



# SREB

## 2013 Legislative Briefing

### *Summary*

SREB states finished their work in regular sessions by midsummer, and many states already are working toward the 2014 sessions. State general fund budgets are still rising for the most part, though slowly, but the growth in revenues often is offset by increased needs for services. Several states were able to free up sufficient funds to support some pay raises for teachers and faculty. Tax relief also remains an issue of interest for state legislatures.

Legislation in 2013, as in recent years, focused on strengthening pathways and standards for students from the early grades through high school, leading to better college and career readiness. Educator effectiveness and evaluation are important parts of this discussion, and teacher preparation is gaining more attention. Bills in a number of states intend to provide flexibility in operations — with accountability — to allow districts to implement innovations to raise student achievement and success.

SREB states also continue to support efforts to increase the numbers of adults with college degrees or certificates by addressing barriers to completion, such as affordability and the transfer of credit. Several states passed laws to assist active military personnel when their service interrupts their education.

A summary of each state's legislative and budget actions can be found in the 2013 *Final Legislative Report*, available at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

### *State and education budgets*

For the most part, general funds continue to rise slowly across the region. State general fund budget increases generally fall in the range of 3 percent to 5 percent. Increases exceeding 6 percent were approved in Florida, Maryland and Texas (for the biennium).

General fund increases for elementary and secondary schools for most states are from about 1 percent to 5 percent, though increases in Florida and South Carolina exceed 8 percent. Most college and university budgets also are

seeing general fund increases of 1 percent to 5 percent, though legislatures approved greater increases in Delaware (8.8 percent for Delaware Tech), Florida (34.2 percent for universities), Georgia (6.4 percent), Maryland (8.5 percent), Mississippi (6.9 percent for universities) and Tennessee (9 percent). Louisiana's 10 percent overall decrease includes a reduction in general funds partially offset by other state funds.

States still hope to spur economic growth by providing tax breaks. Arkansas and Tennessee further reduced sales taxes on groceries — to 0.125 percent (from 1.5 percent) in Arkansas and to 5 percent (from 5.25 percent) in Tennessee. In Delaware, a change in a planned decrease in the tax rate on personal income above \$60,000 will mean that taxes will decrease to 6.6 percent in 2014 (instead of the planned 5.95 percent). Oklahoma will lower the top personal income tax rate to 5 percent (from 5.25 percent) beginning in 2015. A further decrease to 4.85 percent is possible in 2016 if the General Revenue Fund grows by a sufficient amount. North Carolina acted to simplify and reduce taxes by replacing the current graduated income tax rates with a flat tax rate beginning in 2014 and by decreasing corporate tax rates. It also extended sales taxes to several items and services, and it placed caps on several tax refunds.

## *Salaries and benefits*

As the economy and state budgets have begun looking up, some legislatures included pay raises for teachers and faculty in their state budgets. For teachers, budgets included funding sufficient for 2 percent raises in Alabama and Virginia, and 1.5 percent in Tennessee. Districts in Florida and Maryland will determine increases through collective bargaining agreements. Louisiana teachers will get increases that vary by district.

Maryland and Tennessee faculty will see raises of 3 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively. Virginia approved 2 percent raises a year ago for the second year of the biennium. During the 2013 session, it added a 1 percent bonus to the raise already approved. Florida faculty earning less than \$40,000 annually will receive \$1,400, while higher-paid faculty will receive \$1,000.

Florida and Mississippi addressed performance or incentive pay. Florida high school teachers will receive bonuses for industry certifications earned by their students. Teachers of International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses qualify for bonuses for each "passing" score on the appropriate examination, to a maximum of \$2,000. Those teachers now will qualify for up to an additional \$1,000 if a certain percentage of their students achieve the designated score on the exams.

Mississippi's new pilot performance pay system will include a qualitative measure of teacher effectiveness and a quantitative measure of student performance and learning growth. In addition to financial aid, a scholarship-loan program will provide a \$6,000 salary supplement for up to five years to program scholars who teach in low-performing schools.

The Texas Education Agency will publish average salary information for teachers and other K-12 employees by district, subject and grade level and will conduct a cost-of-living analysis that compares teacher pay with that of other professions.

