



SREB

Legislative Report

Final legislative and budget actions

Alabama (<http://www.legislature.state.al.us>)

The Alabama Legislature approved bills streamlining the state's information technology functions, reforming education, changing gun laws, lowering hazardous waste fees and overhauling the state's Medicaid program. The Legislature approved 2013-2014 budgets for both the General Fund (which supports non-education government operations) and the Education Trust Fund (which supports only education and education-related expenses) in early May. The total state GF budget equals \$1.8 billion for 2013-2014, up 0.1 percent compared with the amended 2012-2013 budget. The total ETF budget for 2013-2014 increases to a little less than \$5.8 billion, up 3.6 percent, and includes a 2 percent pay raise (House Bill 506) for elementary and secondary teachers and personnel. This is the first pay raise for K-12 employees since 2008.

Elementary and secondary education funds increase to \$4 billion, up 3 percent, which includes \$3.7 billion for the K-12 Foundation Program (the state's school formula fund), up 2.7 percent, and \$186.9 million for the State Department of Education, down 2.8 percent. Higher education receives 2.4 percent more in state funds (to \$1.4 billion), which includes a 1.8 percent increase for universities (to \$1 billion) and 2.5 percent more for two-year colleges (to \$324 million). For in-state undergraduate students, tuition and fee increases in the 2013-2014 school year are 4.5 percent at Auburn University, 8 percent at Auburn University Montgomery and range from 2.7 percent to 6 percent for University of Alabama institutions. At two-year colleges, tuition increases 1.8 percent.

In February and May, comprehensive school accountability legislation was approved. After passing House Bill 84, the Alabama Accountability Act of 2013, the Legislature overrode the governor's veto of House Bill 658, which amends the Accountability Act. To allow greater flexibility, encourage innovation and provide financial assistance to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population, school systems may submit to the DOE a school flexibility contract proposal

(which provides programmatic or budgetary flexibility, or both) and an innovation plan (a waiver request from specific state education policies, and a strategic plan to achieve annual accountability measures and to meet five-year targets for all participating schools).

The bills define a public K-12 school as failing if it: is labeled as persistently low-performing by the DOE; is designated as a failing school by the state superintendent; or is listed, until July 2017, three or more times in the lowest 6 percent of public K-12 schools on state assessments in reading and math or, after June 2017, has earned at least one performance rating of F or earned at least three D ratings. Parents of a student assigned to a failing school may use a state income tax credit “to help offset the costs of transferring the student to a non-failing public school or a nonpublic school of the parent’s choice.”

An individual or a corporation may claim a tax credit for contributions made to a scholarship-granting organization that offers educational scholarships to students attending qualifying schools — either a public school outside of the resident school system that is not considered failing or any accredited nonpublic school that satisfies certain conditions. By September 15 of each year, an SGO may make unused scholarship funds available to eligible low-income students to defray the costs of attending a qualifying school, whether or not the student is assigned to a failing school.

Senate Bill 60 establishes the Educational Accountability and Intervention Act of 2013, which authorizes the state Board of Education to intervene in the educational operations of a local board of education and to assume direct control over all decision-making and operational functions. The state Board may take over a school system for several reasons, including if: the accreditation status of a school system is in jeopardy; a majority of schools in a system are placed on probation, suspended or revoked, or another formal disciplinary action is ordered by an accrediting authority; or, the system is not in compliance with state fiscal accountability requirements.

Other legislation

HB 91 allows a principal or a designee to institute a code red safety alert level for a school in the event of a perceived immediate threat involving acts of violence.

HB 102 allows the Alabama Public School and College Authority to issue up to an additional \$50 million in bonds to fund new career and technical education equipment purchases and changes the membership of the 21st Century Workforce Grant Committee.

HB 123 redefines the term “resident student” to include students not residing in the state who take certain distance learning courses from a public postsecondary institution. The bill allows the governing boards of each four-year institution and the state Board of Education for two-year institutions to set tuition rates for programs delivered in a distance learning format.

SB 303 increases the number of members on the Teachers’ Retirement System Board and removes the president of the Alabama Education Association as an ex-officio member.

SB 383 authorizes school security personnel and school resource officers (who are certified law enforcement officers specifically selected and trained for the school setting) employed by a local board of education to carry a deadly weapon while on duty.

Arkansas (<http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us>)

The legislative session ended in early May and covered a number of topics including college and career readiness, tax cuts, health care coverage expansion, broader gun rights and school choice. The governor recommended, and the Legislature approved, House Bill 1234 (Act 1450), which lowers the state sales tax on groceries to 0.125 percent (from 1.5 percent; two prior reductions brought the tax down from 6 percent) if at least \$35 million in certain budget reductions are realized for six consecutive months. The remaining 0.125 percent covers the conservation tax approved by voters, thereby eliminating the balance of the state sales tax on groceries.

The Legislature approved a 2013-2014 budget equaling \$4.9 billion in total state funds, an increase of 4.3 percent compared with the original 2012-2013 budget. State funds for K-12 education increase 2.5 percent to a little less than \$2.2 billion, which includes \$2 billion in school formula funding (up 2.5 percent). Higher education receives \$737 million (up 1 percent), including \$592 million for four-year institutions (up 0.8 percent) and \$111.4 million for two-year colleges (up 1.8 percent). For 2013-2014, tuition and fees increase between 3.4 percent and 6 percent for in-state undergraduate students attending four-year public institutions. At most two-year state colleges, students are paying from 2 percent to 8.9 percent more in tuition and fees compared with 2012-2013.

To increase “the likelihood that some at-risk students will stay in school and that other, more motivated students will find their full academic potential,” the Public School Choice Act of 2013, Senate Bill 65 (Act 1227), allows a student to transfer to a school in another district no more than once a year and to complete all of his or her remaining years of school at that school. The legislation requires every school district to participate in the state public school choice program. The districts must adopt specific standards for acceptance and rejection of applications for transfer, and local superintendents must inform parents in adjoining districts of the program’s availability, application deadlines and any other requirements. A student who accepts a school choice transfer may return to his or her resident district during the school year but must reapply to the program to obtain a future school choice transfer.

Senate Bill 66 (Act 601) creates the District of Innovation Program. A school council of innovation, composed of the school principal, teachers, other school employees, parents, community members and at least two students, will develop a school innovation plan — a new or creative alternative to existing instructional and administrative practices that is intended to improve academic performance and learning for all students. The plan must detail goals and performance targets for innovation; school changes needed to better prepare students for life and careers; and new, innovative school practices. The state superintendent may approve a school of innovation for a period of up to four years and may revoke the designation if the school fails to “substantially” fulfill its innovation plan, meet goals and performance targets, or comply with state regulations. Prior to submitting the innovation plan to the state superintendent, the local board must approve the plan, and at least 60 percent of employees must vote in favor of the designation.

To assist public schools and school districts in academic, fiscal or facilities distress, House Bill 1770 (Act 600) extends the time a school may operate in distress and expands the corrective actions the state Board of Education may use. The legislation lengthens the time period to five consecutive years (from two years) that a school or district may function in distress — i.e., it does not meet certain fiscal or facilities conditions or fails to meet the minimum level of academic achievement on state assessments. A school or district must correct its distress status within five years, unless the state Board offers the school or district additional time. If the school or district is not granted more time or does not correct all of its issues by the end of the fifth year in academic distress, the state Board, after a public hearing, must annex, consolidate or reorganize the school or district before July 1 of the next school year.

At any time, the state may impose a number of actions on a district in distress, including reassigning, suspending or removing the superintendent and directing the state superintendent to assume authority over the district's board of education. Enforcement actions for a school in academic distress include reorganizing the school or reassigning the staff, implementing a student curriculum and professional development program for teachers and administrators, and requiring the principal to relinquish authority. Any student attending a school or district in academic distress automatically qualifies to transfer to another school or district not in academic distress. To return a school district in distress to local control, the state Board may pursue a detailed process that includes evaluating the district's progress toward correcting its issues, appointing a community advisory board or consolidating, annexing or reorganizing the district.

House Bill 1528 (Act 509) codifies the current charter school authorization process. The state superintendent will appoint an odd number (from five to 11) of state Department of Education employees to serve on a public charter authorizing panel that will review, approve or deny charter school applications. The state Board, at any time, may opt to review a decision by the panel and hear appeals from charter school applicants whose applications were denied. Previously, the panel drafted its recommendations for the state Board, which made final charter application decisions.

Senate Bill 814 (Act 1081) repeals current high-stakes Algebra I and English II end-of-course assessments. The bill creates a method for transitioning the state's current assessment program to a new common set of assessments in English language arts and mathematics. The new assessments will, among other purposes: determine whether students are college- and career-ready; assess the full range of Common Core State Standards; measure student performance; and provide data for instruction, accountability, interventions and professional development.

House Bill 1838 (Act 585) creates a 12-member Council on Postsecondary Education and Career Readiness to facilitate the collaboration of elementary, secondary and postsecondary institutions in developing college- and career-readiness standards that align school curriculum and graduation standards with postsecondary education requirements and business community expectations for employability. Before a student graduates from high school, the school must assess the student's readiness for college and, if the student does not meet college readiness standards, offer transitional courses and other accelerated skill and knowledge development strategies.

House Bill 2039 (Act 1285) authorizes the state Department of Career Education, in partnership with the DOE and the state Department of Higher Education, to develop and administer a College and Career Coaches Program to prepare middle grades and high school students for postsecondary education or careers. A college and career coach must have a baccalaureate degree and complete career development facilitator training. Coaches will work at postsecondary institutions, education service cooperatives or nonprofit organizations and offer a number of support strategies to middle grades and high school students in certain counties that are in need of improvement. Students outside of these counties may participate in the program by applying jointly with an institution of higher education, an education service cooperative or a nonprofit organization to the state Department of Career Education. To determine the program's effectiveness, the DOE will collect and report performance data based on measurable benefits to students that include increases in high school graduation rates, college attendance rates and remediation rates.

In December 2012, the Lottery Oversight Committee (a legislative panel) recommended modifying the award amount for the state lottery-funded Academic Challenge Scholarship due to a decrease in projected revenues and an increase in the number of students eligible for the scholarship. The Legislature approved House Bill 1295 (Act 234), which sets new Challenge Scholarship award amounts for each academic year, beginning with the 2013-2014 school year. The new award amounts total \$2,000 for a scholarship recipient's

freshman year, \$3,000 for the sophomore year, \$4,000 for the junior year and \$5,000 for the senior year. Eligible students attending two-year colleges or a nursing school will receive \$2,000 in each academic year. During the 2012-2013 school year, eligible students attending four-year institutions received \$4,500. Those attending two-year colleges received \$2,250.

Other legislation

HB 1262 (Act 969) redefines professional development and requires a school district or an open enrollment charter school to offer professional development courses every four years to licensed personnel.

