exploring ways to reform the State's higher education system. The Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform has a 15-year goal of increasing by 100,000 the number of two- and four-year degrees. Among the issues the Commission is considering are a new State funding model, year-round schools, increased reliance on online courses, and State subsidies for college students at both public and private schools. The Commission's final report is expected in December and legislation is anticipated to be introduced in the January session of the General Assembly.

West Virginia Update

October 2010

A new report by West Virginia's Higher Education Policy Commission urged the State, in order to compete in the global economy, to increase its rate of college completion to at least the national average of 51 percent. As reported in The Charleston Gazette, current six-year graduation rates range from 15 percent at Bluefield State College to 59 percent at West Virginia University. The Commission's study found that, since 1995, more than 125,000 West Virginia students had attended, but failed to complete degrees, at the State's two- and four-year institutions. At its current graduation rates, the State will be 45,000 degree-earners short of the national average goal by 2018.

Wisconsin Update

October 2010

The expansion of virtual learning in Wisconsin has placed a premium on teachers who know how to employ effective online instructional techniques. According to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, a new Wisconsin State law requires teachers to receive 30 hours of professional development before July 1 in order to teach fully online K-12 courses. A number of schools and colleges have begun offering in-house training programs, certifications, and graduate school credits for online teachers.