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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 15, 2010
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: FY 2011 Appropriations Update; Duncan's Speech on Technology Use; Lists of Schools Receiving SIG Funding Thus Far

The FY 2011 education appropriation levels continue to be in limbo as the Congress focuses on tax extensions. As of this Friday, the next step on taxes will be up to the House after Senate passage of the Obama/Republican compromise. As we noted in our TechMIS Alert last week, the House passed a Continuing Resolution through September 2011 which would level-fund virtually all education programs with the exception of an additional \$550 million for Race to the Top -- a possible third-round of K-12 funding.

On December 14th, the Senate released its Omnibus Bill which included education appropriations for FY 2011 which was similar to the Senate Committee markup released in August (see August 5th TechMIS Special Report). Like the House Continuing Resolution, the Senate included \$550 million for Race to the Top, but only for an SEA competition, including the possibility of allowing for consortia of rural states to apply. Other increases included:

- \$290 million increases each for Title I and IDEA;
- \$224 million for a second i³ competition;
- \$135 million increase for 21st Century Community Learning Centers with a provision that, "if districts choose," such funds could be used for extended learning time, which has created some opposition from the Afterschool Alliance;
- \$60 million for Promise Neighborhood, up from \$10 million;
- An increase for Head Start of \$840 million -- more than twice the House increases in its Continuing Resolution -- plus an increase of \$681 million for the Child Care Block Grant;
- \$300 million for the new Early Learning Challenge program for pre-K/K.

The Senate version would level-fund School Improvement Grants, Part G at \$545 million; however, a preliminary analysis of provisional language would make several changes, including:

- An LEA which has nine or more Tier I or Tier II schools could implement the

transformation model in more than 50 percent of the schools;

- At least 40 percent of funds in each state must be allocated to serve high schools with graduation rates of less than 60 percent and low-performing feeder middle schools.

Another Senate provision would allocate \$225 million for “a comprehensive literacy development and education program” to advance literacy skills, including pre-literacy skills, reading, and writing for students from birth through grade 12, including LEP students and those with disabilities. At least 95 percent of each state’s funds would be allocated, through competitive grants, to LEAs for professional development, screening and assessment, targeted interventions for students reading below grade level, and other research-based methods of improving classroom instruction.

If a final resolution of appropriations issues does not occur this week, then the current Continuing Resolution through December 18th is likely to be extended through December 23rd.

Amidst the FY 2011 appropriation negotiations, a number of developments have occurred which are addressed in the Washington Update:

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In a recent speech before the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute, Secretary Duncan called for the use of technology to increase productivity, arguing that, for K-12 to get the “biggest bang for the buck,” it will not only have to eliminate waste, but also change the structure and delivery of education. Traditional concepts of seat time, teacher salary increases based upon credentials, among others must be changed in order to realize the benefits of technology.

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USED released data on the types of schools and intervention models used in SIG grants in 44 states, indicating that almost half of the 730 Tier I and Tier II schools are high schools and more than 70 percent are using “transformation” models. An unofficial list of these schools is included in this TechMIS report.

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The America’s Promise Alliance released a report which found the number of high school dropout factories has declined 13 percent between 2002 and 2008 -- from 2,007 to 1,746 -- and called for a Civic Marshall Plan to build a “Grad Nation” targeting the remaining 1,746 dropout factories, and about 3,000 additional high schools in which graduation rates are less than 75 percent. The new Civic Marshall plan could generate a grassroots campaign which could influence the demand for certain products using School Improvement Grant and related funding to turn around high schools and increase graduation rates.

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A new partnership has been announced by three national advocacy groups supporting after-school and summer learning intended to increase STEM literacy for about 20 million children currently enrolled in after-school and related programs; the partnership

would redirect program emphasis from remediation and enrichment to project-based, hands-on, STEM-related literacy which, in turn, could increase opportunities for firms with appropriate content and professional development.

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USED has initiated an extensive review of its competitive grant programs, including Race to the Top, i³, Teacher Incentive Fund, and Promise Neighborhoods, while at the same time doubling its Title I auditing staff whose sole focus over the next six months will be on the implementation of School Improvement Grant programs at the state and district level. These activities relate to anticipated Congressional hearings, investigations, etc. by House Republicans next year; state and district efforts, time, and energies are likely to refocus on ensuring compliance at the expense of implementing SIG activities. Districts could be seeking advice from firms participating as partners.

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A number of miscellaneous items are also included:

- a) Education Jobs Fund spending is expected to increase significantly early next year.
- b) In its annual report, Pre-K Now details of states' pre-k funding for 2011, reporting slight increases from \$5.3 billion to \$5.4 billion over 2010.
- c) Several interview tidbits, as well as official statements by incoming Chairman of House Education & Labor Committee, John Kline (R-MN), suggests he will be a reform-minded consensus builder who will oppose further "Federal intrusion" into local decision-making, while supporting significant increases in IDEA special education funding.

The state profile updates include issues relating to: state Race to the Top progress, Common Core Standards, state budgets/funding, performance-based teacher pay, college readiness/enrollment, district/school rating systems.

Washington Update

Vol. 15, No. 12, December 15, 2010

During His Bold Speech on Technology Use, “The New Normal: Doing More with Less” or Getting the Most “Bang for the Buck in Schooling,” Secretary Duncan Went Beyond the Need for K-12 Education to Eliminate Waste, Calling for the Use of Technology to Boost Productivity, which Will Require a Fundamental Rethinking of the Structure and Delivery of Education in the United States

Referring to “doing more of what works -- and less of what doesn’t,” Secretary Duncan said education decision makers at the state and local levels have to rethink “policies around seat time requirements, class size, compensating teachers based on their educational credentials, the use of technology in the classroom, inequitable school financing, the over placement of students in special education -- almost all of these potential transformative productivity gains are primarily state and local issues that have to be grappled with.” Pointing to effective use of technology in schools, he emphasized, “Technology can play a huge role in increasing educational productivity, but not just as an add-on or for a high-tech reproduction of current practice. Again, we need to change the underlying processes to leverage the capabilities of technology. The military calls it a force multiplier. Better use of online learning, virtual schools, and other smart uses of technology is not so much about replacing educational roles as it is about giving each person the tools they need to be more successful -- reducing

wasted time, energy, and money.” While increasing productivity is primarily a state and local challenge, he acknowledged, “...the federal government has a role here too. We have a responsibility to cut red tape that diverts dollars from improving student outcomes and to focus our resources on those areas with the greatest potential impact.” Citing his flagship, initiatives such as Race to the Top and i³, he noted, “In some cases, government may have to spend more now to get better returns on our current investments in the future.”