HB 1785 (Act 1280) creates a pilot program beginning in the 2013-2014 school year that requires participating traditional public and charter schools to have at least one digital learning course available. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, all traditional public and charter schools must offer and each high school student (beginning with the entering ninth-grade class of 2014-2015) must take at least one digital learning course for graduation credit.

SB 140 (Act 484) creates the Safe Schools Initiative, which requires school districts to annually train all of their employees and students to prevent and respond to acts of violence, terrorism and natural disasters.

SB 456 (Act 454) adds, among other statutory changes, a passing test score on a basic skills assessment (unless the applicant has three years of documented teaching experience) to the list of requirements to obtain a standard teaching license, decreases the hours of pedagogy training (to 24 hours from 30 hours) necessary to keep a provisional teaching license and requires the state Board to issue a five-year standard teaching license after three years of provisional licensure, if certain conditions are met.

Effective with the 2014-2015 school year, SB 752 (Act 696) identifies the levels of school performance and improvement on the current school performance rating system as A for “Exemplary,” B for “Achieving,” C for “Needs Improvement,” D for “Needs Improvement – Focus” and F for “Needs Improvement – Priority.”

Delaware (<http://legis.delaware.gov>)

The Delaware General Assembly approved legislation on a variety of topics, including video slot machine gambling, legalizing same-sex marriage, expanded background checks for firearms purchases, increased penalties for crimes involving firearms, and tax rates for coming years. Currently, the tax rate on personal income above \$60,000 is 6.75 percent, but that rate was set to decrease to 5.95 percent in 2014. With the passage of House Bill 50, that rate will instead decrease to 6.6 percent.

General funds for 2013-2014 are up 3.7 percent to \$3.7 billion, including \$1.2 billion for K-12 education. The K-12 general funds include \$998.8 million in operational funding to school districts (up 4 percent), \$85.4 million for student transportation (up 2.7 percent), and \$83.5 million for block grants and other pass-through programs (up 3.9 percent). The University of Delaware receives \$117.8 million (up 3.1 percent), Delaware State University receives \$34.3 million (up 4.7 percent), and Delaware Technical and Community College receives \$75.2 million (up 8.8 percent). Tuition and fees for in-state undergraduates at the University of Delaware are up 3.7 percent for 2013-2014; tuition is up 4.8 percent for students at Delaware Technical and Community College. Tuition and fees at Delaware State University remain level.

The Legislature passed House Bill 165 to “improve charter school accountability and support.” The bill establishes a pre-review process for charter school applications to ensure that an application is complete and provides an applicant the opportunity to interview in support of the application. Under the bill, a charter

school authorizer may deny an application if the authorizer determines the school is “contrary to the best interests of the community to be served.” Other provisions of the bill require charter schools to provide free lunches to eligible students, provide charter schools with access to bond financing, allow a charter school with an “outstanding record of performance” to receive a 10-year (rather than five-year) renewal, require governance training for charter school board members and require each charter school to have a plan to govern the closure of the school. Finally, the bill establishes a Charter School Performance Fund, which will provide a maximum of \$5 million per year, with a priority on “high quality plans for start-up or expansion” and charter schools that serve high-need students.

Delaware’s statewide school choice program has been in effect since the 1996-1997 school year. House Bill 90 makes several modifications designed to improve the program, such as mandating standardized program forms for use in all school districts, charter schools and the state Department of Education; requiring school districts and charter schools to transmit the expected enrollment and enrollment capacity of each school annually by November 30; and requiring districts and charter schools to hold at least one public information session on school choice opportunities each year.

The bill clarifies how school districts may prioritize applications for enrollment under the school choice program, use a lottery to admit additional choice students and maintain a ranked waiting list for a school with a lack of capacity. The bill specifies “lack of capacity” as a projected enrollment for the coming year of 85 percent or more of the school’s physical capacity. Finally, the bill establishes the Enrollment Preferences Task Force to survey the enrollment preferences and practices of magnet, vocational-technical and charter schools, and to make recommendations if necessary.

The Legislature approved Senate Bill 51 to establish state standards for educator preparation programs. Program entrance standards must require an applicant, at a minimum, to have a 3.0 grade-point average over the two most recent years of the applicant’s education and to achieve a minimum score “on a standardized test normed to the general college-bound population.” A program may waive these standards for up to 10 percent of admitted students, but it must provide assistance to those students to help them meet teacher certification requirements. A program’s curriculum must incorporate a “clinical residency” of at least 10 weeks of full-time student teaching, “clinical experiences” interwoven throughout the curriculum, annual student evaluations aligned to the state’s educator evaluation system, and, for prospective elementary school teachers, research-based strategies for childhood literacy and age-appropriate mathematics content.

Educator preparation programs also must establish rigorous exit requirements, including (but not limited to) passing scores on content-readiness exams and performance assessments. Educator preparation programs will collaborate with the state Department of Education to collect and report performance and effectiveness data for program graduates.

Senate Bill 20 establishes a Prison Educational Unit in the state Department of Education for the purpose of providing educational services to the state Department of Correction. The legislation provides for 14 teaching positions; job qualifications for these educators are the same as the qualifications for high school educators.

House Bill 24 expands minimum mandatory attendance requirements regarding notification and prosecution of parents of absent students, and it reduces from 30 to 20 the number of days of unexcused absences after which a school must refer an absence case for prosecution. A principal may refer a case for prosecution before 20 days if he or she determines it is appropriate to do so.

Other legislation

SB 27 creates a grant program to assist public schools in establishing accelerated academic programs; the one-year grants are renewable for an additional year if funding is available.

SB 100 establishes, based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, prohibitions against and restrictions on the use of seclusion and restraint in public schools and requires the state Department of Education to adopt regulations to implement those prohibitions and restrictions.

SB 103 clarifies that the state Department of Education is the agency responsible for supervising the administration of the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 in Delaware.

SB 148 requires the state Department of Education, for every grant it administers, to publish on its website the eligibility requirements, criteria and successful applications.

Florida (<http://www.leg.state.fl.us>)

The Florida Legislature completed its 2013 regular session in early May after considering legislation on a wide range of topics, including ethics reform for state officials, campaign finance reform, college and career readiness, pension reform for municipalities and special districts, and flexibility for local elections supervisors. On the last day of the session, the Legislature approved a \$26.8 billion general fund budget for 2013-2014, an 8.3 percent increase over the original 2012-2013 appropriation. The governor's budget vetoes reduce the total to less than \$26.7 billion, up 7.7 percent.

General funds for K-12 education total \$10.3 billion, up 9.6 percent; this includes a 13.9 percent increase in school formula funding to \$7 billion. State universities receive just over \$2 billion, a 34.2 percent increase; this returns university general funding close to the 2008-2009 level of \$2.1 billion. State colleges receive a more modest increase of 3.1 percent (to \$913.3 million). General funds for student financial aid are up 6.8 percent to \$102.9 million. The governor's line-item budget vetoes included a 3 percent tuition increase at state colleges and universities. Tuition and fees for in-state undergraduates at state universities in 2013-2014 are up from 1 percent to 2 percent. Tuition and fees are up from under 1 percent to 4.8 percent at some state colleges; 16 colleges have no increase.

The general fund budget includes across-the-board salary increases for state employees and state university faculty and staff; the increases are \$1,400 for individuals who earn \$40,000 or less annually and \$1,000 for individuals who earn more than \$40,000. General funds for K-12 education include \$480 million for teacher salary increases; collective bargaining at the school district level will determine the amount of the increases.

Lottery funds total \$1.6 billion, a 7.9 percent increase. While lottery funds for merit-based Bright Futures scholarships decline 6.1 percent (to \$309.4 million), they increase for school formula funding (up 61.1 percent to \$197.7 million), school district workforce education (up 17.7 percent to \$57.4 million), community colleges (up 13.3 percent to \$204.9 million) and state universities (up 20.4 percent to \$206.5 million).

To align the state education system with economic opportunities, help students prepare for future work and develop students' technology skills, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 1076. The legislation establishes a standard high school diploma for all students who begin ninth grade in 2013-2014 and later; the new diploma requires students to earn 24 credits, including four credits each in English and mathematics and three credits each in science and social studies (including one course taken online). The courses may include applied or career education courses that meet the state standards. New high school diploma designations are

available to all students: Students may earn the “scholar” designation by satisfying course and testing requirements beyond those required for a standard diploma and the “merit” designation by attaining one or more industry certifications. Under the bill, a high school student who earns low scores on a state reading or English assessment must take an intensive remedial course or a course that includes remediation of the skills the student has not yet acquired.

Senate Bill 1076 establishes and expands performance funding (to reward education programs that align with economic demands) for K-12 teachers, school district workforce education programs, Florida College System institutions, and state universities. High school teachers will receive performance bonuses based on industry certifications earned by their students; the legislation also expands existing bonus programs for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate teachers. The basis for school district technical centers’ and state colleges’ performance funding is instruction that leads to industry certifications. For state universities, performance funding expands to cover high-demand programs as identified by the Board of Governors and cloud computing and data management programs. The bill also creates a mechanism for designating Preeminent State Research Universities (based on institutional performance on 12 metrics), revises a degree completion pilot program as the Complete Florida Degree Program to provide online bachelor’s degree options at state universities, and allows state colleges to establish “\$10,000 Bachelor Degree” programs.

To provide school districts with greater flexibility in selecting and purchasing instructional materials, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 1388, which permits a school district or consortium of school districts to review, approve, adopt and purchase instructional materials; the bill also permits them to collect fees from publishers who submit materials for review. School districts that operate such programs are still subject to the previously established requirement that, by 2015-2016, at least 50 percent of the instructional materials they purchase are digital or electronic materials.

House Bill 7029 establishes the Florida Approved Courses and Tests Initiative, beginning in 2015-2016, to expand student choice in high-quality online courses. Courses may include massive open online courses in Algebra I, biology, geometry and civics, and remedial education associated with statewide standardized assessments. The state Department of Education also is required to develop an online catalog of digital learning courses. The bill specifies that blended learning courses are not counted toward class-size requirements, allows public school students to take online courses offered by other school districts and requires the Florida Virtual School to submit detailed annual reports regarding the operations, accomplishments, marketing, assets and liabilities, financial audits, and accountability mechanism of Florida Virtual School Global (which serves students outside of Florida).

Senate Bill 1664 revises accountability requirements for state-approved teacher preparation programs and requires their core curricula to include the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices; state content standards; scientifically researched practices for reading, literacy and mathematics instruction; and strategies for instructing English-language learners and students with disabilities. A teacher candidate must receive instruction in and assessment on the uniform core curricula in his or her area of concentration and must demonstrate the ability to positively impact student learning growth.

Under the legislation, continued approval of teacher education programs is dependent upon “significant, objective, and quantifiable measures” of the performance of the program and its graduates. The bill allows a private provider with “a proven history of delivering high-quality teacher preparation” to seek approval to operate a competency-based teacher certification program, and it allows an individual who earns a passing score on the Florida Educational Leadership Examination, has a bachelor’s degree or greater and can document “three years of successful experience in an executive management or leadership position” to obtain a temporary certificate in educational leadership.