*Some teachers  
and faculty get  
pay raises*

Kentucky and Texas joined other SREB states that have changed teacher and state employee retirement programs due to declines in investment income and increases in workers approaching retirement age. Kentucky's new oversight board will advise the Legislature on retirement plan issues. Legislation established a "hybrid cash balance plan" for state and local government employees other than teachers and requires the Commonwealth to fully fund the "actuarially required contribution." Texas increased the age at which new employees may retire and receive full retirement benefits.

North Carolina's budget provides an additional five days of leave for teachers in 2013-14; phases out career status for teachers in favor of one-, two- and four-year contracts; and eliminates increased salaries for master's degrees obtained after June 30, 2014.

### *Postsecondary financial aid*

Georgia restored the eligibility requirements of the lottery-funded HOPE grant for technical college students to a 2.0 grade-point average (from the 3.0 average adopted in 2011). Louisiana expanded eligibility for the state TOPS scholarships, 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.

Relative to college scholarships for students with disabilities, Georgia amended eligibility requirements for the Special Needs Scholarship Program. Tennessee created STEP UP scholarships for students with disabilities who complete high school under an Individualized Education Program.

Some states took up bills for teachers or prospective teachers. Mississippi created the Teacher Education Scholars Program: Qualifying students who provide five years of teaching service will not have to repay the annual award. It also increased the number of teachers who can receive the Mississippi Dyslexia Education Scholarship. Texas' new Math and Science Scholars Loan Repayment Program is for teachers who agree to teach those subjects in Title I school districts.

Arkansas's lottery-funded Academic Challenge Scholarships will now provide graduated awards that rise each year rather than a flat rate for all four years, due to more students qualifying and less revenue anticipated. Two-year college students will receive \$2,000 per year (previously \$2,500). Kentucky students who meet early high school graduation requirements qualify for a scholarship, and those who complete high school in three years are eligible for a merit-based KEES award at a higher base amount than students who graduate in four years.

### *Tuition and required fees*

While the cost of attending college continues to rise, states are trying to moderate tuition increases. Even so, SREB's *Fact Book on Higher Education* (available at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)) reports that tuition and fees in recent years have risen faster than family income and that the federal Pell Grant covers a smaller percentage of the average annual costs of attending a public college. This means out-of-pocket costs for students and their families continue to rise — more heavily impacting low-income families.

**Estimated Changes to Tuition and Required Fees  
In-State Undergraduates at Public Institutions, SREB States, 2013-14**

	Two-year colleges	Four-year colleges
Alabama	1.8%	2.7% to 8%
Arkansas	2% to 8.9%	3.4% to 6%
Delaware	4.8%	0 to 3.7%
Florida		
State University System		0.9% to 2%
Florida College System	0 to 4.8%	0 to 1.7%
Georgia	0*	1.8% to 9.6%
Kentucky	2.9%	2.75% to 3%
Louisiana	10%	10%
Maryland	0 to 10.2%	2.3% to 5.6%
Mississippi	5.8% average	5% to 6.9%
North Carolina	3.6%**	2% to 12%
Oklahoma	2.4% to 7.1%	0 to 9.1%
South Carolina	3.1% to 5.6%	0.9% to 4.4%
Tennessee		
University of Tennessee		6%
Board of Regents Colleges	3%	1.4% to 6%
Texas	NA	NA
Virginia	4.4% average	5.1% average
West Virginia	0 to 15.2%	4.5% to 9.4%

“NA” indicates data not available.

\* Increases will be determined for the spring semester.

\*\* Tuition only

A few states addressed tuition and fee policies during 2013 sessions. Alabama redefined “resident student” to include students not residing in the state who take certain post-secondary distance learning courses. The governing boards of each four-year institution and the state Board of Education for two-year institutions will set tuition rates for distance learning programs. Florida permits colleges to establish an out-of-state fee that defrays the full cost of instruction for nonresident students enrolled in distance learning programs.

North Carolina requires state universities to inform students and parents about tuition surcharges for taking an excessive number of credit-hours; institutions also must provide advance notice to any students who are approaching the credit-hour limit. Texas college students must 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 GPA requirements.