Unlike the Bush Administration, which initially discouraged online delivered tutoring in its guidance regarding SES provisions but which eventually encouraged greater use of technology only if it improved math and reading achievement, Secretary Duncan has broadened the opportunities for technology use. In particular, he cited areas such as improving teacher working conditions (a significant cause of teacher turnover), online on-demand teacher support and coaching for new teachers, community and parent engagement, reducing the need for remediation (but, where necessary, reducing the cost of providing it) and encouraging and funding expanded use of response-to-intervention, thereby continuing to reduce the number of at-risk students inappropriately placed in special education programs. To realize the benefits of technology, however, local and state decision-makers must directly address traditions related to seat time, teacher pay based on tenure, among others. In his [Education Week](#) blog *Straight Up*, Rick

Hess, Director at the American Enterprise Institute where the speech was given, called the speech “unlike any I’ve ever heard a Secretary deliver,” but wondered, “Now the only question is follow-through -- will this prove to have been a one-time speech, or something more than that?” However, he noted, the Secretary can “make it safer for superintendents and state chiefs to talk about productivity and efficiency alongside student learning. He can make it safe to talk about labor-saving technologies, new staffing approaches, and school closures as part and parcel of reform.” Moreover, the Department of Education can “scour its regulations to make it easier for states and districts to spend dollars smart. It can reduce paperwork and compliance burdens.” And, “It can help push an often hostile education establishment to embrace notions of ‘productivity’ and ‘cost effectiveness’.”

USED Releases More “Data” on Types of Schools and Intervention Models Used in SIG Grant Program in 44 States -- High Schools and Transformation (See Attached List of Tier I & II Schools)

On the same day America’s Promise Alliance released its most recent report on progress being made with “dropout factories” (see related TechMIS item), Secretary Duncan’s office announced that, of the 730 schools receiving School Improvement Grants Part G, 48 percent are high schools. Based on data available from 44 states that have received School Improvement Grants, 24 percent of the schools receiving SIG funds are elementary schools, 21 percent are middle schools, and seven percent are some combination of the three levels. The USED attributes the

significant increase in Federal funding for school turnaround initiatives at the high school level to new rules in the SIG guidance; previously only schools that received Title I Part A funds and were in school improvement status were eligible for SIG funds. Because high schools have been historically underserved by Title I and because of the large amount of Title I funds needed to serve a high school compared to an elementary school (about 15-20% more), high schools -- even if they were eligible -- were not served and were thus unable to receive SIG funds and resources. New rules allow high schools that never had received SIG funds to receive them now because they are otherwise eligible for Title I.

Several months ago, we estimated that approximately \$6 billion would be spent this year on “school improvement” from a variety of funding sources, including SIG Part G. At that time, we also estimated that at a minimum 60 percent of Part G funds would be allocated to districts to serve high schools. Of the 730 schools being served, 48 percent, or almost half, are high schools this year. A Washington Post article (November 30, 2010) reported that, according to a USED estimate, the allocation of Part G funds per high school averages \$1.5 million per year. The per-school SIG allocation for middle and elementary schools (i.e., the remaining 52 percent) is \$500,000-\$1 million per year. USED also estimated that approximately \$825 million of the FY 2009 Part G allocations to states has been carried over from last year to this year. Using the above USED estimates, the percentage of Part G funds allocated to high schools thus far would be approximately 65-70 percent. However, of the \$3 billion of SIG ARRA funds obligated to states, only \$50 million

had been “outlaid” (or spent) by November, according to USED expenditure reports (which are generally low).

Not unexpectedly, data thus far collected from 44 states (not including Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, New Hampshire, Hawaii, and District of Columbia) indicate 71 percent of schools are using the transformation model as reported by Education Week, Washington Post, and eSchool News; and 53 percent of the schools served are in urban areas. Twenty-three percent of the 730 schools are in rural areas, and 24 percent are suburban schools. Twenty-one percent of all schools are using the turnaround model which generally calls for replacing the principal and 50 percent of school staff. Only three schools using the turnaround model were rural schools, while 100 schools were in urban settings and 32 in suburban areas. Only five percent of all schools were using the restart model, most in city settings. Secretary Duncan has said in interviews, “...the geographic diversity puts to rest the notion that School Improvement Grants aren’t feasible for rural schools.” As reported in Education Week, Duncan also said that 20 percent of the schools deemed eligible for grants were in rural areas, but that 23 percent of the grantees were rural schools. However, when rural districts began to complain earlier in the year about the prescriptive nature of the models and the need to replace principals and staff where such staff were not available, Duncan claimed that approximately 30 percent of all failing schools were in rural settings.

The presentation of data thus far is clearly designed to counter arguments that there is a need for a “fifth” intervention model as advocated by NEA officials which appeared

in a recent press conference with Secretary Duncan. In the Education Week article, Secretary Duncan did say he “might be open to a conversation about including other prescriptions down the line.” However, an official USED spokeswoman said they are “not currently looking to expand options.” In a discussion with at least one other reporter who was not provided the “additional data,” she indicated that USED is likely to allow states and, in turn, districts -- especially rural districts -- to request waivers in the immediate future including not to have to replace principals and staff as is currently required under a rigorous interpretation of requirements for the turnaround and transformation models.

Following the press release regarding the above information, USED selectively released, to a limited number of reporters, more data on the types of models being used in different settings. Thus far, no written report for public consumption evidently has been provided. Based on this data, as well as discussions and reviews of several articles, we have been able to piece together additional sketches which could assist subscribers in deciding what types of schools to target with certain products and services. Attached is a list -- provided by “unofficial” sources -- of the 730 schools in the 44 states receiving SIG funds and the model interventions being used.

For a copy of the USED official estimates, go to: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/highest-percentage-turnaround-funds-are-going-high-schools>

America's Promise Alliance Announces Civic Marshall Plan to Build a *Grad Nation* which Could Influence the Demand for Certain Products as the Alliance Implements its Grassroots Campaign Under a Tiered Approach

The *Grad Nation* initiative, created in March 2010 by General Colin Powell and his wife Alma, as part of the America's Promise Alliance (APA) has released a report about the progress and challenges in ending "the high school dropout epidemic." Prepared by respected researchers/practitioners -- Dr. Robert Balfanz, et. al. of Johns Hopkins University -- the report points to success thus far in among other things, reducing the number of high school dropout factories. At the same time APA outlines a strategy to meet the challenge components of which could provide opportunities for firms with appropriate and relevant products and services (e.g., early warning and intervention systems). Many of the report's recommendations, which target the grassroots district/school and community levels, will influence the types of products which will be purchased using Federal funds such as School Improvement Grants, Dropout Prevention, Promise Neighborhood projects, and other funding sources (e.g., including several Department of Labor programs). APA, over the last few years, has convened more than 100 "dropout summits" in all 50 states and has produced *Grad Nation* guidelines to share best research and practices for more than 30,000 individuals ranging from governors to teachers in dropout factories.

As reported widely in the press over the last month, between 2002 and 2008, the number of "dropout factory" high schools -- defined

as 40 percent or more of students failing to graduate -- fell by 13 percent from 2,007 to 1,746. Other indicators of progress reported by Balfanz, et. al. included:

- an increase in the national graduation rate from 72 percent to 75 percent;
- 29 states showing increased high school graduation rates, while only three experienced noticeable declines.

