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A STATE OF THE STATES ROUNDUP: State Governors Address High School Reform and College Preparation

President Bush will not deliver his State of the Union address until February 2, but governors began making their State of the State addresses earlier this month. With the National Governors Association's 2005 Education Summit on High Schools a little under one month away (see box on page 6), several governors made high school reform and college preparation a key component of their speeches.

Despite Revenue Growth, Spending Pressures Continue

For the first time since 2001—when the recession began to take its toll on state revenues—most governors are expected to give positive forecasts for their state budgets. This is a dramatic change from 2003, when thirty-one states had to trim their budgets in the middle of the fiscal year. Even as recently as last year, ten states had to cut their budgets. Now, with tax revenues beginning to recover, only three states (Michigan, Nebraska, and New Hampshire) expect to report that gaps have opened since the beginning of the fiscal year, according to a November 2004 state budget update from the National Conference of State Legislatures. In total, lawmakers have closed an aggregate budget gap exceeding \$235 billion since fiscal 2001.

However, with Medicaid and other health care costs continuing to rise, the pressures on state budgets remain daunting. Fiscal year 2004 marks the first time ever that Medicaid represented a larger component of total state spending than did elementary and secondary education spending.

Education funding remains a challenge for many governors. In several states, legislatures face court orders to revamp their school funding systems. In others, pressure to refill rainy-day coffers that were drained during the recession is strong. Nevertheless, many governors are finding the money to increase funding for K–12 education and are directing portions of those funds directly to helping their older students graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education.

Arkansas

Governor Mike Huckabee (R) stressed the importance of postsecondary education in his State of the State address. “If we’re only going to build an economy that depends on a high school graduate, then, my friends, we are going to build an economy that will see to it that every single Arkansas student will be stuck in poverty,” he said. “A wonderful high school diploma is a good thing. But it is not an adequate thing in order to prepare one for the future and to have a job that will give him or her the ability to succeed and prosper and provide for a family.”

State Governors Address High School Reform and College Preparation

(Continued from p. 1)

To help open doors to college, Huckabee asked lawmakers to make financial aid available to any student who graduates from a high school in Arkansas. Huckabee proposed spending a total of \$2.3 billion for K–12 education, nearly a 10 percent increase. Anticipating arguments on how to pay for his proposals, the governor stressed the economic benefit individuals with college degrees could provide to the state. “Do you realize that if we could increase just by 50 percent the number of adults who have a college degree, it would add \$5 billion to the economy and it would result in a net income to the state of Arkansas of \$340 million a year?” he asked. “The money for Arkansas’ future is in the minds and the hearts of those kids that right now aren’t finishing.”

Arizona

In her address, **Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano (D)** proposed providing \$10 million to fund one-on-one tutoring to help high school juniors pass Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), the state’s high school graduation test. The class of 2006 will be the first required to pass the test to graduate; to date, about 50 percent of high school juniors have not passed the test.

Napolitano also proposed several initiatives to help raise teacher quality in the state. Noting that next to a child’s family the most important element in raising student achievement is having a qualified, experienced teacher in the classroom, she suggested a statewide master teacher program that would ultimately place at least one master teacher in every school. Napolitano also pledged to continue to “move money from administrative overhead outside the classroom—and put it into the classroom, so that the low rates of teacher pay can be addressed.”

Colorado

Governor Bill Owens (R) pledged to address what he called the “Colorado Paradox”—the fact that Colorado has more college degrees per capita than any state, but lags in the percentage of students who go on to higher education. Owens asked the legislature to create the Colorado Achievement Scholarship program, to “help needy families make college a reality for their children.” The program would not only provide money to low-income students to help pay for college, it would also address the lack of academic preparation by helping to promote a “precollegiate curriculum” as established by the state department of higher education.

The governor also called on the legislature to pass a law that would require schools to notify a parent if their son or daughter fails to register for a precollegiate curriculum. Owens’s budget would provide \$3.6 billion for K–12 education, a 1.1 percent increase over last year.

Georgia

In a proposal similar to that put forward by Governor Napolitano, **Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R)** proposed creating a master teacher program for Georgia. “Our best teachers do more than impart facts and figures,” he said. “They also inspire and encourage students and instill a

true desire to learn.” His program would recognize teachers who have mastered these skills and help them serve as academic coaches and peer role models. He also proposed a 2 percent raise for teachers.

Perdue spoke about the need to expand access to a rigorous curriculum—especially to the rural counties throughout the state. He proposed creating a Georgia Virtual High School, which would provide access to more than sixty online courses, including over fifteen advanced placement courses and SAT prep. In addition to offering classes, the virtual high school would provide the tools students need to stay on track for college. Through the website, students could research Georgia colleges and careers, prepare for the SAT, apply for college admission, submit transcripts, and apply for financial aid.

Iowa

In his address, **Governor Tom Vilsack (D)** embraced the recommendations of the Iowa Learns Council, a thirty-eight-member panel that studied ways to provide a “world-class and seamless learning opportunity for [the state’s] children.”

