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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 29, 2013
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke, Blair Curry, Suzanne Thouvenelle, and Paula Love
SUBJ: Budget/Sequesters; State Waiver Critics, Title I; Early Childhood Survey; GSA Purchasing Schedules; and State Profile Updates

Included in this TechMIS issue is a Special Report on the October 17th debt ceiling/Federal shutdown negotiated deal which has now evolved into a budget battle over funding levels and future sequestrations. This could have an even greater impact on education funding than the Federal shutdown (which was really a “slowdown” for most USED programs). The Executive Director of Committee on Education Funding (CEF), Joel Packer, has said that he is “mildly hopeful” that the sequester impact will be reduced, at least temporarily, while leading Republican House budget negotiator, Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI), says that he’s encouraged about the possibility of scrapping mandatory sequesters and that there are “smarter ways of cutting spending than the across-the-board approach,” as reported by Politico.

On October 8th, we sent subscribers a Special Report on USED field test flexibility guidance which was rather complex and raised unanswered questions which have thus far not been resolved through addenda that, as of this date, have yet to be published. Any addenda or further guidance provided in this area relating to field testing”double testing” or the companion set of guidance on extending by one year state implementation of teacher and principal evaluation will be monitored/reported.

A Funding Alert on October 2nd also reported on the Government shutdown and some good news on the October allocation of the second round of funds allocation for Title I and IDEA special education and other programs that were advance-funded.

The Washington Update includes a number of items and updates regarding developments, some of which have been noted in previous reports, of interest to most TechMIS subscribers:

- **Page 1**
 New USED guidance sent to state and district Title I coordinators will likely result in “newly opening” or “significantly expanding” charter schools which are designated “LEAs,” receiving increased Title I allocations mid-year when final enrollments are estimated. These “new funds” could be taken from the State 4% SEA set-aside for school improvement which normally would be allocated to priority and focus schools. Even though the number of such charter school LEAs may be small, some mid-year purchasing opportunities may exist.
- **Page 2**
 USED approves the Texas NCLB flexibility waiver request which has implications for state waiver renewals for 35 other states. The USED-approved, conditional, one-year waiver for Texas allows the state 4% set-aside (Section 1003a) for school improvement to be used in specific districts, not only for interventions in priority and focus schools, but also for districtwide reform initiatives and interventions which could facilitate districtwide purchases of certain tools and applications that help priority and focus school “turnarounds.”
- **Page 4**
 A letter to Secretary Duncan from major education reform and civil advocacy groups recommends that USED follow tougher/stricter interpretations of requirements placed on states seeking waiver renewals. If the strict interpretations of requirements are followed by USED, opportunities could be created for TechMIS subscribers who provide interventions and related professional development and support for low-performing students, especially in priority and focus schools, and earlier identification of these schools for targeting.
- **Page 6**
 The first of three Early Childhood Technology Today surveys reports that a majority of early childhood educators use technology because children enjoy it and it helps meet program goals. The majority of teachers using technology have desktops or laptops with far fewer having access to iPod Touches, smart phones, or tablets.
- **Page 9**
 For certain technology products, TechMIS subscribers should consider getting on the GSA schedule and suggest that district purchasing officials use GSA Cooperative Purchasing to save time on procurements. Small businesses which sell devices, tools, ADP, software, cloud computing devices, and professional development can use GSA schedules as a way to gain visibility and increased sales to districts aware of the GSA Cooperative Purchasing Schedule.

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In the eight states which have not received NCLB state waiver flexibility, districts must still meet most NCLB provisions and can take advantage of prior 2010 “flexibilities” which can provide TechMIS subscribers opportunities for expanding professional development and intervention sales, especially in districts which are identified for improvement.

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The influential Business Roundtable (BRT) plans to create an independent organization to review curriculum and instructional materials to determine their alignment with Common Core State Standards to “help educators make well-informed, cost-effective decisions.”

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A number of miscellaneous items are also addressed including:

- a) The third annual “Primary Sources” survey reports that 97 percent of teachers are aware of Common Core State Standards and 73 percent are enthusiastic about implementation. The top two challenges are to provide more teacher planning time to find materials and plan lessons and to provide quality professional development, especially for teachers of at-risk student populations.
- b) The 1,200+ districts which receive portions of the \$1 billion annual Impact Aid appropriation will shortly be receiving about a third of their money -- much earlier this fiscal year following an announcement by USED officials at the recent National Association of Federally-Impacted Schools (NAFIS).
- c) The Federal Education Budget Project (FEBP) has posted its 2012 school year district-level spending of state pre-K funds, which also includes data for Head Start programs in more than 180 school districts.
- d) NGA and CCSSO has been joined by other Common Core advocate groups, including the National Conference of State Legislatures, to create a six-state Collaborative in which associations will provide some funding and technical support to help states share practices and implement the Common Core State Standards.
- e) Almost 220 Race to the Top district applications have been submitted for a total of \$120 million in new grants that must be awarded by December 31st.
- f) The number of states renaming “Common Core” standards and assessments continues to increase.

The state profile updates address a wide range of issues, including the Common Core State Standards and assessment consortia, state assessments, school funding, voucher programs, schools/districts identified for improvement, and technology initiatives.

Special Report:
**The October 17th Debt Ceiling/Federal Shutdown Negotiated Deal
Has Now Evolved Into a Budget Battle Over Funding Levels
and Future Sequestrations, Which Will Have an Even Greater Impact
on Education Funding Than the Shutdown**

*A Technology Monitoring and Information Service (TechMIS)
Special Report*

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October 29, 2013

The October 17th deal, approved by the House and Senate and signed by the President, has reopened the Federal Government at least until January 15th when the Continuing Resolution expires and has increased the debt ceiling until February 7th. However, the more important battle is just beginning over the FY 2014 budget and agency/program funding levels and whether sequestration will continue in 2014 as mandated by the Budget Control Act or, at the least, providing departments/agencies “flexibilities” in prioritizing program funding levels rather than being forced to conduct program-by-program across-the-board cuts. Below, we provide a framework for monitoring/viewing the ensuing budget battle and progress being made to meet deadlines agreed to in the October 17th Act resulting from HR 2775 “Continuing Appropriations for Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2014 and For Other Purposes.”

As we reported in our July 24th TechMIS Special Report, the Senate passed its FY 2014 budget with an overall spending level at \$1.058 trillion for labor, health and education, which was slightly higher than President Obama’s proposed budget, both of which were well above the Budget Control Act mandated level of \$967 billion. The Senate bill obviously ignored the effects of sequestration. The House Republican leadership made several proposals to meet the mandated sequestration cuts, but as the *Ed Money Watch* blog (October 17th) reported, “...got cold feet when it came time to actually draft an education spending bill that met the new spending caps. Efforts earlier this year to bolster funding for the Department of Defense by reducing substantial amounts of funding for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education failed because of internal dissent among House Republicans about the size of the reduction.” Because of the wide gap in funding levels for health, labor and, education between the House and the Senate (e.g., about \$42 billion), only political finger-pointing occurred without appointment of committee conferees. As part of the October 17th deal, a

provision calls for “a bicameral, bipartisan budget conference committee” to follow the more traditional budget negotiation process to arrive at an agreement on department and program funding levels and to “focus on altering or eliminating sequestration in favor of more targeted cuts,” according to the *Ed Money Watch* blog. As Education Week (October 18th) argued, “The next few months may present the clearest opportunity for education advocates to turn off the automatic sequester cuts, analysts say. Getting rid of them could be a lot tougher if the cuts remain well into 2014, an election year.” The article quotes Michael Griffith, a leading education finance expert, as stating, “If they don’t do it now, there’s this feeling in the education community that the sequestration cuts are permanent.”

One way to soften the impact of continued sequestration would be allowing departments/agencies the flexibility/discretion to prioritize program cuts rather than force across-the-board cuts as that occurred earlier this Spring. However, the Administration turned down the opportunity offered by the House Republican leadership in 2011 to have such programmatic flexibility under the sequestration mandate. The Administration also opposed Senator Collins’ (R-ME) proposal in early October to provide department/agency flexibility as an alternative. The preferred alternative, however, would be elimination of sequestration for FY 2014 and the remainder of the decade as called for in the Budget Control Act; however, this would require serious negotiating between the Senate and House conferees to close the \$42 billion gap between the House and Senate levels and arrive at the \$967 billion level mandated by the Budget Control Act.