However, as the report notes, the rate of progress over the last decade -- a three percentage point increase -- is too slow to reach the national goal of having 90 percent of students graduate from high school and obtain and least one year of post-secondary schooling or training by 2020.

The newly announced "Civic Marshall Plan" to build a *Grad Nation* is designed to help states and districts develop the capacity to transform or replace the remaining 1,746 dropout factories and their feeder schools; then, it will focus on the 3,000 additional high schools with graduation rates between 61-75 percent which account for an additional 35 percent of the nation's dropouts. Many of these schools are likely to be designated as Tier 3 under School Improvement Grants meaning they will not receive priority SIG funding between now and September 2011. The Plan's goals for 2012 are to increase the achievement of struggling readers by grade five, reduce chronic absenteeism, and conduct needs and capacity assessments of targeted schools. During 2013, early warning and intervention systems would be established in every targeted school district and state; middle grades will be redesigned to foster honor student engagement in preparation for rigorous high school courses; and school success mentors will be assigned for every

15-20 students at risk of dropping out.

Some of the components which will be promoted during its grassroots *Grad Nation* campaign include:

- early warning and intervention systems to correct and report on individualized student progress and identify/match interventions, such as tutoring, math curriculum support, ninth-grade academies, extended learning time, and student supports;
- implement innovative alternative learning environments for credit recovery students who have already dropped out of high school, through the use of online education and other models;
- parent engagement through use of homework hotlines and parent access to learning centers within schools; and
- training and support for effective and accountable teachers and principals, especially in the use of effective practices.

The APA has also produced and disseminated the *Grad Nation* guidebook to share best research and practice as noted in a section with subtitle “We Know What Works,” based on case studies in Tennessee, Alabama, Indiana, and New York City. The ingredients for increasing graduation rates include strong leadership, innovation and support, and technical assistance for research-based solutions, many of which have been identified by the What Works Clearinghouse.

For a copy of “Building a Grad Nation” go to: <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad->

[Nation/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation_FullReport_FINAL%2011-30-10.ashx](http://www.americaspromise.org/~/media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation_FullReport_FINAL%2011-30-10.ashx)

Three National Advocacy Groups for Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs Have Joined Forces, with Financial Help from the Noyce Foundation, to Increase STEM Literacy for the Twenty Million Plus Children Currently Enrolled in Such Programs, Representing a Change from the Previous Emphasis on Remediation and Student Enrichment; this New Emphasis on STEM Literacy Would Represent Increased Opportunities for Firms with Appropriate Content and Professional Development

In October, a new partnership of the Afterschool Alliance (ASA), National AfterSchool Association (NAA), and National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) announced that all three advocacy groups will provide a “strong focus on STEM learning at our national conferences beginning with the NSLA conference in November.” The partnership announcement stated, “This environment by nature offers the kind of project-based and hands-on learning time and venue that sparks their [students’] interest and passions -- a logical platform to engage them in STEM education. The principles of experimentation and exploration inherent in the scientific process are also found in afterschool and summer programs, where children and youth confront problems, develop solutions and work collaboratively.” Noting that such programs provide children with an opportunity to develop interest in

science, the statement argues, “Research has shown that an interest in science in 8th grade is a better predictor of students choosing a STEM career than academically high-performing students of the same age who show no interest in science. Unique and effective community partnerships are another feature of STEM programming that falls outside regular school hours. These programs often collaborate with external organizations and individuals, particularly with museums, universities, professors, private businesses, and more.”

The overall strategy of the “partnership” appears to be generating a “grassroots” movement and support for STEM activities and then to leverage Federal and other funding sources, in addition to 21st Century Community Learning Centers, to provide the necessary financial support to initiate and expand STEM literacy in what heretofore has been traditional academic achievement and enrichment programs with a major focus on at-risk, low-performing students in schools not meeting AYP requirements. Some of the tactics announced as part of their overall STEM literacy strategy include:

- “Showcase how afterschool and summer learning programs can help engage and excite children and youth about STEM topics and careers”;
- “Educate afterschool and summer practitioners and provide pathways to professional development to help deliver high-quality STEM programming”;
- “Educate national, state and local policy makers about best practices in STEM learning outside the school day”; and

- Use our conferences, newsletters, and public speaking opportunities to advance this critical agenda.”

The new divergent strategy by the “partnership” could also be an effort to deflect attempts in Congress to allow funds appropriated for afterschool programs, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, to be used for extended learning time, which has been a high Administration priority, and to take advantage of some proposed increases in funding in Race to the Top winning states (see August TechMIS Washington Update). Increased involvement of community-based organizations and local businesses in STEM literacy activities could also generate funding from foundations and local businesses, with possibly increased funding and support of Republicans for the reauthorization of the America Competes Act, which has been floundering in Congress for the last several years with no funding increases.

Firms which have products that could be used in STEM literacy activities should seriously consider approaching the “partnership,” individual advocacy groups, or partners or parties with whom they already have professional contacts to explore the possibilities of working with the “partnership” during the early days of implementation of this initiative.

For a copy of the report go to: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/STEM_JointPositionPaper.pdf

USED has Initiated a Review of its Competitive Grant Programs, Including Race to the Top; Planned Title I State Monitoring Activities Will Focus Exclusively on School Improvement Grant Programs, Most Likely in Anticipation of Investigations and Perhaps Subpoenas and Other Oversight Measures by Republican-Controlled House Early Next Year

In November, USED announced a new initiative to review major competitive grant programs and, at about the same time, sent a policy letter (November 17th) to chief state school officers which stated, "...beginning in January 2011 and through June 2011, we will focus our Title I State monitoring activities exclusively on the SIG program." As Jeanne Sweeney, Title I reporter at Education Daily noted, Patricia McKee Acting Director of USED's Office of Student Achievement and School Accountability programs said focused "indicators" and specific SIG requirements will be issued to affected states in the next few weeks, but that the USED Title I staff will continue to provide technical assistance on all programs in their jurisdiction. Both of these reviews are likely directly-related to the Republican-controlled Congress exercising its oversight role next year through hearings, investigations, and possibly subpoenas, particularly related to Secretary Duncan's flagship programs, including Race to the Top, i³, Teacher Incentive Fund, Promise Neighborhoods, and Teacher Partnership Grants.