For charter schools, House Bill 7009 implements several accountability requirements, such as prohibitions against nepotism, requiring uniform monthly financial statements, and requiring each school to maintain a website containing information on the school's decision-makers and financial stability. It also establishes flexibility measures, such as authorizing a school district to enter into an interlocal agreement to issue permits to a charter school on behalf of governmental permitting entities; allowing a charter school to create its own compensation and salary schedule or its own employee evaluation system; and authorizing a charter school to have at-will employees and to release at-will and annual contract employees without cause. The legislation permits a high-performing charter school to increase enrollment once per year up to the capacity of its facility, and it requires the state Department of Education to develop a proposed standard, statewide charter school contract.

The previously independent Office of Early Learning is established as a unit of the state Department of Education under House Bill 7165. The legislation requires the office to adopt a list of approved curricula, to establish a process for reviewing and approving each provider's curriculum, to identify assessments for school readiness program participants, and to adopt a statewide, standardized contract for each school readiness program provider. The legislation also requires the Early Learning Advisory Council to periodically analyze and provide recommendations to the office on the effective and efficient use of local, state and federal funds and the content of professional development training programs.

Senate Bill 1108 establishes several provisions related to students with disabilities. The bill defines various instructional settings for students with disabilities, including "exceptional student education centers" — separate public schools for disabled students only. It also establishes procedures to grade or give a school improvement rating to each exceptional student education center. The bill creates an "extraordinary exemption" from statewide assessments for a disabled student if it is determined that the student is prevented from demonstrating the required mastery of skills. Finally, beginning July 1, 2014, all teachers seeking to renew their certificates must earn at least one college credit on the teaching of students with disabilities.

Also regarding students with disabilities, House Bill 461 clarifies that, in developing an Individualized Education Program for a deaf or hard-of-hearing student, the IEP team must consider the student's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communication with peers and professional personnel, and academic level and full range of needs. The bill also requires the state Department of Education to develop a model communication plan for use during IEP development.

House Bill 609 expands the state's bullying law to include cyberbullying, and it prohibits bullying or harassment through any electronic medium if it limits a victim's ability to participate in school activities or substantially disrupts the operation of a school. The bill expands state laws against bullying to prohibit any bullying during a public education activity or a school-related program or activity, on a public school bus, or through any digital device physically located on school property or at a school-related program or activity.

Senate Bill 1720 requires each Florida College System institution to implement a developmental education plan no later than fall 2014 and to provide annual accountability reports on developmental education beginning the following year. Under the legislation, Florida College System institutions may not require a student to take the common placement test or enroll in developmental education courses. For nonresident students enrolled in distance learning programs, the bill permits colleges to establish an out-of-state fee that defrays the full cost of instruction. The bill specifies 36 as the required number of general education credits for an associate's or bachelor's degree at a Florida college or university. It also creates the Office of K-20 Articulation in the state Department of Education to support the work of the Higher Education Coordinating Council and the Articulation Coordinating Committee.

Senate Bill 1720 establishes new provisions giving the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida the duty of overseeing the performance of the board of trustees of each state university in complying with and enforcing laws, rules and regulations. The bill requires state universities to comply with all requests from the Board of Governors for information, data or reports, and it identifies corrective actions that the Board may take if a university board of trustees is not in compliance with any laws, rules, regulations or audit recommendations.

Other legislation

SB 284 permits a school to purchase and administer, when necessary, epinephrine auto-injectors to students.

SB 454 provides police officers at Florida College System institutions the same authority to enforce the law as police officers at state universities.

Georgia (<http://www.legis.ga.gov>)

After debating issues such as rewriting the state's juvenile justice code, establishing new gift caps under ethics laws and instituting new statutes for video gambling, the Georgia General Assembly approved a 2013-2014 budget that equals \$37.2 billion in total funds (down 7.7 percent from the amended 2012-2013 appropriation). Overall, state funds total a little more than \$19.9 billion, an increase of 3.1 percent, including \$17.4 billion in state general funds (up 3 percent) and \$910.8 million in lottery funds (up 5.1 percent).

Elementary and secondary education operate with 1.1 percent more in state funds (\$7.4 billion), including a slight increase in school formula funds (up 0.7 percent, to \$6.7 billion). State funding for the Georgia Virtual School falls 34.8 percent (to \$3.1 million) in 2013-2014, mostly due to the transfer of virtual school course development funds (\$1.5 million) to the 2014-2015 budget.

The higher education budget rises 6.4 percent to \$2.2 billion in state funds, including \$1.9 billion (up 7.8 percent from the amended 2012-2013 budget) for colleges and universities and \$313.9 million (down 1.2 percent) for technical colleges. Tuition for 2013-2014 is up 3.5 percent to 7 percent for in-state undergraduate students attending the state's four public research institutions. For in-state undergraduates attending other public colleges and universities, tuition is up 2.5 percent. Mandatory fees rise from 0.5 percent to 1.7 percent at the four research institutions, and from 3.5 percent to 12.2 percent at most colleges and universities. At its September 2013 meeting, the state Board that oversees the Technical College System of Georgia will approve tuition and fee costs for students attending technical colleges beginning in spring 2014.

Lottery funds increase for HOPE scholarships (up 5.6 percent, to \$598.7 million) and for the state prekindergarten program (up 4.3 percent, to \$312.2 million). The increased funding for the prekindergarten school year restores the program to its full 180-day calendar, as recommended by the governor.

The General Assembly passed House Bill 244, which creates new regulations for evaluating professional school personnel. By 2014-2015, each school district and all charter schools must implement a performance evaluation system adopted by the state Board of Education for public school teachers, assistant principals and principals. The performance evaluation model uses multiple, rigorous and transparent measures, with growth in student achievement as the significant measure (at least 50 percent of the evaluation), and four performance ratings: "Exemplary," "Proficient," "Needs Development" or "Ineffective." A rating of "Ineffective" constitutes evidence of incompetency.

Any licensed personnel who receive “Ineffective” or “Needs Development” ratings on an annual evaluation within a five-year period will not have their licenses renewed, unless they demonstrate that the performance deficiency was addressed. School districts and charter schools must report all unsatisfactory, “Ineffective” and “Needs Development” performance ratings to the state Professional Standards Commission.

School districts must base retention, promotion, compensation, dismissal and other staffing decisions primarily on the results of evaluations. Relative to the state salary schedule, a teacher will not receive credit for any year of experience in which he or she was rated as “Ineffective” or unsatisfactory on an annual evaluation, nor will the teacher earn credit on the salary schedule for the second year in which he or she received two consecutive “Needs Development” ratings. School districts have until May 15 (previously, April 15) to offer teachers and other professional employees new contracts.

House Bill 70 amends the eligibility requirements of the Special Needs Scholarship Program. Previously, a student must have resided in the state, have had a specific type of disability, have attended a public school the previous school year and have had an Individualized Education Program written by the school, in addition to other requirements. The legislation authorizes the state Board to require a local board to expedite the development of an IEP, waive the prior school year’s attendance requirement on a case-by-case basis and complete expedited IEPs before the beginning of the school year. The legislation provides three scholarship application deadline dates, which would allow an eligible student to transfer to a private or another public school during the school year.

Over the last few years, several school districts in the state have lost or have come close to losing their accreditation due to school board governance-related reasons. House Bill 115 provides a process for the state Board to utilize when recommending to the governor whether to suspend each of the local board members of a school district or school whose accreditation is at stake. The bill requires a local board to notify the state Board within three business days if a school or school district’s accreditation changes to a level immediately preceding loss of accreditation for school governance causes.

Other legislation

HB 131 provides that dual credit courses have the same weight as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses toward eligibility for the state’s merit-based HOPE scholarship.

HB 284 requires every local board, administration of a nonpublic school and governing body of a charter school to implement a concussion management and return-to-play policy.

HB 372 restores the eligibility requirements of the lottery-funded HOPE grant for technical college students to a 2.0 grade-point average (from the 3.0 grade-point average adopted in 2011) beginning in 2013-2014.

SB 100 creates the 14-member Career and Technical Education Advisory Commission to periodically review the conditions, needs and problems related to the K-12 career and technical education program, issue annual reports and recommend any action or legislation appropriate.

Kentucky (<http://www.lrc.ky.gov>)

The Kentucky Legislature completed its session in late March, having approved legislation on a wide range of issues, including public pension reform, human trafficking, absentee voting by members of the military, public accountability for special taxing districts and individuals’ religious freedom. Following the governor’s recommendation, the Legislature opted not to amend the second year of the 2012-2014 biennial budget.

State funds total \$9.5 billion in 2013-2014, up 3.2 percent from 2012-2013. State funds for K-12 education and universities are up slightly to \$3.9 billion and \$750.1 million, respectively; community colleges receive \$191.5 million, the same as in 2012-2013.

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education limited combined tuition and fee increases for in-state undergraduate students at Kentucky colleges and universities to 3 percent in 2013-2014. Tuition and fees are up 3 percent at most institutions, 2.7 percent at Northern Kentucky University, and 2.9 percent at Kentucky Community and Technical College System institutions.

On the last day of the session, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 2, the main pension reform measure. The bill creates the Public Pension Oversight Board to advise the Legislature on matters pertaining to the Kentucky Retirement Systems and establishes a “hybrid cash balance plan” for state and local government employees other than teachers whose participation begins on or after January 1, 2014. The bill also requires the state to fully fund the “actuarially required contribution” beginning in 2015, which is expected to require approximately \$100 million in additional state revenues annually. House Bill 440, also approved on the last day of the session, addresses this funding need by reducing the personal income tax credit from \$20 to \$10 and increasing revenue collection and tax enforcement efforts by the state Department of Revenue.

After considering measures in the past several legislative sessions to raise the compulsory school attendance age, the Legislature this year approved Senate Bill 97, which permits local school districts to raise the age from 16 to 18 beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. Once 55 percent of districts statewide raise the compulsory school attendance age to 18, it will become statewide policy.

The Legislature approved House Bill 180 to require the Kentucky Department of Education to establish a “statewide professional growth and effectiveness system” for all certified school teachers and administrators. The system must use multiple measures of effectiveness (including student growth data, standardized testing results and locally determined measures of student growth) to inform personnel decisions. In consideration of time concerns, the bill indicates that the system may not require a formal evaluation of all school personnel each year. The legislation permits local school districts to establish, with approval of the state Board of Education, alternative effectiveness and evaluation systems.

Due to the renewed focus nationwide on school safety in the wake of the shooting tragedy in Connecticut in late 2012, the Kentucky Legislature examined school safety provisions in state law and approved House Bill 354 and Senate Bill 8. Both bills require all public schools to adopt an emergency plan with procedures to follow in case of a fire, severe weather, earthquake or lockdown, and they require every school to practice a safety drill and a lockdown drill within the first month of every school year.