In another bill, Texas required universities to offer a fixed tuition price plan to an entering undergraduate student — tuition will not increase for at least the first 12 consecutive semesters of that student’s enrollment.

## *Educator effectiveness*

In recent years, legislatures across the SREB region have passed bills to strengthen the development of teachers and other educators. Most states are implementing new and more comprehensive educator evaluation systems that include student achievement measures. Bills passed this year in Georgia, Kentucky and Oklahoma establish new evaluation systems for certified teachers and administrators that use multiple effectiveness measures, including student performance data, to inform personnel decisions.

These new systems also address the frequency of evaluations. Georgia and Oklahoma call for annual evaluations, though in Oklahoma, probationary teachers also will receive constructive feedback twice per year. Kentucky’s new system may not require a formal evaluation of all school personnel each year; local districts may establish, with state Board approval, alternative effectiveness and evaluation systems. Virginia teachers, as well as principals and assistant principals who achieve continuing contract status, will be evaluated once every three years. Informal evaluations will occur each 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. Probationary principals and assistant principals will receive evaluations annually.

Getting teachers to the classroom requires strong preparation programs in colleges and universities. Delaware and Mississippi legislation raises entrance standards for applicants to teacher education programs. Delaware also established new state standards for preparation programs that include at least 10 weeks of full-time student teaching and other clinical experiences throughout the curriculum, annual student evaluations aligned to the state’s educator evaluations and rigorous exit requirements.

Florida revised accountability requirements for preparation programs and placed requirements on their core curricula. A teacher candidate must complete an assessment on the uniform core curricula in his or her area of concentration and demonstrate the ability to positively impact student learning growth. Continued approval of a preparation program depends upon performance measures of the program and its graduates.

Relative to licensure, Arkansas legislation adds a passing score on a basic skills assessment to the list of requirements for a standard teaching license, unless the applicant has three years of teaching experience. It decreases the hours of pedagogy training (to 24 hours from 30 hours) to keep a provisional 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. Florida now requires all teachers seeking to renew their certificates to earn at least one college credit on teaching students with disabilities. North Carolina licensure standards (and teacher preparation programs) will include competency in the use of digital technology. The state Board in Virginia may require individuals who teach certain middle grades or high school social studies courses, and who seek a license renewal, to demonstrate knowledge of Virginia history or state and local government.

*Teachers’ licensing  
requirements  
change*

*States strengthen  
professional  
development*

North Carolina will evaluate its requirements for continuing teacher licensure and “develop enhanced requirements.” The Virginia state Board may issue two-year renewable, provisional licenses to Teach for America participants who meet certain requirements.

Relative to professional development, Arkansas now requires school districts and open enrollment charter schools to offer professional development courses every four years to licensed personnel. Texas is requiring 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.

North Carolina clarified standards for teacher licensure and state Board evaluation of teacher preparation programs. Texas will provide grants for innovative school district-level recruitment, preparation, hiring, evaluation, professional development and retention practices that improve educator quality and effectiveness. And, through a teacher residency program, a university will partner with a nearby school district or charter school to employ the residents. The program seeks to award master’s degrees to certified teacher residents and lead to certification for those who are not already certified teachers.

### *Health and safety*

Laws in several states addressed student health issues. Florida and South Carolina now will allow school staff to administer epinephrine auto-injectors when necessary. South Carolina created a program to encourage relationships between farms, school districts and other institutions to provide students with fresh foods. The intent of West Virginia legislation is that school districts eventually provide free nutritious meals for all students from kindergarten through grade 12. Georgia and South Carolina bills call for the development of concussion management policies.

A number of states focused on school safety. Kentucky, Maryland and North Carolina require districts to review existing safety plans or to adopt new plans to protect students and staff. Arkansas legislation calls for annual training of school staff and students on how to prevent and respond to acts of violence. In Oklahoma, schools must have a minimum number of safety drills each year. Oklahoma and Maryland created resource centers to assist in providing safety information to schools and districts.

