



SREB

Legislative Report

Governors' legislative and budget proposals

Arkansas (<https://governor.arkansas.gov/>)

The governor indicated that his proposed 2021-23 biennium budget would fully fund state operations and continue the priorities and momentum of his administration, including providing increased funding for public schools and higher education institutions, meeting the recommendations of the Legislative Educational Adequacy committee, cutting tax rates on used vehicle sales and individual income, and continuing funding for crisis stabilization units (an alternative to jail or an emergency room for a person in crisis who encounters law enforcement). In his State of the State address, the governor expressed support for raising average teacher salaries by \$2,000 over the next two years, passing legislation to require a computer science course for high school graduation, and closing the digital divide by setting aside \$30 million in surplus funds to continue broadband expansion.

Overall general fund appropriations would increase to \$5.8 billion in 2021-22, up 2.8% from the 2020-21 forecasted total, and would rise to \$6 billion in 2022-23, a 2.9% increase. In 2021-22, state funding for public K-12 schools would total \$2.2 billion, up 1.4%, while career and technical education would receive \$30.9 million, up 1.7%. General funds would total \$17.1 million (up 10.4%) for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, nearly \$2.7 million (up 6.7%) for the Division of Academic Facilities and Transportation, and \$5.5 million (up 4.8%) for technical institutes. Funding for the Education Facilities Partnership would remain level in 2021-22 at \$41.8 million but would rise 68.1% in 2022-23 to \$70.3 million.

The governor also recommends \$3.3 million for the Succeed Scholarship program, which provides scholarships for students with disabilities to attend private K-12 schools. Though the program began in 2016, it did not receive general funds in 2020-21.

State institutions of higher education would receive nearly \$762.9 million, up 6.3%. This includes \$612.2 million (up 6.6%) for four-year institutions, \$118.3 million (up 5.8%) for two-year institutions, and nearly \$32.4 million (up 4%) for technical colleges. General funds to the Division of Higher Education would rise 5.8% to 11.6 million while \$40 million would be provided for higher education grants.

Delaware (<https://budget.delaware.gov/>)

The themes of the governor's proposal for 2021-22 are investments in three priority areas — clean water, Wilmington education initiatives, and economic development — as well as improving schools for all students, ensuring safe and strong communities, and strengthening the state's economy and workforce. The \$4.7 billion in general funds would be a 4% increase over 2020-21.

General funds for K-12 education would rise 2.6% to nearly \$1.7 billion, with nearly \$1.6 billion of that amount for district and charter school operations — also a 2.6% increase. This would include \$25.5 million, up 104%, for the opportunity fund, which provides additional state funding for low-income and English language learner students. Academic excellence block grants to schools and districts would increase 5.2% to \$48.5 million while student transportation funding would rise 5.3% to \$127.9 million.

While the merit-based SEED Scholarship at the University of Delaware and Delaware Technical and Community College would remain at \$7 million, funding for the merit-based Inspire program at Delaware State University would rise 11% to nearly \$2.8 million. Funding to the University of Delaware would rise 0.9% to \$128.4 million, to Delaware State University would increase 2% to \$39.2 million, and to Delaware Technical and Community College would be up 2.6% to \$88.9 million.

Florida (<http://www.floridaleadsbudget.com/>)

The governor's Florida Leads executive budget proposal for 2021-22 would provide \$35.8 billion in general funds statewide, up 3.6% over the approved 2020-21 budget; however, general funds directed to education would decline 1.3% to \$17.8 billion.

While Florida Education Finance Program formula general funds would decline 0.8% to \$9.1 billion, in part due to expected continuing declines in statewide enrollment, lottery funds for FEFP would rise 29.7% to \$503.1 million. The increase in FEFP lottery funding would be made possible by withdrawing funding for the School Recognition Program, which provides supplemental funding of up to \$100 per student to highly productive schools. This may be used for teacher bonuses, equipment or materials to maintain or improve student performance, or temporary personnel.

The governor proposes \$43.5 million in general funds to establish the Title I School Recognition Program, which would provide supplemental funding as above but directed only to Title I schools that achieve a school grade of A or that improve their school grade by one or more letter and maintain that improvement in the following year.