Senate Bill 61 establishes an early high school graduation option beginning with the 2014-2015 school year to allow students to complete high school in less than four years. To qualify for early graduation, a student must meet benchmark scores (as determined by the state Board of Education) on end-of-course examinations required for high school graduation and the ACT examination. Students who meet early high school graduation requirements are eligible for a scholarship that they may use at public two-year colleges or public or private four-year institutions within the state. In addition, under Senate Bill 64 students who complete high school in three years are eligible for the merit-based Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship at a higher base scholarship amount than students who graduate in four years.

Other legislation

HB 7 allows six public universities to issue bonds totaling \$363.3 million to fund 11 specific construction projects.

HB 184 attaches the Early Childhood Advisory Council (which was established by executive order in 2011) to the office of the governor and enumerates the council's responsibilities.

HB 207 moves the Office of Career and Technical Education and the Kentucky Technical Education Personnel Board from the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet to the state Department of Education.

HB 240 and SB 83 create the Office for Education and Workforce Statistics and the Board of the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics within the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet, and they also create the Council for Educational Research to advise these organizations on the data needed by colleges of education for conducting education research.

Louisiana (<http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/home.aspx>)

Upon its adjournment in June, the Legislature made changes to the procedure for approving the state budget, appropriated about \$34.6 million to fund a salary increase and retirement benefits for certificated classroom teachers, and increased state funding for the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence for eligible low-income students who enroll in nonpublic schools. In May, the state Supreme Court ruled that funding for the SSEE program through the Minimum Foundation Program (the state's school formula fund) was unconstitutional. The Legislature approved a separate allocation of \$43 million in funding for the program, which will support about 8,500 SSEE awards.

The overall 2013-2014 state budget decreases 4.1 percent to \$28.8 billion compared with the original 2012-2013 appropriation. Total state general funds rise to \$8.4 billion, up 1.6 percent. Funding for K-12 education declines 1.7 percent to \$5.3 billion; this amount includes \$3.5 billion in general funds (up 4.7 percent). Finance formula funding through the MFP, which includes general funds and other state funds, rises 2.6 percent to \$3.5 billion.

Higher education operates with a total of \$2.6 billion, down nearly 10 percent. This includes a reduction in general funds (to \$524 million, down 47 percent) and a partially offsetting allocation of \$338.3 million from the state's Overcollections Fund, which receives revenues from various sources. Tuition and fee increases for most in-state undergraduates are 10 percent at community and technical colleges and state universities in 2013-2014.

The Legislature also approved House Bill 243 (Act 140), which expands the eligibility requirements for the state Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, specifically for the Tech Award (for skilled or occupational training) to include students who graduated with an International Baccalaureate Diploma from an out-of-state or out-of-country high school after the 2009-2010 school year. Senate Bill 93 (Act 174) creates a career pathway between career-technical programs and the industry-based certification programs and academic degree programs offered by community colleges. The Board of Supervisors of Community and Technical Colleges must establish a process for developing the content of the programs, awarding college-level credit and guaranteeing transfer of the credit to any community college.

House Bill 115 (Act 275) creates a parent trigger to transfer a low-performing school back to its local school district from the Recovery School District (a special school district created by the state to reform underperforming schools). A majority of parents with students enrolled in the RSD school for at least two years must sign a petition requesting the transfer and the school must have received a performance grade of D or F, or any variation, for five consecutive years while under the operation of the RSD. The transfer must also have approval from the state Board of Education and the local school board.

House Bill 343 (Act 151) and Senate Bill 127 (Act 291) prohibit the administration of state competency-based tests and college examinations to a disabled student who is not pursuing a high school diploma, unless one or both of the following applies: the student's Individualized Education Plan indicates the tests are appropriate assessments for the student or the student's parent requests that the student take the tests. The absence of test results for the school will not impact the performance score or letter grade assigned to the school or school system for state and district accountability.

Other legislation

SB 45 (Act 171) merged four Louisiana Technical College campuses with Baton Rouge Community College beginning July 1, 2013.

SB 199 (Act 295) creates a new school district, the Southeast Baton Rouge Community School System; however, Senate Bill 73, a proposed constitutional amendment that would have authorized funding for the new district if approved by voters, did not pass during the session.

Maryland (<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov>)

The General Assembly took several high-profile actions during the legislative session, including repealing the death penalty, adopting stricter firearms regulations, expanding Medicaid eligibility, allowing the investigational use of marijuana for medical purposes, increasing motor fuel taxes to support transportation infrastructure and developing offshore wind energy resources. Reflecting the continuing economic recovery, the Legislature approved a 2013-2014 general fund budget that is up 6.7 percent over the prior year to nearly \$15.7 billion. The budget includes a 3 percent pay increase for state employees and faculty and staff at state universities. Local school districts determine pay raises for their employees, including teachers.

Total state aid to K-12 education is up 3.6 percent to \$6 billion, including \$2.9 billion in basic formula funding (up 1.5 percent), \$1.2 billion (up 4.3 percent) for school districts with larger numbers of economically disadvantaged students, \$193.4 million (up 9 percent) to educate students with limited English proficiency and \$852.8 million (up 12.9 percent) to help cover teacher retirement costs.

State support for higher education is up 8.5 percent to nearly \$1.8 billion. This includes \$1.2 billion for the University System of Maryland (up 9.4 percent), \$286.6 million for community colleges (up 5.2 percent), \$110.1 million for state-administered financial aid (up 7 percent) and \$41.3 million for independent institutions of higher education (up 8.5 percent). Tuition for in-state undergraduates at state universities is up 3 percent (except at Salisbury University, where tuition is up 6 percent); combined tuition and mandatory fee increases range from 2.3 percent to 5.6 percent.

To advance the goal that 55 percent of working-age adults possess at least an associate's degree by 2025, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 740, the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013. The bill requires schools, beginning in 2015-2016, to assess the language arts, literacy and mathemat-

ics proficiency of students in grade 11 to determine whether they are college- and career-ready; beginning in 2016-2017, schools must offer transition courses for students in grade 12 who do not meet the readiness standards. The bill requires each undergraduate student to submit a degree plan; a student at a four-year institution must submit the plan by the time he or she completes 45 credit-hours, while community college students must submit the plan when they enroll.

Under Senate Bill 740, the Maryland Higher Education Commission must, by July 2016, develop a statewide transfer agreement so that a student can transfer at least 60 credits toward an associate's degree earned at a community college to a public four-year institution. The bill establishes the standard number of credit-hours required for a bachelor's degree at a public university at 120 (except for five-year or professional programs) and for an associate's degree at 60, beginning with the fall 2015 semester. The bill establishes a statewide campaign to encourage students who earned 45 credits toward an associate's degree or 90 credits toward a bachelor's degree but left school without completing a credential to re-enroll and complete their degrees.

The Maryland State Department of Education has indicated that Maryland is not eligible for federal charter school program grants because state law does not align with federal requirements. Senate Bill 194 requires the department to conduct a study and provide recommendations regarding charter schools in the state. In addition to federal charter school grants, the study will include topics such as: per student funding at charter schools compared with traditional public schools; the academic and financial performance of charter schools in the state; the primary causes of success and failure of charter schools in Maryland; teacher satisfaction, retention and turnover at charter schools; student enrollment and retention and parent satisfaction at charter schools; and ways to integrate best practices between charter schools and traditional public schools.

In response to school safety issues raised by the shooting tragedy in Connecticut in late 2012, the General Assembly approved House Bill 453 to establish the Maryland Center for School Safety. The center will help the State Department of Education and local school systems prepare an annual school safety report for public review. The General Assembly also approved House Bill 983 and Senate Bill 143 to require local boards of education to review the emergency management plan for each public school by March 1, 2014. The State Department of Education will submit a report to the General Assembly by July 1, 2014, on recommendations for improving those plans as well as the cost of those improvements.

House Bill 207 addresses the issue of students with excessive numbers of absences. The bill defines a student as truant if he or she has a certain number of unlawful absences in a quarter, semester or school year, and it requires county boards of education to develop active intervention systems for truant students.

Legislation approved in 2012 requires a postsecondary institution that enrolls students in a fully online distance learning program to register with the MHEC within six months of enrolling its first student in the state. Under Senate Bill 510, private career schools, institutions subject to program review by MHEC and institutions that participate in SREB's Electronic Campus are exempted from the registration requirements. The bill also requires MHEC to, at least twice a year, utilize federal databases and other resources to determine whether any institutions required to register under these provisions have failed to do so.

Other legislation

HB 667 and SB 422 require each local board of education and employee organization representing public school employees to negotiate a reasonable service or representation fee to charge nonmembers of those organizations.

HB 813 establishes the Task Force to Study the Impact of Expanding Credit and Noncredit Courses for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

HB 830 requires the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning within the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation to identify alternative methods for an individual to earn a high school equivalency diploma without passing the GED test.

HB 1161 establishes the Commission on Special Education Access and Equity to study the extent to which parents and guardians of students with disabilities are made aware of their rights under federal and state law, ways to improve their awareness of these rights, and any disparities in awareness of these rights or access to special education services that are due to race, national origin or limited English proficiency.

SB 58 repeals the requirement that an individual must reside in Maryland for three months before taking the GED test.

SB 945 requires private nonprofit institutions of higher education that receive state funds to provide student-level data to the Maryland Longitudinal Data System.

Mississippi (<http://www.legislature.ms.gov/>)

The Mississippi Legislature finished the session with a budget for 2013-2014 that does not include any Medicaid funding. The governor called a special session to appropriate funds for Medicaid in 2013-2014. The 2013-2014 general fund budget passed by the Legislature (without Medicaid funding) totals \$4.5 billion, a decrease of 5.1 percent from the original 2012-2013 budget. Elementary and secondary education operate with \$2.1 billion (up 2.5 percent), including \$1.9 billion (up 2 percent) to fund the school formula. Teach for America funding remains level at \$6 million, while the National Board Certification program operates with \$22.6 million (down 7.6 percent).

State funds rise 5.6 percent for higher education (to \$761.6 million). Student financial aid programs receive 22.7 percent more in state funds (\$36.3 million). Four-year colleges and universities receive \$559.9 million (up 6.9 percent), while community colleges receive \$201.7 million (up 2.3 percent). Tuition increases for in-state undergraduate students at four-year public institutions range from 5 percent to 6.9 percent in 2013-2014. The average tuition increase at community colleges is 5.8 percent.

The Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of Higher Learning, which oversees the state's eight public universities, receives \$3 million in additional state funding to aid in the transition to a new performance-based postsecondary funding formula that "distributes funds equitably and rewards universities for operating efficiently and achieving attainment outcomes." The newly approved performance-based funding formula bases 90 percent of funds to universities (after basic operational expenses are allocated) on completed course credit-hours and 10 percent of funds on the progress universities make toward IHL priorities, which include attaining certain outcomes, such as degrees awarded, research activity and course credits earned.