As the *Ed Money Watch* blog notes, the Continuing Resolution through January 15th is at the FY 2013 post-sequester level -- about \$985 billion -- which means that, on January 15th, an additional \$18 billion cut, which should have occurred in 2013, but which because of a last-minute deal passed in January under the American Taxpayer Relief Act was delayed until FY 2014, will occur. As the veteran *Ed Money Watch* blogger Clare McCann argued, “That means another sequester will hit federal programs on January 15 -- the same date that the funding expires under this plan. That’s no accident, Senator Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) wanted to push the deadline for the continuing resolution up against the deadline for sequestration to force the issue further. He hopes to use the next debate over funding the government in just a few short months to press Republicans to provide federal agencies with flexibility to implement the sequester, rather than to apply it evenly to all programs, or even to cancel the sequester entirely.” In the October 18th Education Week article, education budget expert Joel Packer, Executive Director of the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), said he is “mildly hopeful” that Congress might spare districts from the sequester, even if temporarily. The next round of sequester cuts would hit military/DoD spending particularly hard which might generate enough pressure from that sector to make changes to the entire sequester situation.

The Bipartisan Budget Conference Committee must, by December 13th, report its recommendations for the FY 2014 budget and what to do with future sequestrations. For USED, the potential amount of sequestration is difficult to answer because some of the mandatory programs, which were exempt from sequestration in 2013, are now under sequestration. The Committee on Education Funding provided an October 14th update which estimated that, on

October 1st, previously exempt, mandatory USED programs were cut by \$300 million which included \$237 million in vocational rehabilitation state grants and \$31 million in student aid administration. Most observers feel that big programs, such as Title I and IDEA which were cut \$728 million and \$690 million in 2013, would be prime candidates for further sequestration. Others, however, have argued that mandatory programs which are now no longer exempt from sequestration and which have surpluses (such as Pell grants) could more than make up for the \$2.0 - \$2.5 billion USED sequestration amount under current law. If flexibility is provided to Secretary Duncan to use his discretion in deciding what individual programs to cut, it is not clear whether the Administration's flagship programs such as Race to the Top with proposed funding at \$250 million or the new Early Childhood initiative with proposed funding of \$750 million would be safe or targeted for cuts to arrive at the targeted sequestration amount.

Some of the key deadlines and decisions to keep in mind include:

- December 13th when the Bipartisan Budget Committee conferees report their FY 2014 and long-term budget recommendations, along with sequestration recommendations.
- January 15th when the existing Continuing Resolution expires and whether the \$18 million sequestration cut for 2013, which has been postponed to 2014, takes effect and its impact on USED programs immediately thereafter.
- Activities leading up to the February 7, 2014 negotiated debt ceiling decision or a repeat of the most recent debacle.

As McCann noted in her *Ed Money Watch* blog, some of the budget committee conferees, including Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), were on the Super Committee which, over a year ago, failed to reach a broad deal on budget policy, leading to sequestration implementation. If the new bipartisan budget committee does not arrive at negotiated agreements on long-term fiscal matters then, "...we'll be right back in the same place, facing a potential government shutdown (and soon after, another possible government default) by mid-January."

Washington Update

Vol. 18, No. 10, October 29, 2013

New USED Guidance Will Likely Result in “Newly Opening” or “Significantly Expanding” Charter School LEAs Receiving Increased Title I Allocations Shortly, Possibly at the Expense of Priority and Focus Schools Receiving Reallocated Funds for School Improvement Under SEA 4% Set-Aside

On September 23rd Monique Chism, Director of the Student Achievement and School Accountability Program (i.e., the National Title I Program), sent a letter to Title I directors on how to allocate Title I funds to “newly opening” or “significantly expanding” charter school LEAs. The need for alternative ways of calculating the new amounts was required because of conflicts within existing Title I charter school provisions and because of districts’ “hold harmless provisions” affected by the 2013 sequestration. The clarification and the actual allocation guidance are rather complex; however, the bottom line is that “newly opening” and “significantly expanding” charter school LEA will “receive Title I and other Federal education formula funds for which it is eligible within five months after opening or undergoing a significant expansion in enrollment.”

The SEA is allowed to use alternative means for calculating the amount which should be provided to these newly opening and expanding charter school LEAs without reallocating an amount below an existing LEA’s hold harmless Title I allocation. In a sense, the SEA must ensure that all LEAs

receiving Title I allocations above their hold harmless amounts should share in a reduction “across the board” to ensure that “newly formed” or “expanding” charters receive equitable amounts required under Section 5206.

To the extent that the guidance is actually followed this school year, additional funding over the next several months will most likely be allocated by SEAs to newly formed or expanded charter LEAs which could provide opportunities for certain TechMIS subscribers who target such schools. As discussed with Rich Long, Executive Director of the National Title I Association and other Title I experts, it is not clear exactly how the SEA will “ratably reduce” LEA Title I allocations to come up with such an amount. Given the SEAs penchant for “following the path of least resistance,” we feel it is likely that such funds could be “deducted” from the SEA 4% set-aside for school improvement which are supposed to be allocated to Priority and Focus Schools. If so, this process could reduce the amount of such remaining 4% set-aside funding for school improvement going to Priority and Focus Schools this fall, or at the least could slow down the process for reallocating the remaining amounts of the 4% SES set-aside until later this winter.

Information is currently being collected on how SEAs will handle this situation, which we will share with TechMIS subscribers, once we have analyzed such responses should such information be provided by SEAs.

USED Approves NCLB Flexibility Texas Waiver Request Which Has Implications Beyond Texas for State Waiver Renewals for 35 Other States

On September 30th, USED approved Texas' current request for an NCLB waiver flexibility after almost six months of negotiations. Some of the NCLB provisions that were allowed in Texas suggest additional flexibilities which will likely be approved for the 35 states which received waiver approvals prior to August 2012 and which are now seeking two-year renewals. As we noted in our analysis of the state waiver renewal guidance Special Report (September 26th), some flexibilities could have important implications for many TechMIS subscribers.

On page 5 of the 74-page Texas waiver request, the first NCLB Title I provision for which flexibility was requested and approved was Section 1003 (a) which requires the SEA 4% set-aside for school improvement activities. As stated in the Texas waiver request, "Specifically, this waiver is requested to allow TEA to distribute 95% of the 4% reservation to Title I schools identified as priority, focus, or support schools and for systemic improvement at the LEA level to support the identified schools. Current regulations prohibit the use of any Title I School Improvement Program funds at the LEA level." As we stated in our recent TechMIS Special Report (September 26th), the guidelines for state waiver renewals emphasize that LEAs are to be held accountable for turning around lowest-performing schools. We also stated, "Under SIG guidance, initially SIG funds were to be allocated to and used only in individual Tier

I and Tier II schools and not by districts for district-wide reform components, with the exception of dropout 'early warning systems.' Over time this has changed, and now one can assume that if districts are to be held accountable, then such Title I funds will likely be able to be used for certain types of districtwide reforms which are critical to turning around or otherwise enable low-performing Priority and Focus Schools to meet exit criteria."

USED's approval of the Texas waiver request for Section 1003 (a) will undoubtedly be a signal for most, if not all, of the 35 states seeking two-year waiver renewals to make similar requests. Over the last decade, the SEA 4% set-aside has grown steadily, amounting to \$500-550 million nationwide last year. However, as we noted in our TechMIS Special Reports on the impact of sequestration (March and April), in some states the sequester could limit the amount of Title I funds which the SEA could withhold from districts -- particularly large districts -- because of "hold harmless" provisions, which could reduce the amount the SEA could reallocate under the 4% set-aside to districts for use in Priority and Focus Schools as required under the August 2012 waiver guidance. The amount of funds states are in the process of reallocating under Section 1003 (a) is not yet available because the allocation process is still underway, but in most states it does provide opportunities for purchases this Fall, especially in large districts.

While the Texas flexibility request does provide greater opportunities for districtwide purchases of interventions and other activities facilitating the turnaround on Priority and Focus Schools, the Texas request document also states that a separate

waiver will be submitted to allow “Title I funds to be used to support Title I support schools.” As we noted in our September 26th TechMIS Special Report, the waiver renewal guidance states that interventions for Priority and Focus Schools must be more “rigorous.” It states that, for “other Title I schools,” including support schools, the process for selecting interventions must be “rigorous.”