With the combined lottery and general funds for FEFP the governor proposes increasing by 10% (to \$550 million) the amount provided to support the statewide minimum teacher salary of \$47,500 approved by the Legislature in 2020 and attendant salary increases to all certified classroom teachers. Additionally, the portion of combined funding for the mental health assistance allocation to school districts would rise 10% to \$110 million. General funds and lottery funds for class size reduction would remain unchanged at over \$2.9 billion and \$503.1 million, respectively.

General funds to state universities would decline 2.7% to under \$2.8 billion, and funds for state colleges would decline 3.6% to under \$1.1 billion. Lottery funding for both would be unchanged from the prior year, at \$391.2 million and \$168.2 million, respectively.

General funds to the Benacquisto Scholarship Program for National Merit Scholars would rise 27.6% to \$33.9 million, while combined lottery and general funds for need-based Florida Student Assistance Grants to full- and part-time students at public institutions would increase 0.5% to \$163.8 million. General funds for the statewide voluntary prekindergarten program would decline 1.6% to \$405.5 million.

Georgia (<https://opb.georgia.gov/>)

Subsequent to the release of the governor's budget proposals and State of the State address, he proposed a teacher pipeline initiative that would allow retired teachers to return to work and collect a full salary and full pension and that would encourage more military service members to become teachers. The plan also includes a focus on minority inclusion in the teaching profession and would allow the person selected as the state's teacher of the year to serve as an ex-officio advisor to the state board of education. In addition, the governor announced that he was coordinating with the state superintendent of education to provide \$1,000 bonuses to all teachers and school employees in the 2020-21 school year, from federal COVID relief funds. He also plans to use \$10 million from Governor's Emergency Education Relief funds to reimburse families for expenses they incurred to provide a quality education to their children during the pandemic.

Despite the unprecedented challenges the state faced throughout the pandemic, the governor's budget recommendations would restore funding that was cut (due to uncertainty regarding the revenue impact of the pandemic) from the approved 2020-21 budget and would provide further funding increases in 2021-22. (Note: at the time of this writing, the General Assembly has approved, and the governor has signed, the amended 2020-21 appropriations; a summary of that and other final actions will appear in a future issue of *Legislative Report*.)

The amended 2020-21 budget would total nearly \$22.7 billion in general funds statewide, 2.5% above the originally approved amount. Statewide general funds would increase 2.6% above the amended total in 2021-22, to nearly \$23.3 billion.

The amended general fund total for Quality Basic Education formula funding to districts in 2020-21 would rise 7.4% over the original amount to \$9.1 billion. Most of the increase would be from \$567.5 million to reverse austerity funding cuts imposed before the fiscal year began. While QBE general funds would decline 1.5% to just under \$9 billion in the upcoming fiscal year, it would result from lower enrollment statewide and an increase in the required local share of funding (up by over \$100 million in 2021-22).

The state college and university system would in 2020-21 receive an additional 3.2% for teaching and institutional operations, totaling \$2.1 billion; in 2021-22 that amount would increase 3.1% to under \$2.2 billion. The technical college system would receive a 1.1% increase in the current year, to \$333.7 million, and a further 2% increase in the upcoming fiscal year, to \$344.1 million.

General funds directed to the Georgia Student Finance Commission would remain unchanged in the current year and decline less than 0.1% in the coming year (totaling slightly less than \$126 million). This includes an unchanged allocation of \$89.8 million for dual enrollment scholarships.

In 2021-22, lottery funds to HOPE Scholarships for students at state colleges and universities would rise 1% to \$760.3 million while HOPE Scholarships for students at private institutions would total \$68.9 million, up 0.9%. The HOPE Grant for students in diploma and certificate programs would receive \$73.7 million, up 10.9%. Lottery funds for the Bright From the Start prekindergarten program would rise 0.5% to \$380.7 million.

Kentucky (<https://osbd.ky.gov/>)

The governor proposed his A Better Kentucky Budget for 2021-22 — indicating his top priorities as delivering immediate relief to Kentucky families and small businesses impacted by the pandemic, investing in the people, and making bold and strategic investments to shape Kentucky’s position in a post-COVID economy. He described his recommendations as a fiscally responsible budget that does not increase taxes nor cut general fund spending in two consecutive years for the first time since the 2007-08 biennium.