USED's review of the large competitive grant programs is officially "to see how the rules that govern them can be refined and improved," as reported in Education Week's

State EdWatch blog. The article quotes Joanne Weiss, Secretary Duncan's Chief of Staff, who previously directed the Race to the Top initiative, as stating that Race to the Top and i³ succeeded "beyond our imagination... We want to learn from what we did the first time around, we want to improve upon it, both for these programs... [and to share that] learning across the entire department." The Obama proposed FY 2011 budget, which was also referred to as a "blueprint" for ESEA reauthorization, proposed to convert new funding for programs such as Title I to be allocated through a competitive grant process rather than through the existing formula basis, to states and districts. As noted in our March TechMIS Special Report, conversion of formula programs to competitive grants received vocal opposition from education groups such as AASA and NSBA as well as from Congressmen and Senators, particularly those representing rural districts. As reported by the Rural School and Community Trust, of the new 63 Republican turnover districts in the November elections, 31 are Congressional districts defined as "rural areas." Some observers, including Rick Hess and other scholars at American Enterprise Institute, foresee a "repeat" of the Reading First audits, Congressional oversight hearings, and investigations which occurred four and five years ago (see November Washington Update). In early December, The New Teachers Project (TNTP), a national non-profit group often cited for its exemplary initiatives by Secretary Duncan and a supporter of Race to the Top, was extremely critical of the Race to the Top review/scoring process, citing score inflation, reviewer subjectivity, and inconsistent scoring of applications that excluded some states whose proposals more closely met the stated goals of Race to the

Top. TNTP called the second round of applications as being “the luck of the draw.”

It is unclear as to what priority SIG requirements will be the focus of USED’s redirected monitoring and auditing effort beyond the degree to which districts are implementing one or more of the four prescribed intervention models. The auditing process will be difficult due to changes in the SIG legislation in December 2009 and the issuance of more than five interim sets of guidance and modifications over the last year; in turn, these changes resulted in late state application approvals which will result in a one-year extension of “full implementation” in virtually all states requesting waivers, as noted in our November 12th TechMIS Special Report.

In a recent discussion, Jeanne Sweeney said that the indicators that will be the focus of the audits and schedules would likely be made available to the states during the National Title I conference in Tampa at the end of January. She also speculated that additional SEA waiver requests could be allowed on the number of contentious issues related to some of four intervention models.

If hearings occur on Race to the Top’s review process, particularly the scoring rubrics which were used, changes are likely to occur in any future Race to the Top grants competition. As of December 8th, Secretary Duncan has been lobbying Congress to include, in either a Continuing Resolution or an Omnibus FY 2011 budget, \$800 million for Race to the Top which could be directed to not only states, but also districts. The hearings could affect the amount that Congress appropriates and the nature of the competition. The focus of hearings on the i³ grant initiative, if held, will likely focus on

favoritism, and the rationale for “minimizing” participation of the part of private sector firms as partners working with the successful grantee applicants. The American Enterprise Institute has criticized Secretary Duncan’s i³ program for not involving for-profit organizations which AEI argued are more likely to be effective in scale-up projects than non-profit organizations, which were the vast majority of those selected as “official” or “other” partners.

Regardless of the focus on specific indicators under SIG requirements, districts which are receiving SIG funds to serve Tier I and Tier II schools will devote time and energy to ensuring compliance based largely on their interpretations of the SIG regulations and guidance at the expense of conducting pre-implementation activities in preparation for full-implementation September 2011. Firms which have detailed knowledge about the SIG requirements could be invaluable partners to districts in helping ensure compliance and contributing to timely implementation in Tier I and Tier II schools.

Miscellaneous

- a) Money from the Federal Ed Jobs Fund is beginning to be spent by the States. As of early November, only six states had spent any of their allocations -- only about \$1.2 billion out of the Fund’s \$8.9 billion (with nearly \$1.1 billion of that being spent by California). By December 3, cumulative outlays by 25 states totaled \$1.8 billion. It should be noted that, for a variety of reasons, USED has not, as of December 3,

obligated any Ed Jobs funds to South Carolina or Texas.

Several analysts with whom we have talked indicate that the reasons for the slow spending patterns in the states include:

- the passage of Ed Jobs which provided \$10 billion, primarily to retain existing teaching and instructional staff, occurred after school opened in the Fall, too late to rehire released teachers or fill vacant positions.
- in about half of the states, the funds have to be reappropriated by the state legislature before Ed Jobs funds could be allocated to districts, which could not occur until such legislative sessions begin in January/February, 2011.
- in some districts, officials used tight budget constraints as political cover to release staff and to minimize political barbs from teachers' groups; they are hoping that guidelines could change later this year to allow the use of Ed Jobs funds for other purposes.

Many of these same observers believe that some of the Ed Jobs funds had been built into districts' budgets with planned spending not occurring until early next year. If there appears to be a serious threat that unspent Ed Jobs stimulus funding could be rescinded as a result of new Republican leadership pressure in Congress, then one might reasonably expect the rate of expenditures to increase rapidly, especially in those states where state legislatures will have

reappropriated such funds. This could happen if the FY 2011 budget appropriation is in the form of a Continuing Resolution through early next year rather than a Continuing Resolution through September 30, 2011. If such increased Ed Jobs spending on job retention for filling vacancies occurs, then some state and local funds may be freed up for purchasing products and services such as staff development.

- b) In its annual report, Pre-K Now, which details states' pre-k funding for 2011, indicated that total state pre-k funding in FY 2011 increased slightly from \$5.3 billion in 2010 to \$5.4 billion. Noting the bipartisan state legislative support, the report cited 15 states that increased funding included four in which Republicans control both executive and legislative branches, three in which Democrats control both branches, and eight in which control is split between parties. According to the *Early Education Initiative* blog at the New American Foundation, since FY 2005, state pre-k funding has increased from \$3.0 billion to \$5.4 billion in FY 2011; however, due to proportionately larger increases in the number of children served, the per-child served allocation has remained the same or actually declined in some states. The full report includes state-by-state analyses, including sources of funds used to support pre-k programs. The New American Foundation blog notes that this report may be the last "Votes Count" report from Pre-K Now because the project is closing next year. The "Votes Count" report is available at: <http://www.preknow.org/votescount/inde>

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c) Official statements and interview tidbits suggest that the incoming Chairman of House Education & Labor Committee John Kline (R-MN) will be a reform-minded moderate consensus builder. In his statement on December 8th, Chairman-elect Kline reinforced his four priorities for the Committee, which have been embellished during several interviews; these suggest that he will play a moderate role in attempting to build a consensus among Republican committee members, and, in turn, negotiate with Democrats a moderate education reform platform which minimizes Federal intrusion. His stated priorities for the 112th Congress include:

- “Giving employers the certainty, flexibility, and freedom to create jobs;” -- which is directly associated with extending the so-called Bush tax cuts;
- “Conducting robust oversight of education and workforce programs across the federal government to protect students, families, workers, and retirees;”
- “Modernizing and streamlining training programs to help job-seekers get back to work;” and
- “Pursuing education reform that restores local control, empowers parents, lets teachers teach, and protects taxpayers.”

Speaker-Elect John Boehner, who served in the House committee chairmanship position during the passage of NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA in the first half of the last decade stated, “...I know firsthand how much John’s work on that committee

can affect Americans’ lives. He’s a savvy legislator who knows how to lead and can bring together Members on both sides of the aisle to do what’s best for our country.”