“I suspect that many Iowans would be surprised to learn that for every 100 students starting ninth grade in our state, only 83 graduate from high school within four years,” Vilsack said. He went on to explain that only 28 of the original 100 will get their associate’s degree within three years or their bachelor’s degree within six years. “When the Department of Labor reports that 49 out of the top 50 jobs in this country . . . will require post high school education, Iowans have the right to expect and I would submit to you, have the right to demand better,” he said.

For high schools, the council recommended a more rigorous and relevant high school experience. It suggested a need to strengthen curriculum, toughen graduation requirements, and tighten relationships between high schools and postsecondary institutions to allow students to gain college credit while still in high school.

Those recommendations should be followed,” Vilsack said. “In a global economy, in a competitive world, we must challenge our children academically.” In his address, Vilsack announced that the director of the Iowa Department of Education and members of the state board of education would be traveling throughout the state to urge local school officials to adopt the Learns Council’s recommendations for high school reform.

Massachusetts

Governor Mitt Romney (R) praised the success of the Education Reform Act of 1993 for putting more money into public education and introducing testing as a standard for graduation. He then proposed a new Education Reform Act of 2005, which would add a graduation test for science, improve teacher training and mentoring, and extend the school day in the most troubled districts.

“Kids in our urban schools, most of them minorities, are not succeeding at anywhere near the rate of their counterparts in the suburbs,” Romney said. “And let me be clear: The failure of our

State Governors Address High School Reform and College Preparation

(Continued from p. 3)

urban schools to prepare our children today for the challenges of tomorrow is the civil rights issue of our generation.”

Mississippi

During his address, **Governor Haley Barbour (R)** proposed an 8 percent pay raise for teachers—which would make this the second year in a row Mississippi teachers would receive a pay raise. His budget will include \$2.1 billion in education spending, just under a 3 percent increase from last year.

He also promoted his Education Reform Act, which includes several initiatives to redesign high school. Under his plan, the governor would allow students to take classes at a community college or university while still enrolled in high school. Coursework would count toward both a high school diploma and postsecondary degree and would “save Mississippi’s parents thousands of dollars in tuition, and [increase] the academic rigor of the senior year for Mississippi’s students.”

Governor Barbour also suggested that the state insist that, by the 2007–08 school year, all tenth graders have free access to the Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). By that time, he also wants all school districts to be able to offer advanced placement tests in core subject areas to its students.

North Dakota

In his address, **Governor John Hoeven (R)** talked about the state’s thousands of new jobs, highest personal-income growth in the nation, and hundreds of new businesses. He stressed that to sustain this growth, North Dakota needs to focus on education. “To realize the true potential of our state, we must invest in our priorities—priorities that will help us build the best business climate in America,” he said. “That starts with education—both K–12 and higher education. In an informative age, in a technology-based global economy, we must have the most productive and best-educated workforce.”

He proposed spending an additional \$75 million on education over the next four years, in equal installments beginning with fiscal 2006. In his \$2 billion state budget proposal for fiscal years 2006 and 2007, he proposed \$662 million for education, a 5 percent increase over the current biennial budget.

Oregon

Calling education the “most important measure of the state of our state,” **Governor Ted Kulongoski (D)** proposed spending \$6.4 billion for education over the next two years, an increase of 2.4 percent over the current budget. Of that total, \$5 billion would go to school districts, but Kulongoski stressed that more was needed. “I’ve been asked many times . . . if giving \$5 billion, 45 percent of the state general fund, to K-12 education is adequate,” he said. “The answer is no. But it is all we can afford given our current revenues.”

“Nothing will put Oregon’s economy into overdrive faster than a stable, well-funded, and accessible pre-K through 20 education system,” he said. “Business—whether they’re here now or coming in the future—will demand a high-skilled workforce. If we do not reverse the decade-long disinvestment in postsecondary education, and pay more attention to retraining lower workers—it is only a matter of time before a future governor stands where I’m standing and says: ‘The state of our state is in decline.’”

Virginia

Discussing the high school initiative he is leading as chair of the National Governors Association, **Governor Mark Warner (D)** also noted that President Bush had, earlier in the day at a Virginia high school, discussed plans to address the needs of high schools and their students at the federal level.

Governor Warner spoke of the need to expand college course offerings for more high school seniors and juniors while at the same time strengthening Virginia’s remedial programs for those students at risk of failing the state’s graduation tests, the Standards of Learning. The governor also discussed the need to upgrade the state’s mentoring programs for new teachers and the deployment of more “turnaround specialists” to low-performing schools.

Washington

In her address, **Governor Christine Gregoire (D)** spoke about the lackluster future that awaited high school dropouts. Not only do high school dropouts earn half as much as graduates, she said, they are “often unemployed and dependent on government help, and they are at higher risk to end up in our jails and our prisons.” She proposed designing the state’s middle and high schools so that “no student gets lost in the crowd and disconnected from his or her own potential.”

Wisconsin

“A high school graduate from Green Bay isn’t just competing against graduates from Appleton and Oshkosh,” **Governor Jim Doyle (D)** said in his address. “She’s competing against graduates from all over the world.”