His statewide general fund budget, which prioritizes public education, would total \$12.1 billion, up 2.4% over the 2020-21 revised budget including \$788.5 million, up 0.9%, for the Teacher Retirement System and \$125.8 million, up 3.3%, for the School Facilities Construction Commission. The proposal recommends increasing the SEEK K-12 formula funding program base per-pupil amount 1%, increasing teachers’ and classified employees’ salaries by \$1,000, ensuring that retired teachers receive their full benefits, and restoring funding to the teacher loan forgiveness program and the need-based teachers scholarship program, providing \$2.1 million for the former and \$1 million for the latter.

State general funds to the Kentucky Department of Education would rise 7.1% to \$4.2 billion. Of that amount, SEEK would receive \$3.1 billion, up 8.6% — this includes nearly \$2 billion for the base allotment, \$439.7 million for the teachers’ retirement employer match on behalf of local school districts, and \$103.2 million for teachers and classified employee salaries. KDE’s Learning and Results Services would receive \$1.1 billion, up 3.2%, including \$4.2 million (up 91.8%) for Educator licensure and effectiveness, and nearly \$754 million, up 1.9%, for local district health and life insurance. Funding for the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet would rise 4% to \$71.8 million.

General funds for postsecondary education would total \$1.2 billion, including \$717.6 million for public universities, up 6.1%, \$177.1 million for the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, up 3.8%, and \$8.7 million for the Postsecondary Education Performance Fund, 43.8% less than the current year. While general funds for the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority would be down 6.9% to \$303.9 million, the proposal would provide full funding for the merit-based Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship program at \$116.1 million (up 2.1%). The need-based College Access program would receive \$91.9 million (up 5%) and the need-based Kentucky Tuition Grant program for students at independent colleges and universities would receive \$46.1 million (up 4.7%).

The governor proposes \$16.4 million to establish the last-dollar Better Kentucky Promise Scholarship to fill the gap between tuition costs and federal plus state aid for all new students seeking associate degrees or certificates. This would provide aid for nearly 6,300 Kentuckians as well as valuable training, especially for those who may have experienced employment disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maryland (<https://dbm.maryland.gov/>)

In January, the governor unveiled his economic recovery budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year, focusing on education, tax relief, and economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. He presented it as a record investment in public health, crime prevention, and in several areas of public education including K-12 — with recommendations that exceed required minimum funding levels for Foundation formula funds to schools, school construction projects, and aid to community colleges. In addition, the plan recommends additional funding to ensure school districts receive increased funding despite enrollment declines, to expand early childhood programs, and to restore funding for the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) program to provide scholarships for low-income students to attend non-public schools.

The governor also urged passage of the RELIEF Act of 2021, to provide over \$1 billion in immediate tax relief and economic stimulus for struggling Maryland families, small businesses, and those who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic; it was approved by legislators and signed by the governor in mid-February. He also planned to introduce legislation to reduce the tax burden on Marylanders by expanding the Hometown Heroes tax credit, increasing the military retirement income exemption, and creating a new income exclusion for all retirees.

The 2021-22 statewide general fund budget would rise 7% to nearly \$20.1 billion. General funds for K-12 education would total nearly \$6.6 billion, down 0.6%, including \$3.2 billion, up 1.3%, for the Foundation Program. Compensatory education funding for economically and environmentally disadvantaged students would total \$1.3 billion, down 5.8%, and for public school employee benefits nearly \$779 million, up 3.8%. State aid for limited English proficient students and student transportation expenses would decrease to \$334.3 million (down 4%) and \$288.1 million (down 7.1%), respectively.

Gaming revenues dedicated to education and directed to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Grant Program would rise to \$713.5 million, just over double the prior-year amount. This includes \$71.9 million to expand community school services, \$65.5 million for special education grants, \$54.7 million for the early childhood expansion initiatives, and \$53.7 million for pre-kindergarten supplemental grants.

General funds to state-supported colleges and universities would total \$1.5 billion, down 0.4%. Formula funding to community colleges would total \$308.7 million, up 15%, with another \$92.9 million for community college employee benefits, up 0.8%. Aid to nonpublic colleges would rise 50.5% to \$88.8 million.