Further insight into positions which the new chairman will likely take or upon which he will attempt to build consensus can be gleaned from interviews over the last several weeks. As reported in Education Week (November 16th), Kline stated that it is “time to pull Washington out of the nation’s classrooms and stop using billions in federal dollars to bail out state education budgets.” There have been no reports that Kline would support rescinding unspent education stimulus funding, an approach other House Republican leaders have called for. In that same Education Week interview, he noted that he liked Secretary Duncan personally and supported many of Secretary Duncan’s policies, such as charter schools and performance pay for teachers. On the other hand, he called the passage of the Bush NCLB “the largest intrusion of the federal government in public education, ever.” While he felt that the Obama “blueprint” placing higher priority on ensuring that students are ready for college or career could be an important part of the “dialogue” for reform, the plan gives Washington “too much power.” He also was skeptical of Common Core Standards noting plans to encourage states to adopt Common Core Standards could “too easily morph into national assessments which morph into a national curriculum.” As noted in the Education Week article, while he is a deficit hawk, he does favor government spending on IDEA/special education, currently an unfunded mandate, and would increase IDEA funding by \$14 billion.

In an interview conducted by Frank Wolfe,

Education Daily (December 10th), Kline indicated that he wants to “abolish the NCLB regime of mandating tests in grades 3-8 and once in high school in order to allow states flexibility.” During a telephone interview with TwinCities.com, he reportedly said that he hopes to “eliminate or consolidate up to 50 Education Department programs that ‘just are not working.’” He also acknowledged that, while Congress should “overhaul” NCLB, that deciding what changes to make will require “intense negotiations” to allow districts and states to “have more flexibility”

without dictating mandates from Washington. He acknowledged that he and Secretary Duncan share priorities of providing “more parental choice and more charter schools.” While supporting education reform, he noted in a statement announcing his chairmanship, “We must ensure federal red tape does not become the enemy of innovation, and that federal mandates do not become roadblocks on the path to reform.”

Alabama Update

December 2010

In mid-November, Alabama adopted the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The State Board of Education approved the national standards 7-2 despite a number of comments in opposition, most of which labeled the standards as a “national curriculum.”

Arizona Update

December 2010

A new study by the Arizona Board of Regents has found that about 80 percent of Arizona high school graduates do not have a college degree six years after graduating from high school and more than half have never gone to college at all. Known as the *Arizona Student Pipeline Report*, the study tracked several high school classes starting with the 2003-04 school year and found that 53 percent had never gone to college, 27 percent took college courses but had not graduated, and 20 percent graduated with a certificate or college degree. State education officials attribute the low percentages to poor high school preparation of students for higher education and a need for colleges to focus more on helping students finish their degrees. The officials have expressed hope that more rigorous high school math and science requirements will lead to improved college graduation rates.

California Update

December 2010

Education Daily reports that the California School Boards Association and two school districts have filed suit over Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's veto of funding for a State school program that provides mental health services. The veto was part of the Governor's effort to close a \$19.1 billion deficit in the FY 2011 budget. The CSBA, along with the Los Angeles and Manhattan Beach school districts, argue that elimination of the program requires a two-thirds legislative vote. An earlier lawsuit, filed by three disability advocacy groups, alleged that the State violated IDEA and ADA by eliminating the program.

The *California Watch* blog details some of incoming Governor Jerry Brown's education plans in the context of the State's dire financial situation. Brown has said he wants to recruit more teachers from the top third of California's high school graduates, a goal that is unlikely to be achieved without significant increases in teacher salaries. The Governor-elect wants to simplify the State's 4,000-page Education Code which would require repealing or rewriting large numbers of laws and regulations. He believes that the simplification will save the State substantial money.

According to The Mercury News, the East Side Union High School District (San Jose) has decided to make college-prep courses the standard curriculum for nearly all students. Starting with entering ninth-graders next year, most students will be required to take the so-called A-to-G classes -- the 15 basic courses they must pass to qualify for entrance to California State universities. Some students may choose instead to participate in "career academics" which offer classes in specific career fields -- e.g., construction, health, travel). Other California districts that have increased the focus on A-to-G classes include Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose.

Colorado Update

December 2010

The Colorado Statesman reports that the 2011-12 budget proposed by Governor Bill Ritter calls for a \$93.7 million increase for K-12 education but the request is \$92 million less than is required under the State's Amendment 23 to account for enrollment growth and inflation. It is estimated that, despite the increase in State funding, per-pupil funding will drop by 0.6 percent -- about \$40 per student. This is in addition to a 3.6 percent -- \$240 per student -- drop in 2010-11. As part of efforts to balance the State's budget, the legislature has taken steps to suspend or eliminate funding for 13 education programs, including full-day kindergarten, summer school grants, and charter school facilities.

According to The Denver Post, Colorado schools are receiving their first ratings under the State's new performance standards. Relying on student test scores and a complex formula, the old system graded schools on a scale from excellent to unsatisfactory. The new system gives schools accreditation ratings based on academic growth and success in preparing students for college and the workplace. Under the new system, 111 school districts (61 percent of all districts in the State) were rated as accredited and 14 were rated as accredited with distinction.

The Denver Post also reports that, beginning next year, students at any of Colorado's 13 community colleges will be guaranteed admission to Colorado University if they have completed at least 30 semester-hours and earned a GPA of at least 2.7. Available to as many as 135,000 community college students, the guaranteed admission program will be of particular benefit to low-income and first-generation students.

Connecticut Update

December 2010

A recent report from the University of Connecticut suggests that the economic return on a community college degree is not much different from that on a four-year degree. As published in The Connecticut Economy, a two-year degree increases lifetime earnings by 8.3 percent while a Bachelor's degree increases earnings by 9.4 percent. The report also notes that State subsidies for community colleges have lagged behind the sharp rise in community college enrollment which is largely attributable to the State's troubled economy. State funding for community colleges has remained constant at \$158 million since 2008-09 despite the enrollment increase. Another report found that the cost of educating students in Connecticut's four-year universities who left after their first year totaled approximately \$21 million in 2007-08.

Florida Update

December 2010

The Orlando Sentinel reports that, in 2010, Florida high schools recorded their highest scores ever under a new system that rates schools on more than just scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). For the past decade, FCAT scores had been the only measure used in the A-to-F rating system. The new system uses FCAT scores as half of a school's rating, but also includes graduation rates, student success in high-level (e.g., Advanced Placement) courses, and student success on college placement exams (i.e., SAT, ACT). This year, 71 percent of Florida's 470 public high schools earned As or Bs -- up from 41 percent last year. And the percentage getting Ds or Fs declined from 32 percent in 2009 to 14 percent this year.

As reported in the *State EdWatch* blog on EducationWeek.com, 65 of Florida's 67 regular school districts had originally agreed to participate in the State's Race to the Top plan. Florida's \$700 million award includes a new model for evaluating and paying teachers and gives local districts flexibility in the development of their merit pay plans. In the State's final plan submitted to USED, 62 of the initial 65 districts are still on board; the dropouts are Dixie, Hamilton, and Suwannee Counties.