The Legislature passed much of the governor's education reform agenda, "Education Works," which focuses on four areas: literacy, teacher quality, school choice and early learning. Senate Bill 2347 moves the

compulsory school attendance age back one year to 5 years of age. The bill creates the Literacy-Based Promotion Act to improve the reading skills of students in kindergarten and grades one through three until every student completing third grade reads at or above grade level. The budget includes \$3 million for the new Mississippi Building Blocks program to improve the school readiness of young children and \$9 million for the new Literacy Initiative and for reading interventionists.

The legislation also requires that a kindergarten through third-grade student identified with a reading deficiency receive intensive interventions until the deficiency is remediated. To earn promotion to fourth grade, a third-grade student must demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of the school year. Beginning in 2014-2015, a student who is retained due to a reading deficiency will have a “high-performing” teacher and will receive a “Read at Home” plan and other remediation supports.

Senate Bill 2396 revises the current accountability system that rates schools and school districts on an A-to-F scale. The law bases ratings on student achievement, individual student growth, four-year graduation rates and other conditions. The system supports certain educational goals: to ensure all students exit third grade reading on grade level by 2015; to reduce the dropout rate to 13 percent by 2015; and to have 60 percent of students scoring proficient and advanced on Common Core State Standards assessments by 2016, with incremental increases of 3 percent each year thereafter.

Senate Bill 2658 establishes a Pilot-Performance-Based Compensation System in four school districts, using \$1.5 million in state funds. The performance compensation system for instructional personnel and school administrators will contain, among other performance data items, a qualitative measure of teacher effectiveness, and a quantitative measure of student performance and learning growth. The bill requires that high schools with graduation rates lower than 80 percent submit a detailed plan to the state Department of Education to improve their graduation rates by restructuring the “high school experience.”

Senate Bill 2658 also creates the Teacher Education Scholars Program, which will offer an annual scholarship of up to \$15,000 for each scholar who is enrolled in a public or private university as a freshman or junior and intends to enter or is admitted into a teacher education program. Qualifying scholars, who must have a minimum 28 ACT score and a 3.5 grade-point average, may receive the scholarship for up to four consecutive years if the scholar remains enrolled full time in the teacher education program and makes satisfactory progress toward a baccalaureate degree with a major in education. The scholar will not have to repay the scholarship amount as long as he or she remains employed as a teacher in a Mississippi public school. If the scholar continues to teach for five years, the state will forgive the entire scholarship amount. Scholars who teach in schools rated as D or F also will receive a \$6,000 salary supplement for up to five years.

The Charter Schools Act of 2013, House Bill 369, repeals the Conversion Charter School Act of 2010 and creates the seven-member Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board as a state agency with exclusive chartering jurisdiction. The bill allows the CSAB to authorize “high-quality” charter schools, particularly those designed to expand opportunities for underserved students (those in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program who qualify for at-risk student funding under the state’s school funding formula and students who are identified as having special educational needs). The CSAB may approve up to 15 applications each year and authorize charter schools in districts rated as A, B or C only if a majority of the local board members vote to endorse the charter application or initiate the application. The initial charter term is five operating years, and renewal periods may cover successive five-year terms. Any charter school rated as an F school during its last year of operating under the terms of a charter contract will not receive a renewed charter.

To create a more coordinated prekindergarten system of service, Senate Bill 2395 updates the current Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007 by moving the voluntary prekindergarten program from the state

Department of Human Services to the DOE. The bill redefines teacher qualifications for early childhood education and establishes the early learning collaborative application process for awarding funds. Prekindergarten program criteria include establishing an early learning collaborative (which is a collaboration among prekindergarten providers and other early childhood programs), maintaining a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 10, and providing at least 15 hours of annual professional development.

Implementation of the Early Education Collaborative Act of 2013 will occur over time, with each phase lasting for three to five years. (The DOE will determine when to move to a new phase of the program.) Collaboratives will receive \$2,150 per student in a full-day program and \$1,075 per student in a half-day program, and they must match state funds. The bill creates an 11-member State Early Childhood Advisory Council for reasons that include assisting the DOE with implementation of the bill and serving as the designated council for early childhood education and care.

Other legislation

HB 672 increases the number of teachers who can receive the Mississippi Dyslexia Education Scholarship (created by legislation in 2012) from 10 teachers to 20 teachers and awards scholarships only to students accepted into a Dyslexia Therapy Master's Degree Cohort Program.

HB 879 allows children of active members of the U.S. Armed Forces or civilian military personnel who reside on a military base to attend any school district of their parents' choosing, provided that the district choice does not require transporting the student more than 30 miles.

HB 896 creates the Mississippi Speech-Language Therapy Scholarship for kindergarten through sixth-grade students diagnosed with a speech-language impairment to permit them to attend a school of choice that meets specific instructional requirements.

HB 975 and Senate Bill 2779 allow the governor to call a special election to fill any vacancies on an all-elected local school board when the state Board takes over the school district and dismisses the local board members. (Mississippi has local boards with elected members, appointed members, and both elected and appointed members.)

To gain entrance into an approved teacher education program, Senate Bill 2188 requires that, in addition to previous eligibility requirements to obtain a teaching license, an individual must also have scored a 21 on the ACT or achieved a nationally recommended passing score on the Praxis exam, and earned at least a 2.75 grade-point average on pre-major course work.

North Carolina (<http://www.ncleg.net>)

The General Assembly passed legislation on a variety of high-profile topics in 2013, including modifying voter laws, restructuring the tax code, increasing penalties for crimes involving firearms, allowing permit holders to carry concealed firearms in more places, developing rules to govern the "fracking" method of natural gas extraction and accelerating repayment of the state's unemployment debt to the federal government.

House Bill 998, the Tax Simplification and Reduction Act, replaces the current graduated income tax rates with a flat tax rate of 5.8 percent in 2014 and 5.75 percent from 2015 onward. Under the legislation, the corporate income tax rate decreases from 6.9 percent to 6 percent in 2014 and to 5 percent in 2015. If the state meets certain revenue targets, the rate declines to 4 percent in 2016 and to 3 percent in 2017. The legislation extends sales taxes to several items and services, including warranties, service contracts, electricity

and piped natural gas, and it places caps on several tax refunds. The projected decrease in state revenues is \$171.4 million in 2013-2014, rising to \$955.5 million in 2017-2018.

The General Assembly appropriated \$20.6 billion in general funds for 2013-2014, up 2.1 percent from the revised 2012-2013 total; general funds in 2014-2015 increase 1.9 percent to nearly \$21 billion. K-12 education funding in 2013-2014 is up 4.7 percent to \$7.9 billion and increases 2.3 percent to \$8 billion in 2014-2015. State universities receive approximately \$2.6 billion in each year of the biennium; this represents a 0.3 percent increase for 2013-2014 and a 0.7 percent increase for 2014-2015. Community colleges receive about \$1 billion in each year of the biennium, a 3.1 percent increase in 2013-2014 and a 0.5 percent decrease in 2014-2015. Tuition and fee increases for in-state undergraduates at state universities in 2013-2014 range from 2 percent to 12 percent. Tuition for resident students at community colleges is up 3.6 percent.

Proviso language in the budget bill (Senate Bill 402) provides an additional five days of leave for teachers in 2013-2014; phases out career status for teachers in favor of one-, two- and four-year contracts; and eliminates increased salaries provided to teachers and education professionals who have obtained master's degrees. The increased salaries continue, however, for teachers who receive them before July 1, 2014, and for positions that require a master's degree.

The budget establishes "Opportunity Scholarships," which provide grants of \$4,200 per year for students to attend nonpublic schools. Eligibility is limited to students from households with income levels that are 133 percent or less of the amount required to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. Students who received scholarships in the previous year receive first priority for awards; from the remaining funding, at least 50 percent of the grants must go to students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and no more than 35 percent of the grants may go to students entering kindergarten or first grade. The budget provides \$10 million in scholarship funding in 2014-2015.

The budget also establishes the Education and Workforce Innovation Program, which awards grants to schools, school districts or regional partnerships between multiple school districts that they may use over a five-year period "to foster innovation in education that will lead to more students graduating career and college ready." Grantees under the program must match any grant with a combination of local and private funds — each accounting for half of the match amount. Other budget proviso language requires school districts and charter schools to adopt emergency response plans for incidents of school violence and makes provisions for individuals to volunteer as school safety resource officers.

House Bill 112 modifies the appropriations act. Among its many provisions, the bill removes all class-size restrictions from grades four through 12.

With the approval of House Bill 269, the General Assembly established a scholarship grant program for children with disabilities to attend nonpublic schools. A student who is less than 22 years of age, has an Individualized Education Plan, requires special education services on a daily basis and who has not spent any time as a full-time college student may receive a grant of up to \$3,000 per semester. The legislation provides \$3 million per year for awards under the program.

The General Assembly approved House Bill 23 to update teacher and school administrator licensure standards, as well as the requirements for school administrator and teacher preparation programs (including those for lateral-entry teachers), to include competency in the use of digital technology for teaching and learning. In addition, the legislation requires the state Board of Education and the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina System to evaluate the current requirements for continuing teacher licensure and to "develop enhanced requirements."

Senate Bill 337 establishes the North Carolina Charter Schools Advisory Board within the Department of Public Instruction. The board will make recommendations to the state Board of Education on the adoption of rules governing charter schools, the approval or denial of charter school applications, and the renewal, nonrenewal or revocation of existing charter contracts. The bill eliminates charter application reviews at the school district level and requires charter school teachers in core subject areas (mathematics, science, social studies and language arts) at all grade levels (previously, only grades six through 12) to be college graduates.

House Bill 250 requires a charter school, within the first year of its operation, to make efforts for the population of the school to reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of either the local school district or the specific local population the school seeks to serve. The legislation also permits a charter school (after three years of operation and if the school has displayed adequate performance) to expand to offer one grade higher than is currently offered without being required to seek approval from the state Board of Education.

To expand access to career/technical education, the General Assembly approved Senate Bill 14. The legislation establishes, beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, college and career endorsements for high school diplomas; it also directs the state Board of Education to increase access to career and technical teacher licensure and develop strategies to increase student high school enrollment in career-technical courses.

Other legislation

HB 44 states the intent of the General Assembly to shift all funding for instructional materials to digital materials by 2017.

HB 142 requires a campus police agency affiliated with a private, nonprofit institution of higher education to provide certain crime reporting information it maintains to any member of the public who requests that information.

HB 146 requires public schools to provide instruction in cursive writing and the memorization of multiplication tables.

HB 255 requires state universities to notify students and parents about tuition surcharges for undergraduate students who have taken an excessive number of credit-hours and to provide advance notice to any students who are approaching the credit-hour limit.

HB 903 requires the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina System to require all universities to “adhere fully” to the comprehensive articulation agreement with the North Carolina Community College System; the bill requires the two systems to conduct a biannual joint review of the articulation agreement.

SB 168 eliminates several education-related reporting requirements that the General Assembly has deemed “unnecessary” and clarifies standards for teacher licensure and evaluation of teacher preparation programs by the state Board of Education.