Funding for Educational Excellence Awards — the state's largest need-based financial aid program — would rise 3.3% to \$85.1 million. The Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship Program — a last-dollar scholarship to enable students to attend community colleges at no cost — would receive \$15 million, up 87.5%. To keep college affordable to Maryland students the governor proposed limiting tuition growth at state colleges and universities to 2% for the sixth year in a row.

Mississippi (<https://governorreeves.ms.gov/>)

In mid-November of 2020 the governor released his proposal for the 2021-22 budget. The governor's budget priorities include funding for the police and the judicial branch, several workforce and education priorities, and phasing out the state's income tax by 2030. The \$6.1 billion state fund proposal would level-fund most state agencies compared to the original 2020-21 appropriations; however, the current fiscal year funding includes more than \$1 billion in one-time federal funds to combat COVID-19, of which \$200 million went to public schools.

The governor's priorities include \$3 million to create a patriotic education fund. A number of proposals relate to classroom learning: withdrawing state dollars from districts that don't provide an option for in-person learning, \$2 million for training and preparing teachers to successfully conduct computer science courses, \$3 million for math coaches (similar to the reading coaches program) to build on Mississippi's recent student performance gains on math assessments, and \$28 million to fully fund the School Recognition Program that rewards teachers in school when their school's rating increases. Finally, the governor requested \$50 million in one-time funds for targeted workforce development. Funds would go for six purposes, including dual enrollment, modernizing and expanding selected community college training programs, developing industry-certified credentialing or certificate programs in high schools, and incentivizing more students into high demand pathways.

The proposal does not include a pay raise for teachers and would level-fund Mississippi Adequate Education Program formula funding to schools (\$250 million short of full funding). New spending in the executive budget recommendation mostly represents one-time funds, so a pay raise, while supported by the governor, is not included.

K-12 education would be funded at \$2.5 billion, representing an increase of just under 2% when compared to the originally appropriated 2020-21 budget. Institutions of higher education would be level-funded at \$676.3 million, which includes \$42.1 million for student financial aid programs. Community colleges would also be level-funded at \$236.9 million.

North Carolina (<https://www.osbm.nc.gov/>)

The governor presented his supplemental recommendations for the 2020-21 fiscal year as a blueprint for emergency recovery and resilience as the state and nation continue to deal with the pandemic. He is recommending the appropriation of \$695 million in surplus general funds to address immediate needs due to COVID-19, of which \$468 million would provide educator bonuses. Those one-time amounts would be \$2,500 for teachers and principals, \$1,500 for non-certified school employees and \$2,000 for state college and university employees. A further \$30 million would be applied to expanding high-speed internet access, including the replacement of approximately 35,000 internet hotspots in use by students.

Oklahoma (<https://oklahoma.gov/omes/services/budget.html>)

Under the governor's executive budget proposal for 2021-22, state funds would increase 0.6% to just under \$7.9 billion. Funding for education at all levels would increase 0.5% to slightly less than \$4 billion. Most of the education funding increase would be directed to K-12 education funding through the Oklahoma State Department of Education — up 0.6% to \$3 billion.

The State Regents for Higher Education, who oversee state colleges and universities, would receive level funding of \$770.4 million, and the Department of Career and Technology Education would also be level-funded at \$137.5 million. The \$2.1 million directed to the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would be a 36.7% increase. The additional funding is intended to continue Oklahoma's Jobs for America's Graduates program, designed to help at-risk youth succeed in school and careers, and to expand the program from six to eight high school locations in 2021-22.

South Carolina (<https://governor.sc.gov/>)

Under a continuing resolution adopted in mid-2020, the state is operating in the 2020-21 fiscal year with the approved 2019-20 appropriation levels. The governor's proposed 2021-22 budget would provide \$8.9 billion in general funds, a 2.2% increase. Of that amount, \$500 million would be directed to reserves.

K-12 education funding would rise 0.5% to over \$3.3 billion, of which less than \$3.2 billion is aid to school districts, up 0.7%. The governor also proposes \$100 million in one-time funding for the purchase of new instructional materials by the South Carolina Department of Education.

General funding directed to higher education would remain at the 2020-21 levels: \$505.7 million for state colleges and universities, \$166.6 million for technical and comprehensive education, \$35.5 million for the Commission on Higher Education and \$27.9 million for the Higher Education Grants Commission.