Throughout the approved Texas waiver request, the TEA emphasizes that “Flexibility would allow the state’s existing systems of reforms and interventions to guide the support and improvement of teaching and learning.” And with respect to specific flexibilities, it states that the waiver would “allow TEA to identify schools for graduated levels of support and intervention based on the state’s accountability system rather than using the current AYP regulations.” Regarding the requested flexibility to get out from under parent/school choice and supplemental educational services 20% set-aside, the requested flexibility would “allow TEA to use improvement activities better aligned to the state’s accountability and intervention systems.” By receiving approval for greater flexibility regarding the School Improvement Grant program 1003 (g), the TEA would be allowed to “award Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) SIG funds to an LEA to implement one of the four SIG models in any of the schools that the state determines are priority schools.”

The language in the approved waiver request noted above appears to be in some conflict with the September 30th *Politics K-12* blog on Education Week which states, “The Lone Star State had to make big changes to get this Federal flexibility -- from completely

ditching its own state accountability system in favor of one that aligns with federal requirements to setting achievement goals that call for 100 percent student proficiency by 2019-2020.”

On September 30th, TEA Commissioner Michael Williams announced the conditional waiver approval for the state, noting some of the new flexibilities. For example, “Instead of federal designations for all schools in Texas, only the lowest performing 15 percent of schools will be identified as Priority or Focus Schools. Those schools will be subject to a series of federally-prescribed interventions. Additionally, Texas school districts will no longer be required to set aside 20 percent of their Title I federal dollars to provide Supplemental Educational Services (SES). A district will now be free to use those funds on academic intervention programs it deems most effective for its students.”

Several other aspects of possible interest to TechMIS subscribers included in the approved waiver request include:

- While the State’s 20 regional education service centers will be heavily involved in professional development, to the extent external providers are required/used, the TEA must approve such providers based on information in TCA’s “Request for Qualification, Request for Proposal, and Request for Application process.” The review process will be similar to that currently used for the Texas Educator Pipeline project and the District Turnaround Leadership Institute.
- Interventions for teachers to address the needs of all students will include,

among other topics, RTI and/or tiered interventions, accommodated/modified instruction for students with learning differences, positive behavioral interventions, and data-informed instruction.

- Implementation of turnaround principles will occur in SIG schools which are identified as Priority Schools during the 2013-14 school year, with all Priority Schools fully implementing interventions in 2014-15 and all Priority Schools will participate in three years of interventions.

In his letter dated September 30th approving the Texas waiver request, Secretary Duncan emphasizes that he is “granting waivers of these provisions through the end of the 2013-14 school year. If Texas meets the condition described below prior to the end of 2013-14 school year, Texas may request an extension of these waivers through the end of the 2014-2015 school year. At that time, Texas may request a further extension of these waivers.” The conditional waiver stems from the fact that Texas has yet to finalize guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. By May 2, 2014, Texas must amend its waiver plan by “incorporating final guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that meet the requirements of ESEA Flexibility, including the use of student growth, as defined in ESEA Flexibility, as a significant factor in determining a teacher’s or principal’s summative evaluation rating.”

Education Reform and Civil Rights Advocacy Groups Seek Tougher Interpretations of Requirements Placed on States Seeking Waiver Renewals, Which if Followed by USED, Could Create Opportunities for TechMIS Subscribers

Thirteen education reform and civil rights advocacy groups, in a letter to Secretary Duncan dated October 21, called for greater rigor to be used by USED in approving state waiver renewals, recommending that potential loopholes be closed and state options follow more exact and strict interpretations of USED waiver provisions. If these recommendations are followed by USED, opportunities could be created for TechMIS subscribers.

Over the last year, many of the 13 education advocacy groups signing the letter -- which included the Alliance for Excellent Education, Democrats for Education Reform, National Council of La Raza, and National Center for Learning Disabilities, and other related groups -- have voiced their concerns that many of the accountability pillars, some of which were in NCLB which they supported, were eroded by states “gaming the system” under approved waivers over the last year. As reported in the *State Ed Watch* blog on Education Week (October 17th), a recent study by the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University found several glaring problems with the state waiver approved A-F grading system which support some of the arguments in the October 21st letter. For example, only about five correct responses in the Oklahoma reading test separated “A” schools from “D” schools. Moreover, when examining students receiving Federally-

subsidized meals, the report found that these students actually scored higher on average in “D” and “F” schools than they did in “A” and “B” schools, meaning that these supposedly top schools are “masking the especially low performance of poor and minority children.” Calling the Oklahoma study findings most worrisome concerning use of “super subgroups,” the *Politics K-12* blog on Education Week (October 17th) said, “...advocacy groups have worried that turning away from these smaller subgroups would allow some schools to hide behind performance of their top students. This might be the first study, under the new waivers, to provide some evidence that there’s real reason to worry.”

Indeed, the October 21st letter pointed to the use of super subgroups and urged the Secretary to consider a number of questions to determine if super subgroups should continue to be allowed for a state including, “What is the impact of basing accountability decisions on super subgroups? Meaning, how many more or how many fewer schools and students are receiving intervention due to the use of super subgroups and comparisons to the state’s accountability system prior to ESEA flexibility?” And, if there’s evidence that “subgroup performance is being masked by super subgroup averages, the use of super subgroups should be eliminated.” Indeed, doing away with super-subgroup performance makes it likely that more low-performing students and low-performing schools would be required to implement interventions and supports which many TechMIS subscribers could provide.

The letter states that USED graduation rate regulations are not being fully implemented and that some states have adopted harmful practices in calculating graduation rates for

accountability purposes, including the use of GEDs, dropout and leaver rates, and extended yearly rates. The letter calls for states using extended year graduation rates to set more ambitious objectives and if they are used, the states should raise the 60 percent trigger for determining whether the high school would become a “priority” or “focus” school. According to the letter, Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington use the extended year rate, but have not raised the 60 percent trigger. The group also calls for restoring subgroup accountability on graduation rates, arguing that 11 states have weak or non-existent subgroup accountability for graduation rates, “which put lower performing students at-risk of not receiving the support they need to graduate college- and career-ready.” If the 2008 graduation rate calculation regulations were restored and the 60 percent trigger for identifying focus and priority schools were raised in states and extended year and subgroup accountability on graduation rates is restored, more schools are likely to be required to implement interventions and supports.

Another recommendation is to require states to annually “refresh their list of schools in need of improvement” rather than giving states the option to set a timeframe for identifying additional “priority” or “focus” schools. To do so would allow students who would be otherwise stuck at failing schools to receive appropriate interventions and supports. The letter also recommends that USED establish a “substantially different and clear threshold” by which priority and focus schools are no longer required to undergo interventions. This recommendation is consistent with other guidance, published after the August 28th

ESEA Flexibility waiver renewal guidance, which calls for states to identify and report “priority” and “focus” schools as early as possible. This could assist firms in identifying what schools to target which has been a problem in the past.

Another recommendation calls for the transparent use of available information to inform decision-making at the state and particularly the district level. Here, the letter identifies a host of questions which states should answer and demonstrate evidence-based initiatives to implement prior to being awarded waiver renewals. State and more importantly district initiatives to address such questions and requirements should increase the demand for formative assessments, diagnostic and prescription tools, and professional development regarding data-driven decision-making at the classroom/student level.

Two additional recommendations relate to public transparency and ensuring community stakeholder input regarding waiver renewals. The letter calls for USED to release findings regarding its analysis of state data prior to approval of any waiver renewals. Perhaps of greater interest to some TechMIS subscribers is a recommendation that states be required to follow exactly the rigorous USED guidance on ESEA flexibility renewal calling for a framework to consult with the public. Specifically, the letter says, “Ideally, an SEA will solicit input from stakeholders representing diverse perspectives, experiences, and interests, including those that will be impacted by and implement the policies included in the SEA’s plan and will strengthen its request by revising it based on this input.” To do so, the letter states, “We request that USDOE set clear guidelines for

how a state will consult with its citizens as part of any waiver renewal application. Further, it should be prepared to reject any application from a state that does not, in fact, fully and appropriately seek input from community leaders in the development of the application.” As we noted in a recent TechMIS report, technology solutions which will facilitate not only state and district communication with community stakeholders, but also the collection of data through surveys and the use of portals to collect and analyze stakeholder input on a wide range of issues would likely be in higher demand.

In her *Politics K-12* blog (October 22nd), Michele McNeil notes that, while department guidance for waiver renewals has already been published, “...this letter spells out exactly what the groups care most about in the renewal process, and offers a warning of the royal fuss they will put up if the department doesn’t heed their advice.” While many of the letter’s recommendations are designed to hold states and districts more accountable for student progress, especially among at-risk student groups, if adopted by USED and enforced, opportunities for many TechMIS subscribers with interventions, supports, and directly-related professional development capabilities could be created beginning early next year.