Oklahoma (<http://www.oklegislature.gov>)

In an effort to support Oklahoma residents affected by the May 2013 tornadoes, the Legislature ended its session by passing Senate Bill 249, a \$45 million natural disaster recovery bill, which reimburses local governments for relief efforts, and Senate Bill 330, which establishes tax credits for owners of property damaged or destroyed in a 2013 natural disaster. Through approval of House Bill 2032, the Legislature lowered the top

personal income tax rate 0.25 percent (to 5 percent) beginning in 2015. The rate could fall again in 2016 to 4.85 percent if the General Revenue Fund grows enough to cover the 0.15 percent decrease. The Legislature also passed a comprehensive workers' compensation system, expanded gun owners' rights, consolidated over 75 state boards and commissions, created an economic development finance program and established a personal injury trust fund.

The state-funded 2013-2014 budget rises 4.2 percent to \$ 7.1 billion compared with the original 2012-2013 budget. State funds for education increase 3.2 percent to \$3.6 billion, which includes \$2.4 billion for K-12 education (up 3.3 percent) and \$988.6 million for higher education (up 3.5 percent). Career and technical education receives 2.2 percent more in state funds (\$138.1 million). For in-state undergraduate students, tuition and mandatory fee rates are unchanged at the state's research universities, up 5.7 percent at other state universities and up 5 percent at community colleges.

The School District Empowerment Program, House Bill 2131, empowers locally elected school board members to govern school districts and make decisions based on the needs of their students and circumstances. Under the bill, a school district may submit a request to the state Board of Education for a three-year exemption from specific state laws and state Board policies, along with a plan that outlines the district's future goals. The bill pushes back the deadline for a parent to file a student transfer application from April 1 to the first Monday in June. The local board of the receiving school district must approve or deny the request within 30 days, and parents have 10 days to notify the receiving school district of the student's enrollment.

In 2012, legislation created the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board and gave it the authority to apply for the creation and oversight of a full-time statewide virtual charter school sponsored by the state Board of Education. Senate Bill 267 expands the Virtual School Board's authority by making it the sole authorizer and sponsor of statewide virtual charter schools. The Virtual School Board must establish procedures for accepting, approving and denying applications and a process for renewal and revocation of virtual charter school contracts. A virtual charter school manager or applicant whose contract or application is denied, not renewed or terminated by the Virtual Board may appeal to the state Board within 30 days.

Beginning on July 1, 2014, local school districts may no longer offer or enter into virtual charter school contracts with providers that offer full-time virtual education to students who are nonresidents of the school districts. The Virtual School Board will assume responsibility for any virtual school contracts, executed before January 2014, that offer full-time virtual education to nonresident students. At the end of the contract term, those virtual charter school providers may apply for renewal under the new procedures.

House Bill 1658, among other provisions, modifies the school performance rating system. Previously, a school's grade was determined by a combination of factors and percentages: 33 percent for student test scores, 17 percent for learning gains in reading and math, 17 percent for improvement of the lowest quartile of students in reading and math, and 33 percent for whole school improvement. The legislation changes those percentages and factors to 50 percent for whole school performance, 25 percent for whole school growth and 25 percent for growth in the bottom quartile of students. A school can earn bonus points for attaining various goals, including graduation rate percentages, SAT and ACT performance, and advanced course work performance. The bill also assigns grades to schools based on a numerical scale.

Senate Bill 426 phases in the use of qualitative (observable and measurable characteristics of personnel and classroom practices linked to student performance) and quantitative (student academic growth and other academic data) measures in the evaluations of teachers and administrators over four school years and provides for a transition from qualitative measures (100 percent of the evaluation) to both qualitative and

quantitative measures (each counting as 50 percent of the evaluation) by 2015-2016. Qualitative measures must comprise 100 percent of a first-year teacher's evaluation.

Both Senate Bill 426 and Senate Bill 207 amend statutes relating to the frequency of teacher evaluations. Current language mandates that probationary teachers receive evaluations at least twice a year and all teachers have evaluations annually. Senate Bill 426 eliminates the twice-a-year requirement for probationary teachers. Instead, it requires that every probationary teacher receive constructive feedback twice a year from his or her annual evaluation. Senate Bill 207 decreases the frequency of evaluation for career teachers rated as "superior" or "highly effective" to once every two years.

To address school safety, Senate Bill 256 requires that, in addition to the two lockdown drills required by law, schools must conduct a minimum of eight safety drills each school year comprised of two fire drills, two intruder drills, two tornado drills, and two drills selected by the principal and local superintendent. Senate Bill 257 creates the Oklahoma School Security Institute, which is the central repository for public and private schools to contact for information on resources to enhance school security and assess risks and threats to school campuses. Senate Bill 259 requires schools to report the discovery of a firearm on school property if it is in the possession of a minor or other person who is not authorized by law to possess a firearm.

Other legislation

HB 1038 permits students to complete sets of competencies instead of meeting course completion requirements so that they may advance through course work more quickly and move on to more challenging material or potentially graduate from high school early.

HB 1756 provides that disabled students with an Individualized Education Program, which indicates the student has an assessment based on alternate achievement standards, may graduate from high school with a standard diploma after failing to meet standard graduation course credit requirements if the student obtains a written recommendation from his or her teacher, completes remediation, retakes the exam in each subject he or she failed, maintains at least a C average in each subject the student failed, and meets all other graduation requirements of the school district.

SB 91 requires school board members elected or appointed before January 1, 2014, to obtain instruction on education issues. Those elected or appointed after January 1, 2014, must complete at least 12 hours of instruction in particular education areas.

SB 169 requires a virtual education provider (and the local school district it contracts with) to identify and report detailed data to the State Department of Education on the performance of nonresident, full-time virtual students.

SB 226 allows a student who was denied a standard diploma for failing to meet graduation requirements to reenroll in the school district, to receive remediation and to retake any test necessary to obtain a standard diploma.

SB 559 details alternative test scores necessary to demonstrate mastery of state academic content standards in certain subject areas and exempts students from taking end-of-course state assessments in certain subject areas.

South Carolina (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>)

The Legislature approved a \$6.4 billion general fund budget for 2013-2014, up 4.8 percent from the originally approved 2012-2013 budget. General funds for K-12 education are up 8.5 percent to \$2.3 billion, including just under \$2.1 billion in formula funding to school districts (up 7.7 percent). The statewide public charter school district receives \$42.5 million, up 40 percent. Education Improvement Act funding, generated from an earmarked 1 percent sales tax, is down 1.2 percent to \$636.6 million.

General funds for higher education total \$593.4 million, up 5.1 percent, including \$336.1 million for universities (up 9.4 percent) and \$119.9 million for technical and comprehensive education (up 1.1 percent). Combined general and lottery funds are up 3.5 percent, to \$39.2 million, for the merit-based Palmetto Fellows Scholarship and are level, at \$8 million, for the merit-based HOPE scholarship. Combined funding for the merit-based LIFE Scholarship program declines 1.9 percent to \$169.1 million. Tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students in 2013-2014 are up from 3.1 percent to 5.6 percent at state universities. (Tuition and fees did not increase at one university.) They are up 3.1 percent at two-year colleges and up 0.9 percent to 4.4 percent at technical colleges. (Tuition and fees did not increase at one technical college.)

Included in the budget proviso language is the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children program, which will provide up to \$8 million in tax credits to individuals who donate to private organizations that grant scholarships for disabled students to attend private schools.

The South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot program, established in 2006, provides full-day prekindergarten to 4-year-olds in certain low-wealth school districts. Budget proviso language expands the program to eligible children residing in school districts with a poverty index of 75 percent or greater (previously, 90 percent) and provides \$300,000 in Education Improvement Act funding to evaluate the program on an annual basis.

South Carolina law already permits private schools to convert to a public charter school, but it requires the school to close for one year prior to its reopening as a charter school. With the passage of House Bill 3472, a private school converting to a charter school is exempt from the one-year waiting period if, in the most recent school term before closure as a private school, the students enrolled at that school reflect the racial composition of the local school district in which the school is located. The bill also permits the Felton-Laboratory School at South Carolina State University (which helps train future educators) to apply for charter school status.

Also concerning charter schools, the Legislature approved House Bill 3087, which requires a charter school to give enrollment preference to students who were enrolled at that school the prior year. The legislation also permits a charter school located on a military installation to give enrollment priority to children of military personnel stationed at that facility.

To help military veterans obtain gainful employment, the Legislative approved Senate Bill 417, the Military Service Occupation, Education and Credentialing Act. Under the act, a state college or university may award credit to an honorably discharged veteran student based on the military training or service of that student. In addition, the bill permits state licensing boards and commissions to accept the military education, training or experience of honorably discharged veterans toward satisfying the qualifications for a license or certification, or for the approval to take a license examination.

With the passage of House Bill 3453, the Legislature permitted school districts, for the fourth consecutive year, to delay (from April 15 to May 5) the date by which they had to notify teachers whether their contracts

were renewed for the upcoming school year. The bill also requires a school district to notify a teacher, on or before the date he or she is offered employment or reemployment for the upcoming school year, if the teacher has been recommended for formal evaluation in the upcoming school year under the state's Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teaching system. The Legislature approved the regulations for the ADEPT system, developed by the state Department of Education, by approving Senate Bill 621.

Other legislation

HB 3061 requires the Department of Health and Environmental Control to develop and post, in consultation with the state Department of Education, model concussion management policies; school districts must develop guidelines and procedures based on the model policies.

HB 3725, the Safe Access to Vital Epinephrine (SAVE) Act, permits a school district or the governing authority of a private school to obtain and store epinephrine auto-injectors and authorizes a school nurse or other designated personnel to administer them to students when necessary.

HB 3752 removes the limit on the number of credits high school students may earn through online instruction.

SB 191 creates a program within the state Department of Agriculture "to foster relationships between South Carolina farms, school districts, and other institutions and to provide them with fresh and minimally processed foods for consumption by students."

Tennessee (<http://www.legislature.state.tn.us>)

The Tennessee Legislature finished its session in early May after passing an overhaul of the state workers' compensation system, school safety measures, reductions in several types of state taxes, and a partial moratorium on property annexations. The total 2013-2014 budget of \$32.9 billion (up 1.6 percent compared with the 2012-2013 budget) includes \$15.1 billion (up 4.3 percent) in state funds. The Legislature approved a 1.5 percent salary increase for state employees using all state funds, for K-12 staff using a mix of state funds and local government matching funds, and for higher education employees using a mix of state funds and revenue from tuition and fees. The Legislature reduced the state sales tax on groceries for the second consecutive year. House Bill 193 decreases the tax another 0.25 percent (reduced from 5.5 percent to 5.25 percent by the Legislature in 2012 and from 5.25 percent to 5 percent in 2013).