Available lottery funds are expected to rise 2.8% in 2021-22 to \$523.2 million. For lottery-supported merit-based financial aid, LIFE Scholarships would receive \$236.7 million (down 1.4%), HOPE Scholarships \$10.4 million (down 28.8%) and Palmetto Fellows scholarships nearly \$71.2 million (up 15.1%). Funding for need-based grants to undergraduate students at public institutions through CHE would triple to \$60 million, and funding for need-based tuition grants to undergraduate students at independent institutions through the Higher Education Grants Commission would double to \$20 million. Funding for workforce scholarships and grants at technical and comprehensive institutions would nearly double (up 83.3%) to \$20.2 million.

Available Education Improvement Act funds from an earmarked portion of sales taxes are projected to increase 5.1% in 2021-22 to \$905.4 million. The governor proposes doubling EIA funds for reading coaches to \$19.9 million, increasing funds for student assessment and testing by 7.3% to \$29.3 million, and providing \$43.5 million, a 10.1% increase, to raise the employer contribution rate for teacher benefits by 1%.

Lottery funds of \$68.5 million, a 65.2% increase, would support statewide full-day prekindergarten for children age four. Surplus lottery funds totaling \$13.9 million would allow the creation of education savings accounts, provided the Legislature passes enabling legislation.

Texas (<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/bpp>)

In his recommendations for the 2022-23 biennium, the governor organized his priorities along four themes: health, safety, freedom, and prosperity. In addition, he documented the state's response to the COVID-19 emergency using federal funding, including GEER (Governor's Emergency Education Relief) and ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds. While this funding is only partially concerned with education, the governor recommends that the Legislature invest in initiatives to bring broadband internet access to unserved areas of the state.

With the approval in 2019 of House Bill 3, which fully revised the state's K-12 education financing system and made a host of other changes to statewide education policy, the governor urged the Legislature to fully fund all initiatives in the legislation — which included both an increase in the statewide minimum teacher salary schedule and a mandate that districts use at least 30% of any year-over-year increases in state formula funding for full-time employee salary increases. Other priorities for the governor include strategic use of federal funds to address student learning loss

due to the pandemic, development of a robust statewide K-12 civics curriculum and related instructional resources, and supporting and expanding need-based postsecondary financial aid.

Relative to workforce needs, the governor recommends (1) encouraging individuals with some college studies but no degree to return and complete high-quality credentials or degrees, and (2) creating registered apprenticeship programs at public institutions of higher education in partnership with local employers. He also recommends that the Legislature enact strategies outlined in the most recent report of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, a cooperative effort of the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission to improve the state's economic prosperity by guaranteeing residents of all ages access to high-quality education and workforce training.

Virginia (<http://dpb.virginia.gov/budget/>)

In mid-February 2021, after the General Assembly had already extended its session to finish work on appropriations measures, the governor announced revised revenue projections providing an additional \$730.2 million in general funds over the 2020-22 biennium. The governor expressed his support for legislators using the additional funds to provide relief to families and businesses, support public schools and provide pay increases for public employees.

The governor's proposed revisions to the 2020-22 biennial budget, delivered to the Joint Money Committees in December 2020, highlight the availability of additional general funds in excess of \$1.2 billion for the biennium. While his proposal would increase 2020-21 general fund appropriations 0.2% above the original amount to \$22.7 billion, in 2021-22 statewide general funds would increase 6.2% above the original amount to \$24.8 billion (a 9.1% increase from the first year to the second). The increase in available revenues would permit a proposed \$650 million deposit to state reserve funds.

However, direct aid to public K-12 education would decline below the amounts originally appropriated in both years of the biennium, down 0.6% in the first year to just under \$6.9 billion and down 1.3% in the second to \$7.1 billion (a year-to-year increase of 3.3%). The decline is primarily due to declines in student enrollments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the governor's proposed general fund amendments for education are \$80.1 million to provide 2% bonuses for teachers and classroom staff in 2021-22, \$26.6 million to support a legally mandated ratio of 1 counselor to 325 students in all schools beginning in 2021-22, and \$513.6 million over the biennium so that no district receives less state funding over the biennium than was originally appropriated in 2020.