A Majority of Early Childhood (EC) Educators Report They Use Technology Because Children Enjoy It and It Helps Meet Program Goals

Fifty-three percent of teacher respondents of children ages 2 through primary grades, in the first of three surveys conducted by Early Childhood Technology Today (ECTT),

indicated that they used technology (broadly defined as computers—desktops and laptops, iPads, tablets or other tablet devices, multi-touch tables or surfaces, interactive whiteboards, smartphones, iPods, or other portable handheld digital devices) with young children enrolled in their programs. When questioned why they use technology, a majority of teachers reported the children enjoy it or it meets their program goals. Specific reasons for use cited include:

- extension of concepts and skills in the content areas of language/literacy, math and science;
- indirect support for introduction of concepts and skills in the content areas of language/literacy, math and science; and
- children learning how to use the technology devices.

A very small percent of those teachers using technology in their classrooms reported that it was required by the program or expected by parents.

The results of the 2012 ECTT survey are the first part of a series of three surveys that examine how technology is impacting early learning classrooms and programs. These findings are now being made public through articles in journals, blog posts, and other publications. The data help describe more fully how technology is being used in the early childhood education field and how educators feel about it. Survey results will help inform product developers about what technology is used in early childhood programs; and how educators use technology in developmentally appropriate ways. Results also help inform professional development and technology integration

efforts for teachers and administrators.

The Early Childhood Technology Today Survey sample included teachers and administrators from a cross-section of urban/suburban and rural areas; public schools, child care, and private schools. Eleven percent of respondents were from Head Start; in addition, 56 percent of the total respondents (N=485) reported that more than half of the children served by their programs were poor children. Teachers represented 76 percent (N=369) of the total number of respondents while 116 administrators completed the survey. The survey was conducted online.

What technology tools are currently used by early childhood educators? Ninety-five percent (N=187) of those teachers using technology in their classrooms have desktop or laptop computers. About 44 percent of these teachers use interactive whiteboards and 37 percent use a tablet computer. Far fewer teachers access other handhelds including, iPod Touch, smartphones, or multi-touch tables or surfaces in their in classrooms.

Survey findings indicate that 55 percent of teachers offer children access every day to their classroom technology; 26 percent report children using technology three to four days a week with less than 10 percent reporting they only use technology with children less than every week.

About 65 percent of 197 teachers using technology do so to facilitate learning for children with special needs.

Although there are many low-cost or free applications available for translation or multi-lingual books, when teachers were

asked specifically about their use of technology with children learning English in addition to their home languages, only 40 percent of teachers report that they do not use any of these (translation software or books in other languages) to support children from other language backgrounds.

TechMIS clients can look to meet emerging demands for applications and technology solutions as the early childhood market embraces the benefits of new devices in particular, for children learning English and learners with special needs. As the early childhood community becomes more aware of the appropriate use and benefits of technology and with lower prices for desktop and laptop computers, we see pent-up demand, especially when additional private and public funding become available.

Although many firms are focusing on ensuring their applications meet the specifications of the innovative hardware coming to market, at this point the installed base is by and large laptops and desktops. Budget constraints for those programs acquiring new systems make the laptop and desktop pricing much more attractive compared to the “state of the art” tablets and tables. Further, the existing base in schools and early childhood programs includes relatively few tablets and touch tables.

As a reminder the third grade PARC assessment includes a writing component. As an article in the Washington Post (April 14th) noted, students will be required to be able to manipulate a mouse; click, drag, and type answers on a keyboard; and starting in the third-grade write online...Most elementary-age students are digital natives, comfortable with smart phones and tablets,

but they often operate those handheld devices with a swipe of a finger. They have much more difficult time trying to compose text on a keyboard, according to their teachers. Children must learn touch-typing...so they can focus on writing.” To respond to this online component, students will use a traditional keyboard as they respond to this part of the assessment; therefore, software that supports student practice in keyboarding skills and composition will be important to schools.

On the home front, Common Sense Media’s latest survey suggests a dramatic increase in mobile device access in homes of birth through 8-year-olds -- up 25 percent; 75 percent of homes have access to a mobile device. The greatest gain is in tablet availability -- up from 8 percent to 40 percent have tablets at home.

- Among those children who actually use mobile devices daily, the average time of use increased from 43 to 67 minutes daily.
- Surprisingly “screen time” in general has been reduced by about 21 minutes. Experts posit that there is less use of traditional media including TV, DVDs, computers, or video games.
- Gaps in mobile device access of low-income households compared with affluent homes persist.

Find the questions for the ETTC survey online at:

<http://www.ecetech.net/about/early-childhood-technology-collaborative/>

For Certain Products, TechMIS Subscribers Should Consider Getting on GSA Schedule and Suggest District Purchasing Officials Use GSA Cooperative Purchasing to Save Time

In order to make sales during these challenging budget times, vendors need to take advantage of every opportunity. But many vendors haven't even considered GSA (U.S. General Services Administration) Cooperative Purchasing. GSA establishes long-term contracts with vendors that provide millions of products and services at volume discount pricing. For customers, the advantages are easy to see. They save money and time purchasing from pre-approved vendors with GSA Schedules.

GSA Cooperative purchasing also offers many benefits for vendors. First, GSA connects vendors with a wide range of government opportunities. Ten percent of government needs (over \$40 billion a year) is procured through GSA contracts. GSA Schedules are fast and easy and they give vendors an advantage in the government marketplace. For vendors, this is an efficient system of purchasing. And for small businesses, this is an ideal way to gain visibility and increase sales.

GSA has been actively promoting the benefits of the GSA process to school districts and local municipalities. School districts seeking technology purchases will be specifically interested in GSA's Schedule 70 which features a wide variety of information technology products and services, including mobile device and mobile application management (MDM/MAM) tools, automated data processing equipment (firmware), software, cloud computing services, hardware, support

equipment, and professional services. There are also GSA schedules for security and law enforcement equipment, disaster recovery purchasing and more.

As more school districts become aware of this purchasing option, it will become more advantageous for vendors to be eligible to compete for GSA opportunities. In order to become a GSA vendor, there is a comprehensive vetting process that must be completed. In order to determine if this is the right fit for your company, visit the GSA Vendor Support Center at <https://vsc.gsa.gov/RA/>. For assistance, contact Charles or Paula Love (740-462-2342).

States Which Have Not Received NCLB Flexibility Waivers Must Still Meet Most NCLB Provisions and Can Take Advantage of Prior 2010 Flexibilities, Which Can Still Provide Opportunities for Some TechMIS Subscribers

The eight states which have not received NCLB state flexibility waiver approval still operate under most NCLB requirements, but can take advantage of pre-state waiver "flexibilities" and which can provide TechMIS subscribers opportunities, including having Title I funds pay for professional development for non-Title I teachers and providing the same interventions in both Title I and non-Title I schools, in certain districts without violating supplement-not-supplant provisions. As we have cited over the last four years, before NCLB state flexibility waiver policies were initiated, "new flexibilities" were allowed in the September, 2009 USED Title I guidance

on allowable uses of stimulus ARRA funding which continue to be in effect in the non-waiver states (California, Illinois, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming). While some of these eight states have received limited flexibilities in meeting NCLB sanctions, most remain in place in these states and pre-2010 flexibilities continue to provide opportunities for TechMIS subscribers.

As we noted in our September 15, 2009 report addressing ARRA Title I guidance on the use of Title I ARRA funds, a number of opportunities are available in districts that had been identified for improvement. One such opportunity, as we noted in our September 15, 2009 report (please contact us for a copy if need be), is an exception to the rule that Title I funds cannot be used to provide professional development for non-Title I teachers. As the guidance states, “An LEA in improvement status may provide professional development to instructional staff throughout the LEA with Title I, Part A ARRA funds it reserves ‘off the top’ of its Title I Part A allocation, provided the professional development activities are related to the reasons the LEA is in improvement status (E-10).” Hence, focusing on the reason (e.g., low math performance) for a district being identified for improvement, certain types of district-wide professional development activities could be funded by Title I for teachers in both Title I and non-Title I schools, including online coaching/mentoring, technology applications which can facilitate training, and content-related training. Moreover, following a “test case” in Washington State’s approved NCLB state flexibility waiver, the Title I 10% set-aside for professional development in districts identified for improvement can be used, not

only for professional development, but also for purchasing products, materials, tools, etc. which can be used to facilitate training.