Alabama and Tennessee will permit school districts to hire school resource or law enforcement officers who are licensed to possess firearms. Tennessee requires its school law enforcement officers to complete 40 hours of training in school policing. Police officers at state colleges in Florida will have the same authority to enforce the law as police officers at state universities. North Carolina requires campus police agencies at private, nonprofit institutions to provide certain crime reporting information to the public on request.

### *Students with special needs*

Both Florida and Louisiana addressed assessment and accountability for disabled students. Florida created an exemption from statewide assessments for a disabled student who is prevented from demonstrating the required mastery of skills. Louisiana will prohibit

the administration of state competency-based tests to students who are not pursuing a high school diploma, unless the student's Individualized Education Program indicates the tests are appropriate or the parent requests that the student take the tests.

Relative to accountability, Florida legislation establishes procedures to give a school improvement rating to "exceptional education centers" for disabled students only. In Louisiana, an absence of test results for disabled students will not impact a school's accountability rating.

Several states created or amended programs that provide scholarships for special needs students so that they may attend a school of their choice. The state Board may require local districts in Georgia to waive prior-year attendance requirements on a case-by-case basis and expedite IEPs before the beginning of the school year. Also, the three scholarship application deadline dates will allow an eligible student to transfer to another school during the school year. Mississippi's new scholarship program will allow kindergarten through sixth-grade students diagnosed with a speech-language impairment to choose a school that meets specific instructional requirements. North Carolina established a scholarship grant program for children with disabilities to attend nonpublic schools. South Carolina created tax credits for individuals who donate to private organizations that grant scholarships for disabled students to attend private schools.

In other bills, Oklahoma legislation provides that disabled students with IEPs calling for assessments based on alternate achievement standards may graduate with a standard high school diploma under certain circumstances. Tennessee's state Board must create an occupational diploma for students with disabilities. Florida clarified that, in developing an IEP 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, academic level and full range of needs.

Maryland created a commission to study the extent to which parents and guardians of students with disabilities are made aware of their rights under federal and state law, plus ways to improve their awareness. A new task force will study the impact of expanding credit and noncredit courses for students with developmental disabilities.

## *Early learning*

Meeting the educational needs of young children and those in the early grades continues to be a priority across the region. Legislation in West Virginia requires counties to provide early childhood education programs on a full-day, five-day-a-week basis by the 2016-17 school year.

To provide better coordinated services, Florida moved its previously independent Office of Early Learning to the DOE and requires it to adopt a list of approved curricula, to establish a process for approving each provider's curriculum, to identify school readiness assessments and to develop a standardized contract for program providers. Kentucky attached its Early Childhood Advisory Council to the office of the governor and enumerated the council's responsibilities.

*Programs offer  
scholarships to special  
needs students*

Mississippi moved its prekindergarten program from the state Department of Human Resources to the DOE, redefined teacher qualifications for early childhood education and established an application process for awarding funds to early learning collaboratives (between prekindergarten providers and other early childhood programs). It created an advisory council to assist the DOE with the implementation of the collaboratives and to serve as the designated council for early childhood education and care.

South Carolina expanded its Child Development Education Pilot program, which provides full-day services to 4-year-olds in certain low-wealth school districts. Tennessee will permit districts to enroll at-risk children who are 4 years old by August 15 (previously, September 30) in a public prekindergarten program. Bills there also allow a child who participated in a public, private or federally funded prekindergarten program (previously, only public) to enroll in kindergarten the next school year. Georgia increased funding for the prekindergarten program to restore it to a full 180-day calendar.

Mississippi focused on early grades education by moving the compulsory school attendance age back one year to 5 years of age and creating a literacy-based promotion policy to improve the reading skills of students through third grade. Students with reading deficiencies will receive intensive interventions. Beginning in 2014-15, students retained due to a reading deficiency will have a “high-performing” teacher. Virginia legislation expands reading intervention services to students in kindergarten through second grade (previously, available only to third-graders) who demonstrate deficiencies.