The total budget for elementary and secondary education rises to \$4.4 billion (up 4.3 percent), of which \$4 billion (up 3.3 percent) fully funds the Basic Education Program, the school funding formula. Local governments receive a one-time \$51 million investment from the state to assist with technology upgrades in schools and to prepare for new online PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments in English and mathematics. Other programs with increased state funding include curriculum and instruction (up 13.2 percent to \$3.6 million), accountability and assessment (up 5.8 percent to \$29.6 million) and early childhood education (up 3.5 percent to \$91.8 million).

Postsecondary institutions receive a total of \$1.6 billion (up 9 percent) in state funds for 2013-2014, including \$35 million to support the state's outcomes-based postsecondary funding formula. State funding increases for four-year institutions (up 9.3 percent to \$478.4 million) and for community colleges (up 5.8 percent to \$211.2 million). Funding for Tennessee Technical Centers is up 5.1 percent to \$57.5 million. Tuition and fee increases for in-state undergraduates are 3 percent at community colleges and from 3 percent to 6 percent at state universities.

The School Security Act of 2013, House Bill 6 and Senate Bill 570 (Chapter 358), permits local superintendents, in conjunction with school principals, to hire law enforcement officers or officers with prior law enforcement service who are licensed to possess and carry firearms. The bills require an officer to complete 40 hours of basic training in school policing and the local superintendent to notify the chief of the local law enforcement agency of the school security officer's authorization to carry a firearm.

The High Performing School Districts Flexibility Act, House Bill 210 and Senate Bill 592 (Chapter 393), provides incentives and waivers to high-performing districts. A school district must satisfy a majority of specific criteria to designate itself as high performing. The criteria include: having a 90 percent or higher graduation rate, meeting or exceeding achievement and gap closures, or having an average student ACT score of 21 or higher. As a reward for the designation, a school district may appropriate additional funds as needed, utilize a teacher evaluation system that varies from the state Department of Education's evaluation system, add more days to the school calendar and apply for a waiver from state Board of Education rules. The "high-performing" designation lasts for three years.

House Bill 151 and Senate Bill 157 (Chapter 404) cap initial enrollment in a virtual school at 1,500 students. The virtual school may exceed the enrollment cap if the school demonstrates student achievement growth at a minimum level of "at expectations." If a virtual school is low performing for three consecutive years, the state superintendent may reinstitute the enrollment cap or direct the local school district to close the school. If the cap is reinstated, it will not affect students currently enrolled at the school.

To increase job opportunities for students, the Legislature approved House Bill 1276 and Senate Bill 1330 (Chapter 338), which authorize community colleges and technical centers to create Labor Education Alignment Programs. The programs will combine occupational training in a high-skill or high-technology industry with academic credit toward a postsecondary credential.

In support of higher learning opportunities for students with disabilities who have completed high school in accordance with an Individualized Education Program, Senate Bill 36 creates the Tennessee STEP UP scholarship program. The two-year STEP UP award is the same amount as the state merit-based HOPE scholarship award to students attending four-year institutions, which currently is a maximum of \$6,000 a year (\$2,000 for each semester). An eligible student who applies for the STEP UP scholarship must enroll in a postsecondary institution within 16 months after completing high school. To continue receiving the scholarship, a student must maintain enrollment at a postsecondary institution and make satisfactory academic progress. If a student loses eligibility, he or she cannot regain the scholarship.

Other legislation

HB 221 and SB 233 (Chapter 263) give the local school district the choice of continuing the employment of a non-tenured teacher who was not offered the option of employment with the Achievement School District or the operating entity of a school transferred into the ASD.

HB 283 and SB 543 (Chapter 345) provide a 25 percent tuition reduction to any state postsecondary school for every student under 24 years old whose parent is a retired teacher with at least 30 years of service or who received disability retirement after at least 25 years of service.

HB 315 and SB 205 (Chapter 326) permit a charter school sponsor or a charter school management organization to apply to a local school district to convert a public school to a charter school.

The Lois M. DeBerry Alternative Diploma Act, HB 387 and SB 105 (Chapter 448), authorizes the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development to make recommendations relative to any high school

assessments (other than the general equivalency diploma test) that lead to the award of a high school equivalency credential. Any recommendation approved by the state Board of Education is considered a high school equivalency assessment. Previously, the state DLWD worked with the DOE, the state Board and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

HB 566 and SB 618 (Chapter 88), known as the Skills for Jobs Act, require THEC in consultation with the DLWD to produce an annual report regarding state workforce need projections and credential production by January 15 each year.

HB 620 and SB 886 (Chapter 422) require the state Board to create an occupational diploma for students with disabilities.

HB 839 and SB 1022 (Chapter 85) allow a local school system to enroll any at-risk child who is 4 years old by August 15 (previously, September 30) in a public prekindergarten program. They also allow any child who participates in a public, private or federally funded prekindergarten program during the 2012-2013 or 2013-2014 school year to enter kindergarten the next school year. Currently, only children who were enrolled in public prekindergarten programs could enroll in kindergarten the next school year.

Beginning in 2014-2015, HB 941 and SB 1175 (Chapter 411) require each local school district to develop an open enrollment period, during which parents may select a school in the district with available space and request a transfer for their child.

HB 1288 and SB 1353 (Chapter 256) lift the ban on a municipality creating a school district.

HB 1291 and SB 1354 (Chapter 292) lift the requirement that no more than three school districts exist in a county with a population of 25,000 or less.

Texas (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>)

The Legislature completed its regular biennial session after approving a biennial general fund budget for 2014-2015 totaling \$101.4 billion, up 16.7 percent from the original 2012-2013 biennial budget. General funds for higher education are up 9.7 percent over the biennium to \$15.7 billion, while K-12 general funds total \$37.5 billion, up 1.8 percent.

The Legislature approved major revisions to high school curriculum and graduation requirements with House Bill 5. The legislation replaces the three high school curricula and diplomas (minimum, recommended and advanced) with a single “foundation high school program” under which students may earn diploma endorsements such as STEM, business and industry, public services, arts and humanities, or multidisciplinary studies. The foundation high school program applies to students who enter grade nine in fall 2014 or after; students who entered high school previously may opt for the new diploma. All students must have a personal graduation plan and must declare, upon entering grade nine, the diploma endorsement they intend to earn.

House Bill 5 reduces, from 15 to five, the number of end-of-course tests required to earn a high school diploma, and it removes the requirement that an end-of-course test comprise 15 percent of a student’s final course grade. School district ratings now are conducted on an A-to-F scale; in addition to ratings by the state, each district will rate itself and each campus in the district. The bill also requires the Texas Education Agency to create a Texas School Accountability Dashboard that provides performance information for individual schools.

In support of the new diploma requirements, House Bill 2201 requires the state Board of Education to ensure that at least six advanced career-technology courses are approved to satisfy the additional required mathematics. House Bill 462 prohibits the state Board of Education and local school districts from using Common Core State Standards in required curriculum, and it prohibits TEA from adopting or developing assessments based on Common Core State Standards. House Bill 866 exempts students who earn a satisfactory score on certain state-mandated end-of-course tests from having to take the similar test in the subsequent grade.

Senate Bill 2 increases the cap on start-up charter schools from the current limit of 215 to 305 in 2018-2019; dropout recovery charter schools and up to five charter schools for special-needs students are exempt from the cap. Responsibility for authorizing, renewing and performing oversight on start-up charter schools is transferred from the state Board of Education to TEA. Under the legislation, school districts may convert low-performing schools to charters.

The Legislature approved several bills concerning teachers. House Bill 1751 converts the Educator Excellence Awards Program into the Educator Excellence Innovation Program. The program will provide grants to establish innovative school district-level recruitment, preparation, hiring, evaluation, professional development and retention practices that improve educator quality and effectiveness. House Bill 1752 establishes, through a competitive selection process, the Texas Teacher Residency Program at a state university. The university will partner with a nearby school district or charter school to employ residents in the program, which seeks to award master's degrees to certified teacher residents and lead to certification for residents who are not already certified teachers.

House Bill 642 requires that not more than 25 percent of the continuing education requirements for a teacher or principal include instruction regarding effectiveness, recognizing early warning indicators of students at risk of dropping out, integrating technology into instruction and educating diverse student populations. House Bill 742 establishes a competitive grant program for up to 10 school districts to provide K-8 summer education programs for educationally disadvantaged students, and to provide apprenticeship, mentorship, and other professional development opportunities for new teachers and student teachers.

To retire with full service benefits, the Teachers' Retirement System requires members to possess certain combinations of age and years of service credit in the system. Senate Bill 1458 requires members who have fewer than five years of service before September 1, 2014, or who join the retirement system on or after that date to meet new requirements to retire with full benefits. Members must attain either 65 years of age with at least five years of service credit, or 62 years with the sum of age and years of credit equaling at least 80.

As in other states, Texas legislators focused on school safety in the wake of the shooting tragedy in Connecticut in late 2012. House Bill 1009 allows for school marshals as law enforcement officers employed by school districts and permits them to carry concealed handguns. Senate Bill 1556 establishes the School Safety Task Force to study best practices for school emergency operations planning, recommend statutory changes to improve those emergency operations and develop a program to certify school districts that meet emergency operations criteria identified by the task force.

Several bills address workforce needs. The Texas Workforce Innovation Needs Program, established with the passage of House Bill 3662, allows schools, colleges and universities to establish "innovative programs designed to prepare students for careers for which there is demand" in Texas. Programs must either incorporate dual enrollment courses or engage students in competency-based learning to earn postsecondary credentials. House Bill 842 allows school districts, under an existing program, to give students the opportunity to earn college credit for courses or activities, including apprenticeships or training hours that satisfy requirements for associate's degrees or industry-recognized credentials or certificates.

House Bill 1296 requires TEA to provide information on future workforce needs and annual wages for the top 10 highest-demand jobs in the state. TEA also must provide information on institutions of higher education within the state, including comparative tuition costs, retention rates, graduation rates, average student debt, student loan repayment rates and employment rates. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, in conjunction with the Texas Workforce Commission, will make five-year projections of the workforce needs of the state and of the educational attainment and training of persons expected to enter the state workforce.

Each agency in Texas is subject to a sunset review, typically every 10 or 12 years. Senate Bill 215 continues the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board until 2025 and makes some changes in its operations. The bill also removes two-year colleges from participation in the merit-based TEXAS Grant program and the B-On-Time Loan program (which provides interest-free loans that have a forgiveness clause upon a student's graduation if that student graduates in a timely manner with a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher).

Other legislation

HB 29 requires state universities to offer a fixed tuition rate price plan to an entering undergraduate student in which the institution will not increase tuition charges for at least the first 12 consecutive semesters of that student's enrollment.

HB 437 establishes the Texas Innovative Adult Career Education Grant Program at Austin Community College to provide grants to nonprofit workforce and job training organizations to develop, support or expand programs that prepare low-income students to enter careers in high-demand and significantly higher-earning occupations.

HB 1926 expands the list of entities eligible to provide courses through the state's Virtual School Network to include nonprofits, for-profit companies and organizations that provide online professional development courses. The commissioner of education is required to conduct a study assessing the network capabilities of every school district in Texas.