The 2020-21 total for state colleges and universities would be 1.9% less than the original, at \$1.5 billion, though the 2021-22 amount would be 0.2% over the original at under \$1.6 billion (a 2.1% increase above the amended first year amount). The Virginia Community College System would receive \$474.4 million in the first year, 8.8% below the currently appropriated amount; the \$511.2 million proposed for the second year would be 0.8% below the original appropriation and 7.8% more than the proposed first-year amount.

While the proposal would restore several general funded higher education items in the second year of the biennium that legislators cut during 2020, including \$30.3 million for undergraduate need-based aid and \$36 million for the last-dollar G3 workforce initiative (Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back) at community colleges, it also designates nearly \$300 million in budget reductions to higher education over the biennium. The governor's proposal also includes \$32.6 million in 2021-22 to provide one-time bonuses to higher education employees.

West Virginia (<https://budget.wv.gov/>)

In his State of the State address, the governor proposed a zero-growth budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year highlighting several areas of focus such as repealing the state individual income tax, balancing the budget, creating new jobs, combating both drug issues and the COVID-19 pandemic, and creating a second rainy day fund. The governor recommended cutting the income tax by one-third for the top earners and by half for everyone else, replacing it with a 1.5% increase in the overall sales tax as well as larger increases to taxes on tobacco and soda.

The governor proposed a statewide general fund budget of nearly \$4.6 billion for 2021-22, down 0.1% from the current 2020-21 budget. Overall funding for K-12 education would decrease by 3.3% to nearly \$2 billion, including cuts to 21st Century Learners (by 65.6% to \$1.8 million), communities in schools (by 9.9% to \$4.9 million), and safe schools (by 10.9% to \$4.6 million). Programs that would see a funding rise include increased enrollment, up 347.9% to \$22.8 million, assessment, up 188.6% to \$3.9 million, and 21st Century technology support, up 26.2% to \$9.6 million.

Funding for state colleges and universities and for community and technical colleges would remain flat at the 2020-21 levels of \$282.2 million and \$79.9 million, respectively.

Notes from other SREB states

Tennessee special session on education

Beginning January 19, the Tennessee General Assembly met in a four-day education special session called by the governor. Lawmakers approved a \$160 million legislative package aimed at tackling the issues of pandemic-related student learning loss, the state's stagnant literacy rates and how schools will handle standardized testing. While other education legislation may be taken up in the General Assembly's regular session, which resumed following the special session, the following bills were passed and were signed into law by the governor.

House Bill 7004 requires districts to provide interventions for struggling students, including after-school learning mini-camps, learning loss bridge camps and summer learning camps. It also creates the Tennessee Accelerated Literacy and Learning Corps to provide tutoring for students throughout the school year, and it strengthens student reading proficiency requirements for grade promotion by requiring third graders who do not score at least proficient or on grade level on the state's annual standardized assessments to attend summer school or commit to a year of tutoring to avoid repeating the grade. The requirements apply to students in grade three starting with the 2022-2023 school year.

Senate Bill 7003 requires local education agencies that are not already doing so to use a phonics-based approach for reading instruction in kindergarten through grade three. The Tennessee Department of Education is required to develop a new screening test to be administered three times each school year to assess student performance; the test will be made available to districts for free. The bill also includes provisions for teachers to receive training and support for delivering phonics-based reading instruction.

Lawmakers cancelled the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program testing that was to be administered in spring 2020, but the assessments will be administered in spring of 2021. Senate Bill 7001 holds harmless teachers, schools and districts from the results of TCAP assessments in 2020-21. The bill eliminates penalties for teachers based on how well their students perform on

annual state tests and provides that 2020-21 test scores will not count against educator performance ratings. Data used to measure student growth from this year will not negatively affect teacher evaluations through the 2022-23 school year. Additionally, schools with at least 80% of students participating in testing this year would be protected from receiving a letter grade, entering an achievement school district, or earning a priority school status. (While federal law requires a 95% participation rate, the Tennessee Department of Education will apply for a waiver to lower the threshold to 80%.)

The special session actions built on TDOE's plans to implement the Reading 360 literacy program, which will leverage one-time federal relief funding to support a phonics-based approach to literacy and will ensure that Tennessee districts, teachers, and families are equipped with tools and resources to help students read on grade level by third grade.