A recent study by the Education Trust has found that, nationally, nearly 20 percent of core courses in high-poverty middle and high schools are taught by out-of-field teachers. This rate is almost twice the rate in low-poverty schools. More specifically, the national percentage of core secondary classes taught by out-of-field teachers has improved -- from 17.2 percent in 2003-04 to 15.6 percent in 2007-08. In Florida, the rates dropped from 17.9 percent in 2003-04 to 15.9 percent in 2007-08.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, more than 53 percent of Florida's 2008 high school graduates who went on to community colleges required remediation in reading, writing, or math. The SREB also reported that Florida's 2008 graduates were less likely to go on

to college than high school graduates in any of the other 15 Southern states. State education officials hope these numbers will turn around as tougher high school graduation requirements kick in with this year's ninth-graders. Currently, high schoolers need 24 credits and passing scores on the tenth-grade reading and math assessments in order to graduate. By the Class of 2017, high school graduates will have to have taken math through Algebra II and science through chemistry or physics.

The *State EdWatch* blog also reports that a large expansion of Florida's voucher program may be in the works. Republican Governor-elect Rick Scott has publicly supported a plan which could provide vouchers allowing all parents to choose the schools -- public, private, or virtual -- their children attend and to which State per-pupil funding would go. Currently, Florida operates two voucher programs: the McKay Scholarship Program for students with disabilities and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program which offers tax credits to companies that fund private school costs for economically-disadvantaged students. The new program would be called an "education savings account," details of which have not been worked out.

There is controversy in the Florida legislature over Senate Bill 6 which would create a new merit pay system for teachers and phase out teacher tenure. Such a system would replace tenure with individual teacher contracts that would not be automatically renewed. Republican lawmakers support the measure but Democrats and teachers describe the Bill as a radical overhaul of the existing system that provided for no input from educators or the public.

Georgia Update

December 2010

The Answer Sheet blog on WashingtonPost.com reports that the Jones County school district (near Macon) has decided not to accept its \$1.3 million share of Georgia's \$400 million Race to the Top award. The district's rejection of the money was based, in large part, on its refusal to implement a value-added assessment system for teachers based on student standardized test scores. District officials argued that implementing such a system would be too expensive and that research has shown such systems are not reliable in evaluating teachers

Hawaii Update

December 2010

The Honolulu Star Advertiser reports that, in keeping with Hawaii's successful \$75 million Race to the Top application, the State's public schools are beginning to use a new formative assessment system, along with better testing methods and more rigorous standards. The new computerized system will track student progress in order to identify struggling students before they fall too far behind their peers.

THE Journal reports that a consortium of six Hawaii high schools has adopted an early warning system for students at-risk of dropping out. Under a five-year, \$4.8 million grant from USED's Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program, the Pinnacle of Success SLC Consortium plans to use *Pearson's Prevent* as part of its improvement effort in six high schools: James Campbell, Kaimuki, Kauai, President Theodore Roosevelt, Waiakea, and Waipahu. Serving a total of 10,300 high school students, the Consortium's approach also includes personalized learning strategies through career academy mentoring, teacher professional development for AP courses, during-school and after-school tutoring, and remediation tools from Scholastic and PLATO.

Idaho Update

December 2010

The *Curriculum Matters* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that Idaho has become the 43rd state to agree to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Final adoption will, however, will have to wait for approval from the State legislature which convenes in January.

According to the [Idaho Statesman](#), Idaho has spent more than \$2.5 million since March 2008 to develop a student data system, but did not win a \$20 million USED grant to finish building the system. State education officials have requested \$926,000 in ongoing State funds to continue the program and \$43,000 in one-time funds for equipment. A State legislature budget analyst has said the State could save significant money if the system is implemented.

Illinois Update

December 2010

As reported in Education Week, Bank of America will pay \$137 million to settle charges that it bribed local officials to win business as part of a bid-rigging scheme for municipal bond sales. Illinois will receive \$2 million from the settlement, part of which will go to school districts in five Illinois cities, including Chicago.

Indiana Update

December 2010

In early December, Indiana education officials set forth their education agenda for the coming years at a meeting of the State's Education Roundtable. Among the features of the plan are:

- rigorous teacher and administrator evaluation systems;
- accelerated graduation opportunities that would allow high school students to complete diploma requirements by the end of 11th grade and use State per-pupil funds for their 12th grade year;
- expanded pool of authorizers for charter schools (currently, only Ball State University and the Mayor of Indianapolis can authorize charter schools); and
- a program called Parent Trigger which says that, if 51 percent of a school's parents sign a petition, the State can step in early to begin the school's turnaround activities.

Partially funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Education, Marian University's Academy for Teaching and Learning is training educators to address the State's most troubled schools. In its first year, the Academy prepared educators to take positions in which they will be asked to turn around the 20 Indiana schools in their fifth year of failing to meet academic standards. The Marian program will continue to mentor school leaders during their first two years on the job. The program also prepares educators to go into any school, not just turnaround projects, and raise student achievement.

Maryland Update

December 2010

The New York Times has reported on the success of Baltimore's superintendent, Andres Alonso in revitalizing the chronically low-performing district. In the three years since he took office, the superintendent has closed failing schools, replaced three-quarters of all school principals, and reduced central office staff by a third. In the past three years, the district dropout rate has decreased by half and the school system has, for the first time in years, had an increase in enrollment.

According to the *Teacher Beat* blog on EducationWeek.com, teachers in the Baltimore City school district, after having earlier rejected an almost identical proposal, have ratified a new contract that eliminates many features of the district's old salary schedule. Under the new contract, there will no longer be automatic "step" raises each year. Rather, salary increases will be based on teacher performance as measured by evaluations and participation in professional development.

Massachusetts Update

December 2010

A total of 276 local school districts initially signed on to Massachusetts' successful \$250 million application under the Federal Race to the Top competition. In the State's final RTTT plan, 19 districts have dropped out.

The Boston Globe reports that more than a third of the urban eighth-grade students in Massachusetts are at risk of dropping out of high school. State data indicate that more than 7,000 are at risk for a variety of reasons including low scores on the State assessment, high absenteeism, and suspensions. The State report also noted that students who had been held back a grade are at greater risk of dropping out. The data show that the highest risk students were absent for nearly 25 percent of their eighth-grade year, failed the State math assessment, nearly failed the State English assessment, and were suspended up to 30 times.

The Boston Globe also reports that, over the last decade, charter school enrollment in Massachusetts has more than doubled -- from 12,518 to 27,484. Much of this growth has occurred in urban areas. During the last ten years, seven of the ten school units with the largest percentage enrollment increases have been charter schools.

Minnesota Update

December 2010

According to the Brainerd Dispatch, next year, seven school districts and 23 charter schools will be joining Minnesota's four-year-old Q Comp program under which teacher pay is linked to student test scores. After the additions, nearly a third of Minnesota students will be taught by Q Comp teachers. Districts participating in Q Comp receive an additional \$260 per student in State aid, as well as additional levy authority. The new participants will divide an extra \$4 million in start-up funding.