The September 2009 ARRA Title I guidance also provides another exception to the supplement-not-supplant rule which could result in wider district sales opportunities for certain products and services. It states that, if the service provided to non-Title I students meets the “intent and purposes” of the Title I, Part A program, “the LEA may exclude those services from supplement not supplant considerations...For example, if an LEA offers after-school tutoring for any student who scores below proficient on the state’s math assessment, paying for Title I students with Title I funds and non-Title I students with supplemental local funds would not violate the supplement-not-supplant requirement because the students in the non-Title I schools, by virtue of being non-proficient in mathematics, are failing to meet the State’s mathematics standards and thus would be eligible for Title I services if they attended a Title I school.” Based on reports from some TechMIS subscribers, many district Title I directors/coordinators still believe that if a product is purchased using Title I funds for a Title I school, the same product cannot be used for similarly-situated students in non-Title I schools, even if the district purchases the product to be used in non-Title I schools with local or state money. USED officials have stated over the last six months that new Title I supplement-not-supplant guidance for Title I schoolwides would be forthcoming, but they have yet to be published (see August 2013 TechMIS Special Report).

Other opportunities noted in the September 2009 Title I ARRA guidance and in subsequent Title I guidance which apply to

both states with approved waivers and those without ESEA flexibility waivers include:

- Using Title I funds in schoolwide programs to update the entire school curriculum as long as the upgraded materials are “aimed at improving the academic achievement of low-achieving students.”
- Use of Title I funds to implement the RTI model to help schools identify students who are at-risk, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on students’ responsiveness.
- Use of Title I funds in schoolwide programs to improve school climate through interventions if such needs are identified in the schoolwide needs assessment and included in the schoolwide plan.

Even though the NCLB flexibility waivers approved for 44 states and jurisdictions allow much greater flexibility for “getting out from under NCLB requirements,” the Title I flexibilities provided all districts, particularly those identified for improvement, in the use of Title I funds (especially in schoolwide programs), continue to remain providing opportunities in the eight non-waiver states.

If anyone has any questions, please call Charles Blaschke directly.

The Influential Business Roundtable (BRT) Plans to Create an Independent Organization to Review Curriculum and Instructional Materials to Determine Their Alignment With Common Core State Standards to “Help Educators Make Well-Informed, Cost-Effective Decisions”

The Business Roundtable (BRT) has envisioned “consumer reports-type” reviews that will assess how well curriculum and instructional materials are aligned with the Common Core standards. The formal proposal set forth in their October 4th draft report “Taking Action on Education and Workforce Preparedness” states, “Although there is currently a shortage of high-quality curricula aligned with the Common Core State Standards, eventually curricula of varying quality will be available from both nonprofit and for-profit sources. Independent reviews regarding the quality of these materials will assist educators with making well-informed, cost-effective decisions.” The BRT’s five priorities are: the full adoption and implementation of Common Core State Standards; higher priority on STEM education; the development of more effective teachers; greater access to high-quality early-learning programs; and postsecondary education and training aligned with employer needs.

Last March, during the SIIA Government Forum (see April 26th TechMIS Washington Update), Michael Cohen, who heads America Achieves, briefed SIIA members about efforts undertaken by his organization, along with a growing number of other groups which are planning to undertake similar activities. In June 2013, Achieve announced its Educators Evaluating the

Quality of Instructional Products (EQuIP) to help their “experts” and educators review lessons and units using Achieve rubrics. Some SIIA members and publishers expressed concern that the expanding number of “consumer reports-type” organizations could further delay district purchases or state “adoptions” of instructional materials which have been aligned with CCSS. The *Curriculum Matters* blog on Education Week (October 9th), which first reported on the BRT alignment review initiative, said it could become a “political powder keg,” and that “People of varying viewpoints on the common core have told me in the last few years that they think it would be virtually impossible to assemble a group whose educational and political persuasions wouldn’t raise bias concerns.” The notion of creating such a curriculum review entity was discussed more than two years ago at an SIIA Government Forum by Dane Linn who spearheaded the Common Core initiative while at the National Governors Association; Linn now heads the BRT effort. According to the blog, “Linn concluded that setting up a vetting panel was too potentially problematic. That was when he was at the NGA, though. Perhaps things look different from the BRT perch.”

In an October 11th follow-up in the *Curriculum Matters* blog, BRT’s Linn reportedly stated that the next step was to convene foundations and groups spearheading the Common Core initiative such as NGA, CCSSO, and America Achieves to draft a business plan which would be completed in six months. When asked, he indicated that candidate panelists could be those who served on the standards’ writing teams and other “experts in the content areas”; however, no one who

represents vendors of certain materials would be invited to serve on the panel,” since what will likely come in for review will be produced by private vendors. According to Linn, “We understand this is political, but at the same time, if states are going to be successful implementing [the common core] in classrooms, we need to give states and teachers greater assurance that what they’re using is aligned to the standards.”

Linn noted that the panel will “undoubtedly make use of the alignment rubrics designed by Achieve’s EQuIP project and being used currently by the project’s interstate panel of jurors.” He also noted that the BRT panel will also be informed by discussions about Common Core alignment that had been unfolding at the Foundation for Excellence in Education and the Annenberg Foundation.

One can legitimately ask whether the creation of another independent consumer reports-type review organization is needed given the large number of such entities which have been created over the last year and, if so, whether it should be housed under the Business Roundtable. Based on my personal experience in presenting an innovative low-cost, low-risk approach for experimenting with innovative education approaches before the BRT during the 1970s, many business leaders around the table, at that time, tended to “shoot from the hip” without any appreciation of the difficulties and complexities of experimenting and expanding innovations in education. However, since then, under the leadership of executive directors such as Christopher Cross more than a decade ago, the BRT has garnered much more respect for its diligence and knowledge in promoting responsible education reform.

Miscellaneous (a)

Preliminary findings from the third annual “Primary Sources” survey of 20,000 teachers reports that 97 percent of teachers surveyed are aware of Common Core State Standards (100 percent in the 46 states that are implementing Common Core), with 73 percent being “enthusiastic about the implementation of the standards in their classrooms.” The survey, conducted for Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by the Harrison Group, also reports that implementation of the standards will be “challenging” and “will require them to make changes in their teaching practice.” Teachers also called for more professional development and resources to implement the standards. While a majority (64 percent) of teachers in districts which are already implementing the standards agree that implementation is going well in their school, the report notes, “In order to successfully implement the standards in their classrooms, however, the top two needs reported by these teachers are more planning time to find materials and plan lessons, and quality professional development, respectively.”

The survey also asked about the challenges facing certain student populations in meeting the standards. Teachers in Common Core states said the greatest concern is about students working two or more grades below grade level, followed by special education students; and specifically, “For these students, as well as for students who are on grade-level and who are English language learners, teachers rank age-appropriate, leveled instructional materials as the number one need to help students meet the standards.” According to the PR NEWS Wire (October 4th), the third edition

of *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change* will be published in “coming months” and will provide insight into teachers’ experiences and opinions on a number of issues, including how they use technology to collaborate, find lesson plans, and gain support from peers. For more information on the full report release, go to:

www.scholastic.com/primarysources.

Miscellaneous (b)

The 1,200+ districts which receive portions of the \$1 billion annual Impact Aid appropriation will shortly be receiving about a third of their money -- much earlier this fiscal year following an announcement by USED officials at the recent National Association of Federally-Impacted Schools (NAFIS). As reported in the *Politics K-12* blog on Education Week (October 24th), slightly over \$300 million for basic support payments, \$15 million for districts that only received Impact Aid because of nearby Federal property, and \$25 million for students in special education will be sent to districts. Districts receiving Impact Aid funding were the first to feel the brunt of sequestration in March, largely because the program is not “forward-funded” and, when the Federal Government shut down on October 1st, funding for the new fiscal year was delayed. According to John Forkenbrock, Deputy Director of NAFIS, the first allocation for the new fiscal year is larger than in previous years. He is quoted in the *Politics K-12* blog as saying, “Many of these districts would have faced disastrous consequences as early as the end of this month without this money.”