### *Choice, charters and virtual education*

Charter schools and other choice options continue to garner a great deal of attention during legislative sessions. Arkansas, Delaware, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas addressed the authorization of charter schools. Arkansas created a panel of DOE employees to review, approve or deny charter applications. Mississippi also created a statewide authorizing board as a state agency with exclusive chartering jurisdiction. A North Carolina advisory board within the Department of Public Instruction will advise the state Board on the adoption of rules governing charter schools, on charter school applications and on the renewal, nonrenewal or revocation of charter contracts. In Texas, responsibility for authorizing, renewing and overseeing start-up charter schools moves from the state Board to the Texas Education Agency. Delaware created a pre-review process to ensure that an application to create a charter school is complete.

Florida legislation implements several accountability and reporting requirements for charter schools but also establishes some flexibility relative to salaries and evaluations. It also calls for the DOE to develop a standard, statewide charter school contract.

Actions in North Carolina and South Carolina address the racial and ethnic composition of charter schools. In North Carolina, new charter schools must make efforts for the school population to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the local district or the specific population it seeks to serve. South Carolina will waive a one-year waiting period for a private school to open as a public charter school if, during the most recent school term, the enrollment at the school reflects the racial composition of the local district in which the school is located.

In other actions, Maryland will study its charter schools. Delaware will permit high-performing charters to receive a 10-year contract renewal (up from five years). It also established a fund, which will provide a maximum of \$5 million annually, with a priority on “high quality plans for start-up or expansion” and charter schools for high-need students. Initial terms for charters in Mississippi will be five years; renewal periods may cover successive five-year terms.

North Carolina legislation expands to all grade levels the requirement that the teachers in core subjects be college graduates. South Carolina charters will give enrollment preference to students who were enrolled in the schools the prior year, and schools may give priority to the children of military personnel stationed at a nearby military facility. Texas increased the cap on start-up charter schools from the current 215 to 305 in 2018-19, and districts may convert low-performing schools to charters.

Legislation in several states allows parental choice in selecting schools. Arkansas requires every district to participate in the state choice program, and the districts must adopt specific standards for accepting and rejecting applications for transfer. Delaware amended its program to mandate standardized program forms for use statewide, clarify how districts may prioritize applications for enrollment, and require districts and charter schools to provide (by November 30) the expected enrollment and enrollment capacity of each school. Both states also require districts to inform parents about choice opportunities. Tennessee districts, beginning in 2014-15, must develop an open enrollment period during which parents may request a transfer for their child to a school in the district with available space. Mississippi will allow children of active members of the military or civilian military personnel who reside on a military base to attend any nearby school district of their parents’ choosing. Oklahoma pushed back the deadline for a parent to file a student transfer application from April 1 to the first Monday in June.

Relating to choice, an individual or a corporation in Alabama may claim a tax credit for contributing to a scholarship-granting organization that provides awards to students attending qualifying public or private schools. North Carolina created opportunity scholarships to help students from lower-income families attend nonpublic schools.

Several states took up issues relating to virtual courses or schools. Arkansas soon will require all public schools to offer, and each high school student to take, at least one digital course for graduation. Florida will expand offerings, including massive open online courses in subjects with statewide standardized assessments. The DOE will develop an online course catalogue and students may take courses from other school districts. Florida and Oklahoma bills include reporting requirements. A bill in South Carolina removed the limit on the number of credits high school students may earn through online instruction.

Oklahoma expanded the authority of the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board (created in 2012 to oversee the creation of a full-time statewide virtual charter school sponsored by the state Board) by making it the sole authorizer and sponsor of statewide virtual charter schools. Tennessee capped initial enrollment in a virtual school at 1,500 students. A school may exceed the enrollment cap upon demonstrating student achievement growth of “at expectations” or above. The state superintendent may reinstitute the cap or direct the district to close the school for low-performance. Texas expanded the list of entities

*Actions expand  
the use of  
virtual courses*

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.

### *Accountability, flexibility and low-performing schools and districts*

Several states acted on rating systems to more clearly identify the performance of schools and districts. Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas (districts only) and Virginia adopted A-to-F rating scales. Oklahoma modified its school rating system. Schools now will be graded on the basis of 50 percent on whole school performance, 25 percent for whole school performance growth and 25 percent for growth in the bottom quartile of students.