Montana Update

December 2010

According to the New America Foundation, Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer has released his proposed budget for the 2012-13 biennium. The budget for the 2010-11 biennium included \$31 million in Federal stimulus funding for higher education. To offset this money -- which will not be available in 2012-13 -- the Governor would increase State aid for higher education in 2012-13. The additional \$8 million is intended to cover the costs of higher enrollments and inflation.

National reports have indicated that, in many states, the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act have become irrelevant and that the requirement that all students test at grade level in reading and math by 2014 is unachievable. The Billings Gazette reports that the Billings school district, despite progress, has given up any hope of reaching the NCLB target. Currently 89 percent and 74 percent of Billings students are performing at grade level in reading and math respectively. However, next year, with NCLB targets of 92 percent in reading and 84 percent in math, district officials say they are unlikely to meet the requirements.

Nevada Update

December 2010

According to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, Nevada ranks near the bottom among all states in such categories as the percentages of:

- young adults with college degrees;
- high school freshmen who go on to get college degrees;
- the adult population with college degrees; and
- the working population with graduate degrees.

To address the issue, Nevada has joined with 23 other states in Complete College America, a D.C.-based non-profit organization whose goal is to improve college graduation rates. Nevada is seeking to increase its number of college graduates from 12,000 in 2010 to 23,000 in 2020.

Among the Network's possible approaches are shorter but more semesters, remedial math and science courses, a better system for tracking students after they leave the programs, more tutoring, and making academic advising mandatory.

New Jersey Update

December 2010

Education Week has recently reported on the aggressive fiscal approach of New Jersey's Governor Chris Christie. In the past year, the governor has:

- cut State appropriations for education by more than \$800 million;
- introduced a salary cap for school superintendents, based on district enrollment;
- capped property tax increases at two percent effective in January.

He has also proposed a “toolkit” to help local governments cut costs. The “toolkit” proposals include limitations on sick and vacation leave payouts for retiring teachers, revised collective bargaining procedures, and allowing districts to cap wages. The Governor has also endorsed two bills that would affect education. One would give tax credits to businesses that establish scholarships for students who are attending low-performing schools. The second would create a new charter school authorizer under the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education.

New Mexico Update

December 2010

Despite higher-than-expected tax revenues, New Mexico is still looking at a difficult budget situation. According to the New America Foundation, the higher revenues -- about \$56 million - will not be distributed to roll back cuts made earlier in the current fiscal year. Rather the State will reserve the funds to help balance the budget in FY 2012 when \$215 million in Federal stimulus money is no longer available.

New York Update

December 2010

New York State has released guidance on the implementation of “response to intervention,” including the use of RTI with English language learners. Prepared by the State’s Response to Intervention Technical Assistance Center, the guidance provides recommendations for monitoring the progress of ELLs and emphasizes the importance of gathering information about students’ knowledge in their native language. New York has implemented five-year RTI grants in 14 schools, half of which have significant numbers of ELLs.

The New York Times reports that New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the State Department of Education have reached a compromise over the Mayor’s controversial appointment of Cathleen Black to be the City’s school chancellor. The appointment of Ms. Black, a publishing executive, was sharply criticized because of her lack of educational background. Mr. Bloomberg has agreed to appoint a “chief academic officer” as second in command, although the scope of the position’s authority is unclear. The job is expected to be filled by Shael Polakow-Suransky, a former classroom teacher and high school principal.

The Albany Times Union reports that 21 local school districts in New York have agreed to pool their shares of the State’s \$700 million in Race to the Top money. Supported by the local BOCES, the Capital Region Network Team will be funded by \$3 million from districts in the Albany area. The Network, run by an advisory committee consisting of a representative from each participating district, will help districts implement the Common Core State Standards, develop new professional development opportunities, and establish teams to analyze student performance data.

North Carolina Update

December 2010

The *State EdWatch* blog on EducationWeek.com reports that North Carolina's Race to the Top effort has maintained all 115 of its original school districts' commitments. Moreover, 33 of the 51 charter schools that were eligible for a share of the State's \$400 million RTTT award have also agreed to participate. The State's RTTT plan calls for expanding the use of data, including student achievement data, in the evaluation of principals and teachers. It will require stronger steps to turn around low-performing schools, which could include State oversight, replacing leadership, or outside "transformation coaches." The State's RTTT money will be used to connect school districts through a "cloud computing" project that would move technology resources to centralized servers. State officials think such a change would save North Carolina school districts significant money. The State has reviewed and tentatively approved the Scope of Work plans of all North Carolina school districts under the State's Race to the Top program. District RTTT plans are available at: <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/rttt/lea-charter>

With both houses of the North Carolina legislature in the hands of Republicans, it is expected that efforts will be made to eliminate the State's cap of 100 charter schools. Last year, charter schools served 38,000 North Carolina students -- fewer than three percent of the State's total enrollment. Charter school advocates say that up to 20,000 students are currently on waiting lists at the State's 99 existing charter schools. As part of its successful application for \$400 million under the Federal Race to the Top competition, North Carolina did not lift the cap but approved a law calling for "charter-like" schools. Critics of charter schools have argued that charters take per-pupil State money away from public schools without performing significantly better in terms of student test scores.

North Carolina will receive \$3.4 million as part of the \$137 million settlement from Bank of America to resolve allegations that the bank bribed local officials in a bid-rigging scheme to invest proceeds from municipal bond sales. According to [Education Week](http://EducationWeek.com), North Carolina will return the money to the communities and school districts that were harmed by the scheme.

The Raleigh News & Observer reports that North Carolina has entered into a three-year, \$800,000 agreement with Microsoft to implement the company's IT school curriculum Statewide. Under the agreement, high school students will have access to lessons in Microsoft applications in schools and community centers and at home. The program will offer, at no cost to high school students, credentials that community college and continuing education students have to pay for. The Microsoft IT Academy courses will replace the entry-level computer courses at all high schools for the Fall 2011 semester -- enrolling an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 students. Thirty-seven high schools across the State began teaching the Microsoft curriculum this year.

According to The News & Observer, the Durham school district plans to use \$4.5 million of its Race to the Top funding to provide iPads to students at two low-performing schools and to implement an extended day program at another school. Students and teachers at W.G. Pearson Elementary and Lowe's Grove Middle School will get the iPads along with staff to integrate the devices into the schools' curricula. Neal Middle School will use its RTTT money to extend the school day by one hour and to establish a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math School and a Math/Science summer camp.

Ohio Update

December 2010

According to Ohio's final Race to the Top plan, 50 of the initial 538 participating districts and schools have declined to stay in the program and will forfeit their shares of the State's \$400 million award. Among the reasons for the dropouts were concerns about the amount of time involved, local collective bargaining agreements, and disagreements between school boards and district staff over the use of student performance in teacher evaluation. Many of Ohio's districts' Scopes of Work have been approved conditionally meaning they will need to make modifications for years 2-4.