Miscellaneous (c)

A database on district-level spending of state pre-K funds for the 2012 school year is now available. The Federal Education Budget Project (FEBP) and the Early Education Initiative have the latest information (SY 2012) on state pre-K funding, on a district-by-district basis, which overall was lower than in SY 2011. However, as the *Ed Money Watch* blog (September 24th) reports, “The data offer an on-the-ground look at national early education funding trends...We looked more deeply into those figures and found that the cuts were far from across the board.” The blog cites as an example, Texas where state funding dropped from \$844 million in 2011 to \$727 million last year. However, while Houston pre-K funding was reduced from \$61 million to \$53 million, the Denton School District saw an increase of spending of more than \$700,000 in the same timeframe. As the blog further notes, “FEBP is the only source of this critical information across the country and at the school district level...FEBP also shows data for Head Start programs run by 186 school districts around the country.” For firms interested in reviewing state pre-K funds by district, go to FEBP.newamerica.net and use the “PreK-12” search box.

Miscellaneous (d)

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, organizations which spearheaded the Common Core State Standards initiative, have announced the creation of a Collaborative of six states (Arizona, California, New Hampshire, Washington,

West Virginia and Wyoming) to implement collectively the CCSS by sharing practices and strategies. Joining the Collaborative will be the National Conference of State Legislatures and the State Higher Education Executive Officers. In some states, major opposition to, and delayed implementation of the CCSS have been attributed to lack of support from state legislatures and inertia of the higher education community regarding implementing college- and career-readiness assessments. According to the *State Ed Watch* blog on [Education Week](#) (October 3rd), each group is providing grants and in-kind technical assistance to the states.

Miscellaneous (e)

Almost 220 applications were submitted by districts and groups of districts representing almost 680 school systems in 44 states for the Race to the Top-District competition. Grants will be between \$4 million and \$30 million, totaling \$120 million and must be awarded by December 31st. As the *Politics K-12* blog on [Education Week](#) (October 8th) reports, additional districts from Colorado may “trickle in” as a result of an extension to October 11th allowed due to flooding in that state. During the previous Race to the Top-District competition, which awarded \$400 million, 317 applications were received. The 680 school systems in the latest competition come from all states except Hawaii, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and Wyoming. Due to the Federal “shutdown” and the closure of the ed.gov website, a listing of all applicants and districts in consortia that submitted is only available on the *Politics K-12* blog.

Miscellaneous (f)

The number of states renaming “Common Core” standards and assessments continues to increase. Most recently, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer has ordered the state to stop using “Common Core.” As Politico reports, most states have stuck with “Common Core,” but a few renamed the standards from day one to give it a more local flavor, for example: “Kansas College- and Career-Ready Standards,” “Georgia Performance Standards,” and “Missouri Learning Standards.” Oklahoma’s renamed standards are “Oklahoma C3 Standards,” while Michigan will continue to maintain the word “Common Core” in its website because of opposition from the state legislature and an ongoing threat to not include any funds for implementing Common Core in the new state budget. Rather, the state department has agreed not to update its website with any information that is referenced to “Common Core.”

As we have suggested to TechMIS subscribers that are positioning a lot of their products and services as being directly-

related to “Common Core Standards or Assessments,” one might want to consider referencing any collateral to “more rigorous state standards” or similar more general names rather than direct references to Common Core. However, such positioning may not be appropriate for some specific states which are still promoting/advocating “Common Core” in its initial form.

Alabama Update

October 2013

Under the Alabama Ahead Act in 2012, a board has been established with the authority to issue up to \$100 million in bonds to buy digital equipment replacing textbooks. Supporters of the proposal argue that students could use tablets or laptops for greater research opportunities, expanding on what they have learned, than working with textbooks. The plan could also help districts reduce costs through replacing aging textbooks. Advocates noted that the \$60 per student allocation for books dropped to \$7 after 2008 and that the new approach would cover about 75 percent of the cost of new digital devices in school districts.

Alaska Update

October 2013

According to the Juneau Empire (October 23rd), the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) continues to grow, with about 400 Alaska native students in the University of Alaska's program and 32 having graduated in 2012. The ANSEP strategy is to begin early at the middle school level to build interest and encourage young people to take science and math courses. There is a big emphasis on peer-taught student groups, with older students being seen as role models. Organizations which have supported the project include the National Science Foundation, Alaska oil producers (such as BP, Conoco, and Exxon Mobil) and the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Over the last decade, students have come from 95 communities, mostly small and rural areas. More than 80 percent of participating middle school students have graduated from the eighth grade completing Algebra I.

Arizona Update

October 2013

The Arizona Court of Appeals on October 1st ruled that the State's Empowerment scholarship account program, a state voucher program for several education services, is constitutional. According to the *Charters & Choice* blog on Education Week, teachers' unions and school administrator groups have argued that the program violated the State's Constitution's religious clauses which prevent public money from being provided to private or religious schools. Even though State law prevents a school voucher program, the court found that the scholarships provide parents with educational options that can be used for private school tuition, education therapy services and aids, textbooks, college tuition, online learning courses, and college textbooks.

California Update

October 2013

California State Superintendent Tom Torlakson has argued that the State cannot afford to administer its existing State assessments while pilot testing the new assessments. Observers feel that the only leverage USED has is to withhold the State's small 1% plus state set-aside of Title I funding. According to AAP, "... he [Secretary Duncan] has pulled back from that stance. The Department has said it is willing to issue a new kind of waiver that would let states such as California avoid a duplicative testing regime during this transition year."

The Education Week blog *K-12 Parents* reports that the "School Success Express" community forums, organized by the California Endowment, began on September 30th to discuss the Local Control Funding Formula initiative stemming from Proposition 30, which voters approved last November. The Act provides more funding support for low-income students who are learning to speak English or living in foster homes, with total projected State LCFF funding to increase by \$18 billion over the next eight years. Under the new law, schools must develop plans to increase parent engagement, improve parent and student engagement, and establish more positive learning environments which districts must include in their plans beginning July 2014 when the State Board of Education is to provide districts with more detailed guidance on the accountability criteria which will be enforced by the State.

California's "Linked Learning" Initiative to provide career prep for high school students will get \$7 million in new funding, as reported by the *College Bound* blog on Education Week (October 9th). Two million dollars is coming from the State, \$2.5 million from the James Irvine Foundation, and \$3.3 million from California Community College System (which will be used to provide 20 Linked Learning pilot sites). A preliminary evaluation found that students involved in Linked Learning were more likely to receive credits and failed fewer courses than other students not involved and participating students improved their persistence and graduation rates compared to traditional California students. More information about Linked Learning is

available from www.connectedcalifornia.org

According to The Hechinger Report (September 24th), the number of students enrolled in California's teacher preparation programs has declined from 34,838 students in 2011-12 to 26,446 students last year. The 24 percent reduction is the largest decline recorded in the past decade over which enrollment has declined by a total of 66 percent. The California State University System, which traditionally credentials about half of the teachers in the State, only issued credentials to 5,787 students in 2011-12, down from 13,933 in 2003-04. The report cites a number of reasons for declining numbers, including teacher layoffs, deteriorating working conditions, negative sanctions of NCLB, and the State's Standardized Testing And Reporting (STAR) system. As the report concludes, "What is unclear is whether enrollments in schools of education will pick up fast enough to produce teachers fast enough to replace the wave of retirements that will inevitably come in over the next decade."

An ambitious plan would provide all 660,000 Los Angeles district students with iPads. The *Digital Education* blog on Education Week (October 17th) reports that Superintendent John Deasy "has proposed to slow down the initiative, delaying the deployment of hundreds of thousands of devices until next summer." The Board, which will receive Deasy's proposal in about two weeks, has already approved a \$30 million contract with Apple to provide 30,000 iPads to students in almost 50 schools during Phase One. The eventual cost is projected to be \$500 million. Infrastructure upgrades to support Common Core assessments would bring the total price tag to roughly \$1 billion, all of which would be financed by bonds. Problems related to security breaches, missing iPads, and logistical problems have plagued the initial phase.

Colorado Update

October 2013

According to Ed News Colorado, Colorado's new Read Act, now in its first year of full implementation, would retain third-graders if they are reading below grade level. K-3 students are tested using one of the State-approved reading tests in early Fall and are tested once again within 30 days if they score below the cut score. If they do not pass the second time, in consultation with parents, a reading plan is developed that would include such activities as tutoring, full-day kindergarten, summer school, or specific reading interventions from a list of State-approved programs. According to the article, in 2013, about 27 percent of the State's third-graders did not pass the TCAP in reading. Last Spring, about 42,000 K-3 students or about 16 percent were designated as having significant reading deficiencies based on test scores from DIBELS, PALS, or the DRA 2. The State funds the program at about \$15 million or \$360 per student.