Lawmakers approved an increase of almost \$43 million for teacher salaries, while the governor has proposed a 4% increase in his budget for fiscal year 2021-22. A full analysis of the governor's recommended budget will appear in the next issue of *Legislative Report*.

A bill filed late in the special session by both chamber majority leaders would have threatened funding to those districts that do not offer at least 70 days of in-person instruction for grades K-8 by the end of the school year, but the measure was not considered during the four-day session. The legislation may, however, be filed again during the regular session.

Notable legislation under consideration and actions by legislatures in SREB states

Legislators in Maryland overrode the governor's May 2020 veto of House Bill 1300 in the second week of February. The legislation enacts the recommendations of the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, known as the Kirwan Commission. The bill is an education reform package focused on five major areas: early childhood education and support for families; support for and increasing diversity among the ranks of educators and education leaders; student readiness for college and careers; providing additional resources for at-risk students; and accountability in its implementation. Legislators also overrode the veto of a measure to help pay for the initiative, which levies a tax on digital advertising.

In Oklahoma, multiple measures have been proposed to tighten the rules around virtual charter school management contracts after EPIC Charter Schools sent state tax dollars to a related for-profit management company. The House of Representatives in West Virginia approved and sent to the Senate House Bill 2012, which would permit virtual charter schools, allow 10 pilot charter schools and allow the state to approve an additional 10 schools per year starting in 2023-24. (Currently the limit on both pilot charter schools and newly approved schools each year starting in 2023 is three.) Florida Senate Bill 48 would merge several K-12 private school scholarship and voucher programs into the McKay-Gardiner Scholarship Program for disabled students and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for families at or below 300% of the federal poverty level.

With the economic difficulties of the pandemic, particularly related to workers and employment, workforce measures are expected to be prominent in several states. Oklahoma will consider legislation to extend apprenticeship programs to high school sophomores (Senate Bill 619). Virginia's Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back initiative (House Bill 2204) will provide financial assistance to low- and middle-income Virginia community college students enrolled in a program that leads to an occupation in a high-demand field. The bill has passed the General Assembly.

Legislation around the teaching of American history and government and civics was introduced in several SREB states. Companion bills were introduced in Virginia (Senate Bill 1196 and House Bill 1904) to require that teacher, principal and district superintendent evaluations include an evaluation of cultural competency, and that individuals seeking initial licensure or license renewal with an endorsement in history and social sciences complete instruction in African American history. In Arkansas, House Bill 1231 would prohibit the use of public funds to teach curriculum based on the 1619 Project and reduce the funds distributed to public schools that teach it.

In Mississippi, companion bills (Senate Bill 2678 and House Bill 633) ensuring that all Mississippi schools offer computer science courses have passed their respective chambers. The measures also include scholarships for teachers to earn endorsements in computer science.

In early February North Carolina General Assembly approved and the governor signed Senate Bill 36, which further modifies COVID relief measures enacted in 2020 by extending deadlines for the use of funds and allocates funding contained in the federal stimulus measure approved in December 2020. While the governor had previously called for all school districts in the state to voluntarily provide some manner of in-person instruction, legislators in February approved Senate Bill 37 which would require all districts to provide an in-person option for students in grades K-12 in compliance with previously issued school reopening health and safety requirements. The legislation awaits the governor's action.

In addition to the teacher salary and bonus proposals above, teacher recruitment compensation and salaries are a hot topic across state capitals. Measures to increase teacher salaries include Alabama House Bill 298, Mississippi House Bill 852 and Senate Bill 2001, Oklahoma House Bill 1592 and Senate Bills 52 and 703, and Texas House Bill 1088.

Bills such as in Alabama Senate Bill 225, Georgia House Bill 32 and South Carolina Senate Bill 168 would boost teacher recruitment in those states, while legislation that would provide or expand student loan repayment or expense reimbursement for teachers include Alabama House Bill 175, Arkansas House Bill 1157, Delaware House Bill 89, Kentucky House Bill 200, South Carolina House Bills 3114 and 3459, and Texas House Bill 1205. Florida Senate Bill 1220 and Oklahoma House Bill 2692 would provide additional opportunities for teacher leadership roles and professional advancement, while North Carolina Senate Bill 59 would provide additional pay to teachers who perform teacher leadership, mentoring and professional development duties in addition to their classroom duties.

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