Laws also provided flexibility in the operation of school districts. Alabama will permit districts to submit to the DOE a school flexibility contract proposal, as well as an innovation plan requesting a waiver from certain state education policies in return for meeting certain accountability provisions. Arkansas's new district of innovation program will permit a school council (comprised of educators, other school employees, parents, community members and at least two students) to develop a school innovation plan to improve academic performance and learning for all students.

School districts in Oklahoma may submit a request to the state Board for a three-year exemption from specific state laws and policies, along with a plan that outlines a district's future goals. High-performing districts in Tennessee also may receive flexibility in budgeting, utilizing a teacher evaluation system that varies from the state plan, modifying the school calendar and applying for a waiver from state Board rules. Virginia districts may receive waivers from certain state regulations for up to five years by providing a description of how the waivers will result in better instruction and improved student achievement.

States continue to focus on issues relating to low-performing schools. Alabama authorized the state Board to assume direct control over low-performing school systems. 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 to a nonpublic school. Virginia established a special school district to reform underperforming schools. Legislation in Louisiana created a parent trigger to transfer a low-performing school back to its local school district from the Recovery School district (a special school district to reform underperforming schools).

### *At-risk students*

To assist at-risk students, Delaware reduced 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 before 20 days. Maryland requires local boards to develop an active intervention system for truant students.

Students having academic difficulties will receive help in Florida and Virginia. A Florida high school student who scores low on a state reading or English assessment must take an intensive remedial course. Virginia districts must assist middle grades students

who show deficiencies on math assessments. Districts also must provide interventions to middle grades students at risk of failing the Algebra I end-of-course test.

In other actions, Delaware established a Prison Educational Unit in the DOE to provide services to the state Department of Corrections. Texas established 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 and professional development opportunities for new teachers and student teachers. West Virginia will allow “defeated and discouraged learners” to remain enrolled in public schools while enrolled in alternative education programs.

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

### *K-12 and higher education governance*

Bills in Louisiana, Tennessee and Virginia related to school district organization. In Louisiana, a new school district was authorized, but a proposed constitutional amendment that would have authorized funding for the district if approved by voters did not pass. Tennessee lifted the ban on a municipality creating a school district and the requirement that no more than three school districts exist in smaller counties. Virginia required local boards submitting district consolidation proposals to the state Board to give notice to the public and conduct one or more public hearings.

Relative to local school boards, Georgia set out a process for the state Board to utilize when recommending to the governor whether to suspend each of the local board members of a district whose accreditation is at stake. Mississippi’s governor may now 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 board members. Oklahoma’s bill called for instruction on education issues for local board members. District superintendents and school board members in West Virginia who belong to the same regional educational service agency must identify county-level services and functions that they may share.

Florida and Louisiana addressed postsecondary governance. New provisions give the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida the duty of: overseeing the performance of the institutional boards of trustees in complying with and enforcing laws, rules and regulations; and identifying corrective actions the Board of Governors may take. Universities must comply with all informational requests from the Board of Governors. Louisiana merged four Louisiana Technical College campuses with Baton Rouge Community College beginning July 1, 2013.

As a result of renewed focus on career-tech education and workforce programs, several states created or realigned agencies responsible for oversight, coordination and information. Georgia’s new Career and Technical Education Advisory Commission will 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 created 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, as well as the Council for Educational Research to advise these organizations on the data needed by colleges of education for conducting education research. Another bill moved the Office of Career and Technical Education and the Technical Education Personnel Board from the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet to the DOE. Texas transferred responsibility for adult education and literacy programs from the Texas Education Agency to the Texas Workforce Commission.

### *College and career readiness*

Actions in states continue to reflect the importance of ensuring that students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. As part of legislation addressing high school graduation, Arkansas, Florida and Maryland passed provisions relative to intensive remediation or transitional courses for high school students not meeting standards, to boost them to college and career readiness.

Arkansas created the Council on Postsecondary Education and Career Readiness to facilitate the collaboration of elementary, secondary and postsecondary institutions in developing rigorous 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.

Maryland will require schools, beginning in 2015-16, to assess the language arts, literacy and mathematics proficiency of students in grade 11 to determine if they are college- and career-ready. Schools must offer transition courses to students who do not meet readiness standards.