Pennsylvania Update

December 2010

The 2009-10 Program Reach and Risk Report, released by the State at the end of November, found that only about a third of Pennsylvania's children under five years old have access to quality preschool. Among the study's more specific findings:

- Children in 46 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties and 21 of its largest cities are moderate-to-high risk of school failure.
- In every county, at least 29 percent of children under age 5 live in economically at-risk homes.
- In 23 of the State's 27 largest cities, more than half of children under age 5 live in economically at-risk households.

According to Education Week, Pennsylvania will receive \$4 million out of the \$137 million settlement paid by Bank of American to resolve allegations that the bank bribed local officials to win business. State officials say the State's settlement money will be given to school districts, counties, and municipalities that were victim of the bid-rigging.

Rhode Island Update

December 2010

According to [The Providence Journal](#), Rhode Island is considering a new three-tiered diploma system linked to student proficiency on State assessments. Under the proposal, students who do not score at least “partially proficient” on eleventh-grade tests would have to retake the tests in their senior year. The schools would be required to offer remedial support for those students. If the students do not improve their scores, they would receive no diploma. The three diploma levels are:

- *Rhode Island* diploma for those who score “partially proficient” and complete 20 credits and a senior project or portfolio;
- *Regents* diploma for students who score “proficient” and fulfill other requirements; and
- *Honors* diploma for those who score “proficient with distinction” on the State tests.

As reported on [Stateline.org](#), Rhode Island’s Governor-elect, Lincoln Chafee, has raised questions about the State’s successful Race to the Top application because it included a doubling of the number of charter schools in the State.

South Dakota Update

December 2010

The Rapid City Journal reports that South Dakota has adopted the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The State will provide guidance and begin training on the new standards this school year but it will be at least four years before new assessments are implemented to replace the existing State assessment. South Dakota is a member of one of the two multi-state consortia that is developing new assessment systems for the Common Core Standards.

Tennessee Update

December 2010

Each year the Tennessee Higher Education Commission prepares a report card on teacher preparation institutions which includes student test score data for public school teachers who have been on the job up to three years. As reported in The Memphis Commercial Appeal, except for math teachers from Vanderbilt University, the most effective new teachers in Tennessee are trained by Teach for America, not colleges of education. TFA recruits high-performing graduates from all disciplines and, this year, was approved to offer its own teacher accreditation program.

During a recent Education Trust National Conference, officials from the Tennessee SEA updated the State's Race to the Top plan. Thirteen schools have been taken over by the Achievement School District (ASD) from under LEA jurisdiction. ASD schools will receive \$1.2 million per year over the next four years; it is not clear whether this funding comes out of the State's 50 percent allocation or the 50 percent LEA allocations. ASD will establish partnerships with reputable agencies to bring new resources forward, including increased staff and charter school options. According to Education Daily (December 9th), planning is under way with LEAs and partners for the official takeover next July. Seven of the ASD schools are in urban districts and the remainder are in single districts which will be responsible for planning, verifying performance indicators, driving and monitoring performance, building capacity, and implementing interventions as needed. Under school turnaround activities, the following partners have been established: Charter School Growth Fund, KIPP, Teach for America, the New Teachers Project, and Leadership Development. According to the PowerPoint presentation that was included in the Education Trust Conference, over the next year, five indicators of progress will be early grades reading proficiency, middle grades math proficiency, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and college completion.

Texas Update

December 2010

As reported by the New America Foundation, the Texas legislature, in its session beginning in January, will be addressing a \$24 billion shortfall in the 2012-13 biennial budget. Lawmakers are expected to cut \$3 billion - \$5 billion from the K-12 education budget. The programs most likely to be cut are teacher incentive pay and preschool, but the size of the shortfall means that the State's \$37 billion Foundation School Program -- basic State aid -- will also be reduced.

A recent report from the Texas Education Agency indicates that only four percent of Texas school districts received the highest -- five-star -- rating under the State's accountability system which combines student academic performance and rates of spending. Five stars means the district has high progress rates and "very low" spending, while one-star districts have low progress rates and "very high" spending. About 20 percent of districts received ratings of 4 or 4 ½ stars, 36 percent got 3 or 3 ½ stars, 31 percent got 2 or 2 ½ stars, and ten percent got 1 or ½ stars. Known as "Connecting the Dots: School Spending and Student Progress," the report allows Texas educators to compare the effectiveness of school districts using such categories as dropout rates or math scores. The report also recommends a number of cost-saving approaches for districts including:

- reducing the number of administrators;
- moving almost entirely to electronic textbooks; and
- changing the 22-to-1 student teacher ratio in elementary schools from a cap to an average (this change alone could save an estimated \$558 million although a change in State law would be required).

A recent study has found that Texas' \$400 million merit pay plan for teachers -- District Awards for Teacher Excellence -- has resulted in more teacher retention and higher student test scores. Conducted by Vanderbilt University, the University of Missouri, and the Rand Corporation, the research also found that school districts got better results when they gave larger bonuses -- \$3,000 or more -- rather than making smaller payments to more teachers. Although the teacher

bonuses were primarily based on test scores, the researchers warned that the achievement gains could be attributable to a number of factors other than the merit pay.

The Houston Business Journal reports that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation have made significant grants to the Houston school district. The Gates Foundation will make a \$1.5 million donation to be used, over the next three years, to support the design of a new teacher appraisal system in partnership with the New Teacher Project. The Dell Foundation will contribute \$1.37 million over two years to support Houston's student college readiness program.

According to the Houston Chronicle, the Texas Education Agency has assigned a conservator to the Houston school district to ensure the district corrects areas in which its residential schools were out of compliance with IDEA. Among the schools' violations are not adhering to IEPs, giving too many modified exams, and not providing teachers with students' IEPs. A total of about 120 students with disabilities attend the district's residential facilities.

Virginia Update

December 2010

According to the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell says he will ask for a minimum of \$50 million in new funding to increase college access and affordability. The Governor's plan looks to increase by 100,000 the number of two- and four-year degrees awarded over the next 15 years, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math. Among the plan's features are the sharing of resources among schools, Statewide online courses, electronic textbooks, and better preparation of students in K-12 schools to minimize the need for college remediation. The Governor has also said he will return to the State's public colleges and universities \$8 million in rebates on credit-card interest.

According to Fox News, Virginia's Attorney General has issued a legal opinion that schools can seize students' cell phones and laptop computers and can read text messages if there is "reasonable grounds" for suspecting the student has violated the law or school rules.

West Virginia Update

December 2010

As reported in The Register-Herald, West Virginia has implemented *Learn21*, a new website that offers interactive games, virtual field trips, and video lessons in core subjects (math, science, social studies). Useable by students from pre-K to 12th grade, *Learn21* expects to add language arts, reading, fine arts, health, and technical education in the near future. *Learn21* allows feedback from users and could, in the future, add college-level materials. State officials see *Learn21* as part the transformation of public education in West Virginia to more online resources. *Learn21* is available at: <http://wvde.state.wv.us/learn21/>