



SREB

Legislative Report

Final legislative and budget actions

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

The Alabama Legislature adjourned in early April, having considered legislation on topics including abortion, lobbying, public assistance programs, dual enrollment, adoption, firearm regulations and taxes. The 2014-15 general fund budget, which supports non-education government operations, is up 5.1 percent over the originally approved 2013-14 budget, to \$1.8 billion. This includes funds for House Bill 367, which provides a 4 percent cost-of-living salary increase for state employees, conditioned on the availability of sufficient state general funds, and provides a one-time, lump-sum bonus of \$400. Senate Bill 267 provides a one-time, lump-sum payment to retired state employees; the payment will total \$300 or \$2 per month of service, whichever is greater. These provisions do not apply to teachers or other local school district employees.

The Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget, which supports education and education-related expenses, totals \$5.9 billion in state funds for 2014-15, up 2.9 percent. State funding to universities is up 1.1 percent to just over \$1 billion, while funding for the two-year college system is up 3 percent to \$333.6 million. Changes in tuition and fees for in-state undergraduates at four-year institutions range from a decrease of 0.4 percent to an increase of 6.6 percent; two institutions did not change their rates. Two-year college increases range by institution from 0.8 percent to 7.7 percent.

Funding for the K-12 Foundation Program under the ETF budget totals \$3.8 billion, up 2.3 percent. This includes \$3.4 billion in formula funding to schools, up 2.1 percent, as well as \$315.8 million for student transportation, up 3.8 percent.

State funds for the department of education are down 1 percent to \$185 million; funding for National Board Certification is down 9.6 percent to \$9.4 million. However, funding is up for the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (up 3.6 percent to \$29 million), Advanced Placement (up 13.3 percent to nearly \$4.3 million) and career and technical education (up 44.3 percent to \$3.3 million).

Under current state law, businesses with average monthly sales tax liabilities under \$1,000 are exempted from the collection and remittance of sales taxes. The Legislature approved House Bill 151, the Small Business Tax Relief Act of 2014, to increase the liability amount under which a business is exempt to \$2,500. This is expected to reduce receipts to the Education Trust Fund by \$4.5 million when it takes effect in the 2016-17 fiscal year.

Work force development was a focus of the Legislature this year. As a result, it approved Senate Bill 217, which establishes the Alabama Workforce Council, an appointed group of business and industry executives. The council will advise the state superintendent of education, the chancellor of the community college system, the governor and the Legislature on ways to address the state's work force development needs and streamline the state's current work force development efforts.

In order to increase funding for the community college system's Career-Technical Dual Enrollment Program, House Bill 384 provides a state income tax credit, beginning January 1, 2015, to individuals and businesses who donate cash to the community college system to provide scholarships under the program. Taxpayers who contribute scholarship funds may direct up to 80 percent of their contribution to a specific program or courses, or to a particular community college. Individuals or businesses may claim a credit equal to 50 percent of their contribution in that year; the total amount of tax credits provided in any year may not exceed \$5 million.

As a means to protect school districts from unfunded mandates, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 7. The bill proposes a constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters, would prohibit state laws and executive orders from requiring local school districts to make expenditures in excess of \$50,000 without funding those expenditures. The amendment would not apply, however, to legislation approved by two-thirds of the state House and Senate or to laws or regulations that address the compensation, benefits or due process of local school district employees.

Senate Bill 38 prohibits the state department of education from licensing or regulating private or religious schools offering K-12 education. The bill also applies the same teacher certification requirements for public school teachers to private and religious school teachers. In addition, the bill prohibits public institutions of higher education from denying admission to, or otherwise discriminating against, students due to their attendance at a private or religious school or in a home school environment.

Other legislation

HB 156 requires the state department of education to develop an anaphylaxis preparedness program and requires each school district to implement the program by the 2015-16 school year.

HB 191 clarifies that a student who withdraws from school to enroll in an accredited, state-authorized online school is not classified as a dropout.