Florida students who entered ninth grade this fall will earn a standard diploma with 24 credits, including four credits each in English and mathematics and three credits each in science and social studies, at least one of which must be taken online. The courses may include applied or career education courses that meet the state standards. New diploma designations include "scholar" for those students who exceed course and testing requirements and "merit" for those who attain one or more industry certifications. Students scoring low on a state reading or English assessment must address deficiencies through intensive remediation.

Texas amended high school graduation requirements to require all students entering ninth grade in fall 2014 to earn a single diploma with endorsements in several areas. The state Board will ensure that at least six advanced career-technology courses are approved to satisfy the additional mathematics courses required. North Carolina legislation establishes, beginning in 2014-15, college- and career-ready endorsements for high school diplomas.

Relative to assessments, Arkansas repealed high-stakes Algebra I and English II end-of-course tests to transition to new assessments designed to determine whether students are college- and career-ready. Oklahoma detailed alternative test scores necessary to demon-

*New high school  
graduation  
requirements aim  
to better prepare  
students*

strate mastery of state academic content standards in certain subject areas and exempts students from taking end-of-course state assessments in certain subject areas. Texas reduced, from 15 to five, the number of end-of-course tests required to earn a high school diploma, and it removed the requirement that an end-of-course test comprise 15 percent of a student's final course grade.

Several states supported acceleration options for students who wish to complete high school early. Delaware created a grant program to help public schools develop accelerated academic programs. Kentucky established an early high school graduation option that will allow students to complete high school in less than four years. Oklahoma will permit students to complete sets of competencies instead of meeting course completion requirements so that they may advance through course work more quickly.

Maryland and Tennessee took up provisions relating to high school equivalency credentials. Maryland repealed its requirement that an individual reside in Maryland for three months before taking the GED test. The Maryland Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning must identify alternative methods for an individual to earn a high school equivalency diploma without passing the GED test. Tennessee authorized the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development to recommend to the state Board high school assessments (other than the GED test) that lead to the award of a high school equivalency credential.

Under a bill in West Virginia, the state Board, the Higher Education Policy Commission and the Council for Community and Technical College Education will create a college- and career-readiness initiative, including establishing readiness standards for English and math. The state Board will develop transitional courses for high school seniors who do not meet the standards. North Carolina will award grants to foster innovation that will lead to more students graduating career- and college-ready. Arkansas authorized the development of the College and Career Coaches Program to prepare middle grades and high school students for postsecondary education or careers.

College and career readiness relative to workforce and career-tech programs garnered attention in 2013 sessions. Several states created pathways that link the various government entities in education and workforce development to better provide services for students. Louisiana created a career pathway between career-technical and industry-based certification programs, and academic degree programs offered by community colleges. Tennessee's community colleges and technical centers will work on labor alignment programs to combine occupational training in a high-skill or high-technology industry with postsecondary academic credit.

Texas schools, colleges and universities may create innovation programs to prepare students for high-demand careers. These programs must either involve dual enrollment courses or competency-based learning leading to college credits, including apprenticeships or training hours. Also, technical and two-year colleges may partner to deliver technical education programs. Virginia created partnerships between high schools and businesses to provide certain types of work opportunities to students who may not seek education after high school. A program in Texas will provide grants to nonprofit workforce and job training organizations to develop, support or expand programs that prepare low-income students for careers in high-demand and significantly higher-earning occupations.

*Actions change  
testing requirements*

To help address future workforce needs, Tennessee will report annually on workforce need projections and credential production. The Texas Education Agency will report on workforce needs and annual wages for Texas' top 10 highest-demand jobs. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission will make five-year projections of workforce needs and of the educational attainment and training of persons expected to enter the workforce.

Alabama may issue up to an additional \$50 million in bonds to fund new career and technical education equipment purchases. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will establish from one to three centers for education research; the centers will conduct research on education and workforce programs and policies in the state.

## *College completion*

States continue to focus on goals to increase the numbers of postsecondary degrees and certificates earned with policies designed to assist students in their efforts to complete their studies. The transfer of credits between institutions and credits required to complete a degree were topics of actions in several states. The Maryland Higher Education Commission must develop a statewide transfer agreement by July 2016. The bill sets the standard number of credit-hours required for a bachelor's degree at 120 hours (except for five-year or professional programs) and for an associate's degree at 60 hours.