HB 2012 requires TEA to gather salary information for teachers, librarians, counselors and nurses; publish averages by school district, subject and grade level; and use the data to conduct a regional cost-of-living analysis that compares teacher salaries with salaries in similar professions. The bill also requires the commissioner of education to contract for a survey of teaching and learning conditions administered to teachers, counselors, principals and superintendents.

HB 2103 requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish from one to three centers for education research; the centers will conduct research on education and workforce programs and policies in the state.

HB 2760 permits Texas State Technical College institutions to enter into partnerships with public junior colleges to "enhance the delivery of technical education programs."

SB 307 transfers the responsibility for administering adult education and literacy programs from TEA to the Texas Workforce Commission not later than January 1, 2014, as per the recommendations of the Sunset Advisory Commission.

SB 498 requires four-year institutions of higher education to notify a public community college, public state college or public technical institute when a transfer student has achieved more than 66 (previously, 90) semester credit-hours so that the community college, state college or technical institute can award the student an associate's degree.

SB 1159 provides automatic readmission for a person who was previously offered admission to or was enrolled in a graduate or professional program and whose enrollment was interrupted by military deployment; any credit that person previously earned is applied toward meeting program requirements.

SB 1210 requires college students to meet certain grade-point average, satisfactory progress and excessive credit-hour requirements to maintain tuition and fee waivers; students whose enrollment was interrupted by military deployment are exempted from the grade-point average requirements.

SB 1720 establishes the Math and Science Scholars Loan Repayment Program for teachers who agree to teach mathematics or science in Title I school districts. The program will begin with the 2016-2017 academic year with a maximum of 1,000 participants; the maximum number of participants will increase by 1,000 every year up to 4,000 participants in 2019-2020 and beyond.

Virginia (<http://www.viriniageneralassembly.gov>)

The General Assembly amended the 2012-2014 biennial budget that was previously adopted, increasing the budget 0.7 percent to a little more than \$35.1 billion in general funds. In 2013-2014, total general funds rise 5.1 percent (about \$18 billion) compared with the amended 2012-2013 budget. General funds for education increase to \$7.2 billion, up 3.4 percent. Elementary and secondary education operate with 3.3 percent more in general funds (to \$5.4 billion), including a 1.6 percent increase (to \$5.3 billion) to fund the school finance formula. Teachers and support staff receive a 2 percent salary increase financed with \$70.2 million in general funds.

Higher education's budget for 2013-2014 increases 3.3 percent (to about \$1.3 billion), with state-funded student financial aid increasing 5.7 percent (to \$8.6 million). In addition to the 2 percent raise (financed with nongeneral funds) approved in 2012 and scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2013, faculty receive a 1 percent salary bonus in 2013-2014, funded with \$7.3 million in general funds. Tuition and mandatory fees increase, on average, 5.1 percent for in-state undergraduates at four-year institutions, 4.4 percent for students at two-year colleges and 7.9 percent at Richard Bland College (the state's only public junior college).

In March, the governor signed several education bills that were a part of his "All Students" agenda. House Bill 2151 (Act 588) and Senate Bill 1223 (Act 650) create new policies relating to principal and teacher evaluations, grievances and dismissal. The bills require school boards to provide a mentor to each principal in probationary status, except those who have "prior successful experience as principals," during the first year of the probationary period. Evaluations of probationary principals and assistant principals will occur every year. The local superintendent will use the evaluation results and other considerations in making a recommendation to the local board regarding renewal of the principal's contract. A principal or assistant principal who achieves continuing contract status will have a formal evaluation at least once every three years and an informal evaluation at least once each year that there is not a formal evaluation.

Currently, teachers are evaluated once every three years. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, formal evaluations of teachers will occur at least once every three years and more often as deemed necessary by the principal. Informal teacher evaluations will occur every year in which there is not a formal evaluation and at least once in the first semester of the school year for a first-year probationary teacher. Previously, probationary status for teachers lasted three years. The bills allow local school boards to extend teacher probationary status to five years and prohibit workforce reductions based solely on seniority.

House Bill 1999 (Act 672) and Senate Bill 1207 (Act 692), require the state Board of Education to rate school performance using an A-to-F grading scale. The state Board must approve student growth indicators by July 31, 2013, for standards used to accredit schools and in teacher evaluations. “Student growth” is defined as whether students: on average, fall below, meet or exceed an expected amount of growth based on a statewide average or reference base year on state assessments or additional assessments; maintain a proficient or advanced proficient performance level on state assessments; or make significant improvement within the below-basic or basic level of performance on reading or mathematics assessments.

“To transform our approach to failing schools,” the governor supported the passage of Senate Bill 1324 (Act 805), which creates a special school district to reform underperforming schools — the Opportunity Educational Institution. A school must transfer to OEI if its accreditation is denied or its accreditation status is at stake for three years and a majority of the OEI Board votes to transfer the school. An OEI school may return to its local school district once it achieves full accreditation or with Board approval after five years of oversight. Otherwise, the Board may retain the school in OEI for a specified number of additional years.

Senate Bill 1189 (Act 539) and House Bill 2098 (Act 584) allow the state Board to approve school waivers from certain state education regulations for up to five years. The local board must provide a description of how the waivers will increase the quality of instruction and improve student achievement in the affected school. In addition, the state Board may approve waivers (renewable in up to five-year increments) that permit the local board to assign instructional personnel to schools with the greatest needs, as long as the district employs a sufficient number of personnel district-wide, as required by law.

House Bill 1350 (Act 728) requires local districts to provide targeted mathematics remediation and intervention to students in grades six through eight who show deficiencies as demonstrated by their individual performances on any diagnostic test or grade-level state math assessment. House Bill 2068 and Senate Bill 1171 (Act 123) require local districts to provide algebra-readiness intervention services to students in grades six through nine who are at risk of failing the Algebra I end-of-course test. Act 123 also expands reading intervention services to students in kindergarten and grades one and two who demonstrate deficiencies. Previously, only students in grade three received this type of reading intervention service.

House Bill 2101 and Senate Bill 1248 (Act 500) create “High School to Work Partnerships” between public high schools and local businesses to provide certain types of work opportunities to students who may not seek further education after high school. Partnerships would provide an apprenticeship, internship or job shadow program in a variety of trades and skilled labor positions, or a tour of local businesses and a chance to meet with the owners and employees.

House Bill 2084 and Senate Bill 1175 (Act 440) authorize the state Board to issue a two-year provisional license, known as a “Teach for America” license, to any participant in TFA who, among other requirements, holds a baccalaureate degree and has an employment offer from a local school district. TFA license holders are not eligible for continuing contracts, but they may have the license renewed after two years if the TFA licensee has achieved satisfactory scores on all professional teacher assessments and received satisfactory evaluations.

Other legislation

HB 1388 and SB 936 (Act 109) allow school boards to notify principals, assistant principals or supervisors of their reassignment to a teaching position by no later than June 15 (previously, April 15).

HB 2066 and SB 1172 (Act 224) permit local school districts that have a sufficient number of librarians, guidance counselors and school-based clerical personnel to assign these employees to schools within the district according to the area of greatest needs, whether the schools are elementary, middle grades or high.

HB 2076 and SB 1131 (Act 225) exclude charter applications initiated by one or more local school boards from review by the state Board.

HB 2088 (Act 229) requires that in the event a postsecondary institution closes or its certification is revoked, the institution must make arrangements for the transfer of all student academic and financial records to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia within 30 days of the closure or, with SCHEV's approval, ensure preservation of the records by entering into an agreement with another school to keep the records.

HB 2144 (Act 587) allows the state Board to grant a two-year waiver from either third-grade science or history and social science state assessment requirements, or both, to a public elementary school that had an adjusted pass rate of less than 75 percent on the state reading assessment administered during the previous school year.

SB 1201 (Act 644) clarifies current provisions for local school boards to submit proposals for the consolidation of school divisions to the state Board. Prior to the submission of a consolidation proposal, the submitting school board must give notice to the public and conduct one or more public hearings.

Beginning on July 1, 2014, SB 1345 (Act 726) authorizes the state Board to require any individual licensed to teach either middle grades civics or economics or high school government or history, and who is seeking a license renewal, to demonstrate knowledge of Virginia history or state and local government by completing a module or professional development course that has a value of five professional development points.

West Virginia (<http://www.legis.state.wv.us>)

Due to the projections of slow growth in revenue collections in coming years, the Legislature approved an overall general fund budget for 2013-2014 of \$4.1 billion, down slightly from the prior fiscal year. General funds for K-12 education are just under \$2 billion (down less than 1 percent), while general funds for higher education are down 6.9 percent to \$424.7 million. This includes \$67.9 million for community and technical colleges (down 6.5 percent) and \$287.9 million for four-year colleges and universities (down 8.5 percent). Tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students at state colleges and universities in 2013-2014 are up 4.5 percent to 9.4 percent.

Early in the session, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 359, which addresses many of the education priorities identified by the governor in his 2013 State of the State address. Under the bill, the state Board of Education, the Higher Education Policy Commission and the Council for Community and Technical College Education will establish a college- and career-readiness initiative, including establishing readiness standards for English and mathematics; the state Board of Education will develop transitional courses for students in grade 12 who do not meet the readiness standards.

The bill requires counties to provide early childhood education programs on a full-day, five-day-a-week basis by the 2016-2017 school year, provides school calendar flexibility for local school boards, requires each school district to provide 180 days of instruction within 48 weeks, allows teacher and school principal input on teacher hiring, and specifies the qualifications that school districts must take into account when hiring professional employees.

Recognizing a link between proper nutrition and improved student outcomes, the Legislature enacted Senate Bill 663, the West Virginia Feed to Achieve Act, with the intent that school districts eventually provide “free nutritious meals” for all students from kindergarten through grade 12. The program is phased in for elementary schools “as sufficient funds become available”; all schools are required to adopt, by the 2015-2016 school year, a system to ensure that all students are given an adequate opportunity to eat breakfast.

Other legislation

HB 2491 requires the Council for Community and Technical College Education and the Higher Education Policy Commission to adopt rules to provide students who are called to military duty with a “fair and efficient” procedure for withdrawing from classes, completing course work or securing a leave of absence from course attendance.

HB 2861 allows students identified as “defeated and discouraged learners” to remain enrolled in public schools while enrolled in alternative education programs.

HB 2940 requires all county superintendents and members of county boards of education that belong to the same regional educational service agency to meet and identify administrative, coordinating and other county-level services and functions that they may share.

HB 3157 requires the state Board of Education to identify reports written by teachers and school administrators that are unnecessary or counterproductive; the bill also delays to the 2014-2015 school year implementation of the requirement in Senate Bill 359 that each school district must provide 180 days of instruction within 48 weeks.

SB 80 requires an assistant superintendent of a local school system, if he or she has at any point held a teaching or administrative certificate, to substitute teach at least three days every school year.

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