HB 472 permits the chancellor of the community college system to appoint an interim president at a community college for any term that the chancellor deems in the best interests of that college.

SB 10 dissolves the Foundation for Local Schools, a nonprofit organization created by the Legislature to accept and invest donations on behalf of public schools, and requires the disbursement of funds held on behalf of local school systems to those schools systems.

SB 57 establishes the Alabama Safe at Schools Act, which requires the state board of education to establish guidelines that will allow school employees to assist in the care of students with diabetes.

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

Meeting in its biennial budget session, the Legislature approved a \$5 billion state-funded budget for 2014-15, up 2.2 percent from the originally approved 2013-14 budget. Funding for K-12 education through the public school fund is up 3.8 percent to over \$2.1 billion. Most of this amount (nearly \$2.1 billion, up 3.9 percent) is state aid to school districts, while \$32.3 million is for career education (level with 2013-14 funding).

Funding to four-year institutions of higher education is down 1.8 percent to \$581.1 million, while two-year college funding is up 0.4 percent to \$111.9 million. Technical college funding is level at \$33.6 million. Tuition and required fees for most in-state undergraduates rose as the fall semester opened. Increases by institution for students at four-year colleges and universities range from 2.8 percent to 6 percent. Students at two-year colleges are seeing increases ranging by institution from 2 percent to 12.6 percent; four colleges did not raise tuition and fees.

The Legislature approved Senate Bill 145, which provides \$5 million for the Open Enrollment Public Charter School Facilities Loan Fund in 2013-14. Any unused funds at the end of the fiscal year rolled over to 2014-15; in addition, Senate Bill 47 provides \$25 million for the loan fund in 2014-15.

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

The General Assembly completed its legislative session with the approval of a \$3.8 billion general fund budget for 2014-15, up 2.5 percent from the original 2013-14 budget. K-12 education funding is up 4.1 percent to nearly \$1.3 billion, including over \$1 billion for school district operations (up 4.4 percent). General funds for block grants and other pass-through programs are up 3 percent to \$86.1 million, and are up 2.8 percent for student transportation to \$87.8 million.

The University of Delaware receives \$115.6 million (down 1.8 percent), Delaware State University receives \$34.6 million (up 0.7 percent) and Delaware Technical and Community College receives \$76.1 million (up 1.2 percent). While funds for scholarships, and grants, and the merit-based SEED scholarship remain level (at \$3.1 million and \$4.6 million, respectively), funds for the merit-based INSPIRE scholarship program at Delaware State University are up 14.2 percent to \$1.6 million. Tuition and required fees at UD will rise by 1.9 percent for in-state undergraduates; students at Delaware State will see no increase and those attending DelTech will pay 4.9 percent more.

Generally, all educators in Delaware are evaluated annually through the Delaware Performance Appraisal System II; however, a school district may apply to the state department of education for a waiver so that the district can implement a locally developed evaluation process. Senate Bill 168 extends to vocational-technical school districts and charter schools the option to utilize a locally developed educator evaluation system, and removes the prohibition against applying locally developed systems to educators holding their initial license. Senate Bill 244 expands the purview of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System II Advisory Committee to include reviewing data regarding the fidelity of implementation of the system, determining whether data are being used fairly for improving educator quality, and reviewing proposed new amendments to the state's Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waiver.

Senate Bill 254 establishes the Committee to Advance Educator Compensation and Careers, which will develop a plan for a new compensation structure and career pathway for teachers in Delaware. The plan must determine base pay levels at each step in the career pathway, provide teachers with opportunities to receive additional pay for assuming leadership roles and responsibilities, and establish senior leadership

positions for the most effective teachers who have previously served in leadership roles. The committee will submit its plan to the governor by November 15, 2014 so that the plan may be considered for inclusion in the governor's 2015-16 budget proposal.