Florida specified 36 as the required number of general education credits for an associate's or bachelor's degree. It also created the Office of K-20 Articulation in the DOE to support the work of the Higher Education Coordinating Council and the Articulation Coordinating Committee. North Carolina universities must adhere to the comprehensive articulation agreement with the North Carolina Community College System.

To assist students in completing degrees, Florida expanded a pilot program statewide that provides online bachelor's degree options at state universities. A statewide campaign in Maryland will encourage students who have a certain number of college credits to reenroll and complete their degrees. Four-year institutions in Texas will now have to notify a public community college, state college or technical institute when a transfer student has achieved more than 66 (previously, 90) semester credit-hours so that the appropriate institution can award the student an associate's degree.

South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia joined other states that have laws to assist those in the military by awarding credit for experience or adopting policies for when their service interrupts their educational progression. South Carolina permits a state college or university to award credit to an honorably discharged veteran student for the military training or service of that student. Also, state licensing boards and commissions may 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.

Texas will provide 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. West Virginia's Council for Community and

*Students get  
help with degree  
completion*

Technical College Education and the Higher Education Policy Commission will adopt rules to provide students who are called to military duty with a procedure for withdrawing from classes, completing course work or securing a leave of absence from course attendance.

Florida and Mississippi will implement new performance funding provisions to support college completion. Florida's two postsecondary systems will receive rewards for aligning programs with the state's economic demands. The basis for performance funding for state colleges is instruction that leads to industry certifications. For state universities, performance funding expands to cover high-demand programs and cloud computing and data management programs. Mississippi's newly approved performance funding formula bases (after basic operational expenses are allocated) 90 percent of funds to universities on completed course credit-hours and 10 percent on the progress universities make toward state priorities.

To advance the goal that 55 percent of working-age adults possess at least an associate's degree by 2025, part of a Maryland bill requires each undergraduate student to submit a degree plan by a specified point in time. Each Florida College System institution must implement a developmental education plan by fall 2014 and provide annual accountability reports beginning the following year.

Texas allows school districts 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. Also, the Texas Education Agency 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.

Virginia requires that if 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 or ensure preservation of the records through an agreement with another school.

### *Other K-12 and higher education issues*

Maryland legislation amended a 2012 bill that requires postsecondary institutions that enroll students in a fully online distance learning program to register with the Maryland Higher Education Commission. Now, private career schools, institutions subject to program review by MHEC and institutions that participate in the SREB Electronic Campus are exempt from the requirements. Also, private nonprofit institutions that receive state funds must provide student-level data to the Maryland Longitudinal Data System.

North Carolina and Florida passed instructional materials bills. North Carolina intends to shift funding entirely to digital instructional materials by 2017. Florida will provide school districts with greater flexibility in adopting and purchasing instructional materials, but they still must meet the requirement that by 2015-16, at least 50 percent of the instructional materials they purchase are digital or electronic.

Relating to school and district personnel, South Carolina again delayed (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. Districts also will notify a teacher if he or she will receive a formal evaluation in the upcoming school year. School boards in Virginia may notify principals, assistant principals or supervisors of their reassignment to a teaching position by no later than June 15 (previously, April 15). Also, districts that have a sufficient number of librarians, guidance counselors and school-based clerical personnel may assign these employees according to the area of greatest need, whether the schools are elementary, middle grades or high.

West Virginia requires a local assistant superintendent who has held a teaching or administrative certificate at any point to substitute teach at least three days every school year. Districts will have calendar flexibility — each must provide 180 days of instruction within 48 weeks effective in 2014-15.

Kentucky permits local school districts to raise the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 beginning in 2015-16. Once 55 percent of districts raise the age to 18, it will become statewide policy.

North Carolina, through budget language, lifted all class-size restrictions from grades four through 12.

More detailed information on legislation passed during 2013 sessions is available in SREB's 2013 *Final Legislative Report*. These summaries of SREB states' final legislative actions are available upon request. All SREB reports are available at [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org).

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