Florida Update

October 2013

After withdrawing as the fiscal agent for the PARCC assessment consortium, Florida Governor Rick Scott has called on the recently appointed Education Commissioner, Pam Stewart and the State Board to issue a bid to determine what tests should be used to replace the current Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The State Board of Education has already adopted the Common Core Standards and is moving ahead to implement them, according to [Education Week](#) (September 21st). As a side note, the White Board Advisors most recent survey of Washington “Insiders” reported that 42 percent now say PARCC is on the “right track,” compared to 27 percent in its last two surveys. This has occurred despite Florida’s withdrawing as a PARCC fiscal agent.

The *Curriculum Matters* blog on [Education Week](#) (October 16th) reports that the Florida State Board of Education voted on October 15th not to adopt the “appendices” attached to the Common Core as official policy. These include suggestions regarding student writing, how to structure math classes, and reading “exemplars” that accompany the standards. However, as the [Miami-Herald](#) reported, this policy does not prohibit individual districts from using these resources. The blog notes that the reading suggestions appendices have also come under fire recently in Alabama and Georgia.

Idaho Update

October 2013

The Idaho Statesman (October 19th) reports that an estimated 20,000 Idaho tenth-graders will be taking the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) this month as part of a Statewide effort to make graduates college-ready. School district officials believe that the PSAT can be a powerful tool in helping districts graduate more college- and career-ready students. In April 17,000 juniors took the exam, but only a quarter scored high enough to be considered college-ready, according to the Statesman. District officials report that curriculum changes could be made and teacher patterns could be adjusted, not only in tenth and eleventh grade, but also in junior highs or even elementary schools. State officials said the April test cost about \$200,000 with the results due back in December for districts that signed up to take the test. Officials argued that PSAT provides more useful data to identify individual student efficiencies that need to be remediated than the existing Idaho Standards of Achievement test which does not provide feedback on a question-by-question basis.

Illinois Update

October 2013

According to Education Week, Illinois' request for NCLB waiver flexibility has yet to be approved and remains in "waiver purgatory -- and forcing more and more districts to fail to meet yearly goals under the outdated NCLB law." The primary reason is the 2010 Illinois State law that calls for implementation of a new teacher evaluation system by 2016-17. In order to receive a Federal NCLB waiver, states must implement new evaluations by 2015-16 and, as the Education Week article notes, "Illinois's not budging on its timeline and so far neither are Federal officials." While Illinois received a freeze on identifying more schools for improvement, the freeze has since expired and last year 66 percent of Illinois schools failed to make AYP and failure rates are expected to climb higher this year.

According to the *Curriculum Matters* blog on Education Week (October 10th), the second edition of the *Illinois Civic Blueprint* has been released, even though Illinois is one of ten states that does not require students to take a stand alone civics or government class to graduate. Moreover, State assessments do not include civics. The Blueprint, developed by the McCormick Foundation and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, is designed to fill the void. It's intended to be a guide supporting a thorough civics curriculum including proven school-based civic learning practices, examples of schools using such practices, and a number of recommendations for policy makers, including:

- measuring student civic learning outcomes by including civics and state assessments and other accountability measures; and
- using alternative tests including project and portfolio assessments.

The document also depicts examples of what school leaders and teachers can do to cultivate civics learning programs.

Under a 1996 law, Chicago Public Schools has been allocated State funds based on its size and student needs with total flexibility on how the money can be used. The other 859 districts submit

expense claims and are reimbursed based on numbers of students served. Under a new bill, proposed by State Representative Sandy Pihos, a Republican from Glen Ellyn, Chicago would be allocated funds like all other districts in the State. As reported in Education Week, for school year 2011-12, CPS received \$607 million in State money, whereas under the State's per-pupil reimbursement rate, it should have received only \$372 million for that school year. Chicago CPS student enrollment has declined since 1995. Efforts to change the way State funds are allocated to fund bilingual education programs by submitting expenditure reports for reimbursement have already been underway, according to the article (October 9th).

Indiana Update

October 2013

Education Week notes that the battle for control of Indiana's education system has become even more heated. The Republican-controlled legislature has shifted calculation of school accountability ratings from the State Department of Education to the Legislature's non-partisan analysis arm. This represents the latest skirmish between the lawmakers and the Democratic State Superintendent, Glenda Ritz. The legislators have also questioned why the Department of Education has not released teacher effectiveness ratings or school A-F grades.

According to the Evansville Courier & Press, the number of Indiana students applying to receive vouchers and use State money to pay for private schools has more than doubled for the second consecutive year. More than 20,000 students have applied this year. The State provides a maximum of \$4,700 for elementary school students.

Iowa Update

October 2013

Iowa Governor Terry Branstad recently signed Executive Order 83 which says, "...the state of Iowa, not the federal government or any other organization" will be determining the content of state academic standards, as reported in [The Muscatine Journal](#). The order also states that the Iowa Department of Education will provide only aggregate student data regarding the Common Core to the Federal Government. The Governor stated, "We want to make sure this is an Iowa academic standard and the needs of our state are not going to be dictated by the federal government, and we believe what we did was clarify that the Iowa Core is all about, and that is the state academic standards."

As reported in [Education Week](#) (September 24th), more than half of Iowa schools failed to meet AMOs under the No Child Left Behind Act and will have sanctions placed on them. Iowa requested, but was denied, a state waiver to get out from under NCLB requirements. Of the State's 1,361 public schools, 64 percent did not meet NCLB targets in 2012-13.

Kentucky Update

October 2013

To make up for State and Federal funding cuts over the last few years, about 80 Kentucky school districts have increased local tax revenue by about four percent, the largest amount allowed, with 26 districts yet to decide, which means the total amount will grow. While the Kentucky Board of Education has approved a budget request to restore K-12 funding to pre-recession levels, it is unlikely to gain traction among lawmakers because there is no money. The State's Flexible Focus Funding which provides funds for professional development, safe schools, textbooks, and related areas has dropped from \$154 million in 2008 to \$93 million today and per-pupil funding under the State formula for Education Excellence has dropped from \$3,866 in 2009 to \$3,827 this year. About \$272 million would be required over the next biennium to restore these two programs.

Louisiana Update

October 2013

The Executive Director of the Louisiana School Boards Association has criticized State Superintendent John White for not following a State-led transition plan previously developed to implement Common Core Standards. Rather, the State Superintendent reportedly said he wanted to “empower teachers to design their own curriculum” while providing limited guidance such as sample lessons by grade and subject area and videos, along with guidance about what curricula are offered by publishing companies. He argued that the State should not mandate which curriculum is used by school districts. White emphasized that the private sector is better at providing curriculum than State bureaucrats, as reported in Education Week (October 8th).

According to The Hechinger Report (September 29th), next school year, nine-year-olds will start taking online tests created by the PARCC consortium. The writing component of the test will likely require fourth-graders to type a minimum of one page in a single stretch; fifth-graders will probably have to type at least two pages. To meet the challenge, school officials are considering adding keyboarding classes, introducing online assessments in kindergarten, and taking students to the computer lab for writing classes. The New Orleans KIPP network continues using the MAP test and is integrating computer skills into classes.

The Louisiana Board of Regents has extended its “Developmental Education Prerequisite Delivery Pilot” remediation program, started in 2012, for enrollees who do not meet college admission requirements. The pilot program is currently used in 15 institutions. For fiscal year 2014-15, a draft budget of more than \$180 million has been requested. About \$30 million will be allocated to help institutions serve a “backload” of students, according to Revelry reported in Education Week.

Despite considerable opposition, Louisiana’s private school voucher program continues to grow, according to Education Week (October 21st). State data indicate that program enrollment has

increased from 4,944 students last year to 6,775 in 2013-14, a 37 percent increase. Known as the Louisiana Scholarship Program, the State-funded program is available to students from low- and moderate-income families who would otherwise be attending public schools rated C, D, or F under the State's accountability system.

Maryland Update

October 2013

The Baltimore Sun (September 18th) reported that \$5.5 million in grants have been awarded to 13 districts under the Early College Innovation Fund and the Digital Learning Innovation Fund which are designed to help students earn college credits and career certification while in high school. The winners of the \$2 million Early College Grants were: Baltimore County, Howard County, Caroline County, Montgomery County, Washington County, and Prince George's County. The Digital Learning Grants, totaling \$3.5 million, were provided to the SEED School of Maryland and Baltimore City, Carroll County, Frederick County, Garrett County, Kent County, and Washington County.

Massachusetts Update

October 2013

As reported in the BostonHerald.com (October 7th), the State Legislature Education Committee will be hearing several bills to raise Massachusetts' legal dropout age from 16 to 18. One measure would allow Boston and Lawrence to increase the dropout age to 18 even if the remainder of the State does not have to.