When determining whether to approve or deny a charter school application, state law requires an authorizer to consider potential positive or negative impacts the school might have on the existing schools and community from which the school might draw students. The authorizer also may place conditions on a charter school approval based on those potential impacts. Senate Bill 209 requires the state department of education to establish regulations that more specifically define those impacts as well as the process in which those impacts are considered.

Other legislation

HB 205 requires school districts, beginning in 2016, to schedule an in-service day on the date of a primary election if any school in that district is used as a polling place.

HB 334 removes references to multiple student assessments to provide for the state's transition from the Delaware Comprehensive Student Assessment to the Smarter Balanced Assessment System.

SB 20 establishes the Prison Education Program in the state department of education to provide educational services for the state department of correction.

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

The Legislature approved a total 2014-15 general fund budget of \$27.9 billion, up 4 percent over the originally approved 2013-14 budget. The Legislature approved Senate Bill 5601 to provide three temporary sales tax holidays (for school supplies, hurricane supplies, and energy- and water-efficient products), provide sales tax exemptions, increase certain tax credits and lower several tax rates. The bill is expected to lower general revenue receipts by \$215.5 million in 2014-15, though receipts to certain state trust funds are expected to increase \$144.8 million in 2014-15.

Total 2014-15 education general funds are up 2.3 percent to \$14.5 billion. K-12 education receives \$10.4 billion (up 0.9 percent), including \$7.1 billion (up 0.7 percent) for Florida Education Finance Program formula funding and \$2.8 billion (up 1.4 percent) for class size reduction. General funds for the state department of education are up 18.3 percent to \$88.9 million; almost all of the increased funding is for the Florida Department of Education's Office of Assessment (up 30.6 percent to \$56.9 million). General funds for voluntary prekindergarten are down 2.2 percent to \$396.1 million.

General funds for state and community colleges are down 2.3 percent to \$892.1 million. Universities receive \$2.2 billion (up 8.8 percent), including \$1.7 billion for educational and general activities (up 10.1 percent). Support for private colleges increases 37.4 percent to \$159.9 million. No in-state undergraduate tuition increases were approved for the state university system and with changes in required fees, increases fall below 1 percent with five of 10 institutions showing no increase. At state college system institutions, tuition will not increase; mandatory fees are determined by institutional boards.

Lottery funds for merit-based Bright Futures scholarships decline 14 percent to \$266.2 million, but lottery funds for need-based Florida Student Assistance Grants are up 22.2 percent to \$55.1 million. K-12 finance formula support is up 22.6 percent to \$242.3 million, while class size reduction funding and school recognition grants are level at \$103.8 million and \$134.6 million, respectively. Lottery funds for school district work force

education are up 43.7 percent to \$82.4 million; funds for community colleges are up 24.4 percent to \$255 million; university educational and general activity funding is up 24.2 percent to \$256.5 million.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program provides tax credits to taxpayers who contribute to organizations that provide scholarships for low-income students to attend private K-12 schools. Senate Bill 850 expands student eligibility to receive a scholarship, beginning in 2016-17, to include students whose family income is 185 percent to 260 percent of the federal poverty level (previously, 185 percent and below). While the bill slightly increases the maximum per-student scholarship amount for currently eligible students, the maximum amounts permitted for newly eligible students decline as a student's family income increases. The bill also establishes Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts for students with disabilities, which may be used to pay for instructional materials, curriculum, specialized services or assessments specified in a student's Individualized Education Program, or the costs of enrolling the student in a private school, postsecondary institution or online course of instruction.

Senate Bill 850 also requires each middle school to implement an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out; permits school districts and state and community colleges to establish collegiate high school pathways that allow high school students to earn a full year of college credit; establishes a bonus program for elementary schools and teachers who assist students in attaining new digital skills; requires students with disabilities to begin postsecondary goals and career transition planning prior to turning 14 years of age; creates a good cause exemption to the grade-retention requirement for students not reading at grade level in grade three; and prohibits a school from retaining students in grade three more than once.