To help Wisconsin’s high school graduates become better prepared for college and the workforce, Doyle proposed adding a third year of math and a third year of science as graduation requirements for all Wisconsin students. Currently, only two years of math and science are needed to earn a diploma. Not only is the state among the bottom thirteen states in math and science requirements, the state’s high school requirements “aren’t even high enough to meet the basic standards for incoming freshmen at the University of Wisconsin.”

Links to other State of the State addresses, as well as dates for future addresses, are available at <http://www.stateline.org/stateline/?pa=issue&sa=showIssue&id=422881>.

Bill Gates to Speak at NGA 2005 Education Summit on High Schools

Last week, NGA announced that **Bill Gates, cofounder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, will deliver the keynote address at the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools that it will host with Achieve, Inc., in Washington, D.C., on February 26–27.

“Too many high school students drop out before earning a diploma, and too many of those who graduate are unprepared for the realities of the twenty-first-century economy,” said Gates. “This failure of our high school system has dire consequences for our economy, but even more important, it is simply wrong.”

As part of his chairman’s initiative, **Virginia Governor Mark Warner** chose to focus on ideas for improving high schools, with a particular emphasis on the senior year. Under Warner’s initiative, Redesigning the American High School, NGA intends to raise national awareness on the need for improving America’s high schools and the consequences of inaction.

The high school summit is the kickoff to that initiative. It will bring together governors from fifty-five U.S. states and territories, top business executives, and prominent K–12 and higher education leaders to address the urgent need to improve America’s high schools so students can meet the demands of today’s challenging economy.

“During the last decade, efforts to improve public education have focused on earlier grades, to set standards and define end-of-course and graduation requirements. This year, states will begin to implement changes in high schools themselves and to rethink expectations for postsecondary education and workforce success,” Warner said.

More information on the NGA’s 2005 Education Summit on High Schools is available at http://www.nga.org/nga/newsRoom/1,1169,C_PRESS_RELEASE%5ED_7822,00.html.



BIG BUILDINGS, SMALL SCHOOLS: Report Suggests New Ways to Make Large Schools More Conducive to Learning

On January 20, the Boston-based nonprofit organization Jobs for the Future (JFF) released *Big Buildings, Small Schools: Using a Small Schools Strategy for High School Reform*, a report that addresses ways for school districts to divide large high schools into multiple small schools that provide their students with the benefits of a smaller, closer-knit community. The small schools that the report envisions may be housed in one building, but they are quite distinct from one another. They share no departments or special programs, which distinguishes them from the “small learning communities” within schools that were a popular reform measure in the 1980s.

While large schools resist division into completely separate entities, the report contends, such radical division is necessary if students are to reap the benefits of small size. The report notes that evidence of the advantages of small size is based on research into small schools, *not* small learning communities.

Big Buildings, Small Schools addresses the concrete elements of creating small schools, from community relations and leadership to physical capacities and labor relations. **Report authors Lili Allen and Adria Steinberg**, both of Jobs for the Future, outline the choices that districts face in effecting structural school transformation, focusing on two major questions: Should a school transform at once or over time? Should schools control their own transformation from within, enlist outside partners such as community groups, or accept outside leadership, typically a charter management organization?

Districts' choices should depend on their particular circumstances, the report concludes. What is right for one school is not right for every other. Case studies of completed school transformations in Boston, New York, and Oakland and Sacramento, California, illustrate this point.

The report assumes that creating small schools is desirable. Yet it notes the limits of what school size transformation can achieve. Small schools alone do not necessarily provide their students with better educations. Rather, the report explains, "conversion [to small schools or communities] offers a potentially powerful opportunity for a 'defining moment' of change—an opportunity to provide the most fertile conditions for excellent teaching and learning."

The complete report is available at:

<http://www.jff.org/jff/PDFDocuments/smallschoolexsum.pdf>.

Senate Confirms Secretary-Designee Margaret Spellings

On January 20, the U.S. Senate confirmed **Margaret Spellings** by voice vote as the new U.S. secretary of education. That evening she was sworn in by **White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card** in a private ceremony. Spellings is the nation's eighth education secretary and only the second woman to hold the post. Shirley Hufstедler, who was named by President Jimmy Carter, was the first.

Last week, Spellings appointed **David Dunn as chief of staff for the Department of Education**. Prior to his appointment, Dunn was special assistant to President Bush for domestic policy at the White House Domestic Policy Council, where he handled all areas of education policy from early childhood through higher education.

Frost Starts New Venture: Education Priorities

Susan Frost, former President of the Alliance for Excellent Education, has started a new education policy and advocacy consulting firm that will focus on helping organizations set policy priorities and move education action agendas at the federal, state, and local levels.

"I've been extremely fortunate to work with some of the best education advocates in the country to make education a national priority and help every child have the right to an excellent education," Frost said. "I look forward to continuing that work in new venues as elected officials, educators, business and community leaders and child advocates face the challenge of raising student achievement and graduation rates for all students."

Frost can be reached at Education Priorities, 800 25th Street, NW Suite 1004, Washington, D.C. or via email at frost@edpriorities.net.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C., and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America's secondary school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.