Governor Deval Patrick recently announced new vouchers will be made available to allow Massachusetts children currently on a waitlist of 43,000 to enroll in Head Start and other early education services. The legislature has appropriated \$15 million for this fiscal year which is less than the \$131 million the Governor had sought in order to eliminate the waitlist.

Michigan Update

October 2013

Under pressure from Republican Governor Rick Snyder, the Michigan Senate approved a measure to allow State funding for implementing Common Core State Standards. However, the measure required that the State seek competitive bids for the Common Core assessment rather than adopting the Smarter Balanced assessment system. The Senate measure is similar to a House measure approved earlier which will require some negotiations to reach a final agreement.

Beginning in January, Michigan public school students in grades 5-12 can take up to two online courses per semester provided by the Michigan Virtual University or other Michigan districts. Although students do not need approval from their home district, the district must provide one-twelfth of its total State per-pupil allocation (\$7,076 for the school year) per course semester. The catalog of online classes is being maintained by Michigan Virtual University. All courses must be taught by Michigan-certified teachers.

New York Update

October 2013

Education Week reports that New York's Education Commissioner, John King, made a surprising announcement recently, citing a "variety of pressures," that too much standardized testing may hurt instruction and therefore some standardized tests in New York will be eliminated. One will be the eighth-grade math test. The Board of Regents is also considering eliminating that test and others. In this context, Commissioner King and the Board are emphasizing a "comprehensive initiative" to keep the focus in the State on teaching. Evidently, the Board is also looking at the possibility of reducing tests for English language learners and for students with disabilities.

The New York State Board of Regents has approved a new plan which would allow schools to base their providing of remedial services on percentile rankings, using student score improvement between 2012 and 2013. This would limit the number of students who would be provided help. Several months ago, the State Board approved a flexibility which would have severely limited the number of students, achieving less than "proficiency," taking remediation under the Academic Intervention Services Program.

Following up on one of Governor Andrew Cuomo's top education priorities, the New York Department of Education has released a request for proposal (RFP) for \$20 million in competitive grants for districts, over the next three years, to develop promising practices which extend learning time in schools. As reported in the *Time and Learning* blog on Education Week (October 15th), the program will provide districts with opportunities to transform and redesign the school day, week, and year to better meet student needs and improve student achievement. Funds will be available as early as January for programs to begin this school year. The RFP states that instructional time has to increase by more than 300 hours per year and even though the Governor has supported charter schools, the RFP, according to the blog, states that charter schools are not eligible to apply.

The Buffalo school district after-school partnership, called *Say Yes Buffalo*, will receive \$4.5 million from the Wallace Foundation over a four-year period to help students from low-income families to improve academic performance. The after-school programs and summer programs also provide legal help and social services and other creative enrichment activities so that when students graduate, they are eligible for free tuition at participating colleges. The program is scheduled to begin in November in half of the city schools. More information is available at Education Week's *Time and Learning* blog (September 20th) and at <http://buffalo.sayyestoeducation.org/>

North Carolina Update

October 2013

As reported in the Raleigh News & Observer (October 3rd), the State Board of Education has adopted “cut scores” for standardized tests taken last Spring which will result in failure rates of more than 50 percent of students who took math, reading, and science tests. At the high school level, English end-of-year exams and eighth-grade science tests are the only tests that more than half the students passed. Scores of individual schools will be released in November, but they will not be factored into teacher evaluations or be part of the new system of rating schools. The new standardized tests at the elementary and middle school level have been aligned with Common Core standards, which districts began teaching last year.

The Guilford County Schools has suspended the use of tablets and related equipment. A district press release noted that about ten percent of the district’s 15,000 devices have been returned because of broken screens. The initiative has been funded by the Race to the Top-District funds and supplemental grants. As reported in the *Digital Education* blog on Education Week (October 7th), Superintendent Maurice Green stated, “We need to get these issues resolved quickly so we can continue the good work already underway in our schools.”

North Dakota Update

October 2013

According to AP, two-thirds of the state's public school districts failed to meet AYP standards which is an increase over last year.

Oklahoma Update

October 2013

On October 12th, Oklahoma State Superintendent Janet Barresi sent a letter to the PARCC Governing Board Commissioner Mitchell Chester of Massachusetts. She stated that Oklahoma is in the process of selecting a vendor to develop assessments for grades three through eight for English/language arts and mathematics and was expanding the end-of-year instruction assessments for high schools.

Pennsylvania Update

October 2013

As reported on Philly.com (September 19th), Pennsylvania State officials announced a new 100-point rating system for public schools, charter schools, cyber schools, and technical schools beginning September 30th. Buildings that score above 70 are considered satisfactory. Criteria include attendance, participation in annual testing, graduation rates, and closing achievement gaps. Forty percent of a school's score is based on exam results and forty percent on how much student progress occurs in a given year on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment and high school achievement tests in English, math, and science.

According to [Education Week](#) (October 17th), Pennsylvania will be providing an extra \$45 million to Philadelphia public schools. While the article notes that a student died after an apparent asthma attack at a Philadelphia school without a nurse on site, the financially-strapped district evidently convinced the Governor that the district had made enough progress toward the Governor's education and financial goals for improvement in order to earn the \$45 million in extra funding. The extra money, according to the article, helps close the prior year's money gap as its \$2.4 billion approved budget is less than the prior year's budget of \$2.7 billion.

Puerto Rico Update

October 2013

Puerto Rico has joined the 42 states and the District of Columbia whose ESEA flexibility waiver requests have been approved. According to the *Politics K-12* blog on Education Week, Illinois and Wyoming and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have requested waivers, but are still under consideration. Iowa remains on a wait list since an earlier version from the state was rejected, but a revised request may be considered in the future. Of the states with approved waivers, Alaska, Texas, Virginia, and Puerto Rico received approval without adopting the Common Core Standards, while Minnesota has adopted the English/language arts standards only.

South Dakota Update

October 2013

The South Dakota State Board of Education has decided to allow districts the flexibility to use standards of their own for evaluating teachers. To receive State approval, districts must show evidence supporting their approach. South Dakota will be submitting a request for a USED waiver to delay for one year the use of student performance and teacher evaluations that relate to personnel decisions according to SEA officials.

Texas Update

October 2013

The Texas Tribune (October 6th) investigation of supplemental educational services in the State reports that, over the last few years, Texas school districts have spent \$180 million on SES, primarily from private providers. Over the last four years, more than 75 formal complaints have been filed by districts to the TEA accusing private providers of a range of violations. On September 30th, the TEA received approval for its Ed-Flex state waiver so it will no longer require districts to set aside up to 20 percent of their Title I allocations for SES and parent choice in schools missing AYP for two or more years (see related Washington Update item).

The Dallas Morning News (October 14th) reports that the Texas Merit Pay program has been cut by the legislature from \$392 million in 2010-11 to \$24 million this year, which will “virtually kill it.” Two years ago, about 180,000 teachers received bonuses based on student test scores and related district measures. The last bonus checks were distributed this Fall to 18,000 teachers who earned bonuses based on student performance in 2012-13. A study by the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University reportedly found that students in schools with merit pay “had greater test score gains than those in schools without merit pay...The schools also had less turnover among teachers.” Replacing the Merit Pay program is the new Educator Excellence Innovation Program which will award grants to schools with high percentages of low-income students beginning in the 2014-15 school year. The primary use of such funds will be to prepare new teachers and train veteran teachers to become mentors, master teachers, or instructional coaches.

Washington Update

October 2013

Superintendent Randy Dorn announced that Washington will adopt the Next Generation Science Standards which was recently recommended by the State Board. As quoted in the *Curriculum Matters* blog on Education Week, “Prior to full implementation in 2016-17, the state will implement an awareness campaign followed by capacity building with testing for new standards beginning in 2017-18 school year.”

Wisconsin Update

October 2013

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a controversial piece of legislation has been introduced by a Milwaukee State Senator that would allow charter schools to be authorized without the blessing of the school district in whose attendance area the charter school would operate. The proposed amendment to Senate Bill 76 would allow the University of Wisconsin two-year and four-year campuses, as well as technical colleges and Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs), to approve charter schools to operate independent of districts. It would also allow independent charter schools with high-performance records to add new campuses. The bill is opposed by the State Department of Education and teachers unions across the State. Currently, all 238 Wisconsin charter schools are “LEAs,” but must operate under contracts with local school boards.