Senate Bill 1642 makes several changes to the state's school assessment and accountability system. The bill requires each school to assess at least 95 percent of students for purposes of determining school grades, modifies (beginning in 2014-15) the measures that are used to derive a school's grade, and requires district-level calculations of school-grade measures (also beginning 2014-15). Based on the school and district grades in 2014-15, the state board of education will establish required levels for school and district performance beginning in 2015-16.

Previously, tuition at Florida colleges and universities and for work force education programs was subject to an automatic annual increase based on the rate of inflation if legislators did not include a tuition increase in state appropriations. House Bill 851 eliminates that increase. The bill also eliminates for most institutions the tuition differential that permitted them to raise tuition above legislatively approved increases for a maximum total increase of 15 percent. Now, only preeminent research institutions that meet certain performance requirements may increase tuition above rates set by the Legislature, but the maximum total tuition increase a student may be assessed in a year is limited to 6 percent. The bill also prohibits colleges and universities from denying in-state tuition status to a student solely based on the immigration status of that student's parents, and allows a person to qualify for in-state tuition status if he or she marries an individual who possesses in-state tuition status.

Other legislation

HB 9 establishes the convening date of the 2016 regular session of the Legislature as January 12, 2016.

HB 313 requires a school district board that establishes a gender-specific school to open enrollment in the school to all students in the district; requires personnel at the school to participate in professional development; and provides the state department of education with data on the performance of students at the school compared with other students in the district.

HB 433 allows a candidate for educator certification to demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge by achieving a passing score on a national or international examination that tests comparable content and relevant standards, and allows a school district to assign a newly hired teacher to a school receiving D or F ratings, only if the teacher received an effective or highly effective rating in the previous year and receives high quality mentoring during the first two years of employment with that district.

HB 7029 provides that, for students, simulating a firearm or weapon while playing, wearing clothing or accessories that depict a firearm or weapon, or expressing an opinion regarding Second Amendment rights are not grounds for disciplinary action or criminal referral.

HB 7031, which primarily makes technical corrections and repeals outdated legislation, clarifies the specific credit requirements for high school graduation in English, mathematics, science and social studies, based on the year a student enters grade nine.

SB 188 requires school districts and the state department of education, for purposes of maintaining data on individual students, to use student identification numbers in place of Social Security numbers. It also prohibits any board or agency with control over or that provides services for public schools from collecting information on political affiliation, voting history, religious affiliation or biometric information of a student or that student's parents or siblings.

SB 864 provides that a school district is responsible for the content of all instructional materials used in its classrooms. It allows a parent to challenge a school district's adoption of any particular instructional materials.

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

Prior to adjourning, the Georgia General Assembly passed a state-funded budget totaling \$20.8 billion for 2014-15, an increase of 4.6 percent. This amount includes total general funds of \$18.6 billion, 5.1 percent more than was originally approved for 2013-14. The budget includes funds equivalent to a 1 percent salary adjustment for state employees; however, these funds are for merit-based increases and for recruiting and retaining workers in critical positions.

State funds for elementary and secondary education rise 7.2 percent to more than \$7.9 billion, including \$7.2 billion, up 7.6 percent, for the Quality Basic Education formula. This includes \$314.3 million (to offset a portion of the nearly \$1.1 billion austerity adjustment included in the 2013-14 budget) that is intended to permit local educational authorities the flexibility to eliminate teacher furlough days, increase instructional days, and increase teacher salaries. It also includes over \$1 million for differentiated pay for newly certified math and science teachers.

The University System of Georgia receives more than \$1.9 billion, a 3 percent increase. Funding for the Technical College System of Georgia rises 5.7 percent to \$331.9 million. In-state undergraduates at four-year colleges and universities are paying increases in tuition and required fees ranging from 1.8 percent to 7 percent. Students at the state's technical colleges are paying 4.7 percent more.

The state lottery continues to support prekindergarten programs and the HOPE program. Prekindergarten programs operate with \$314.3 million, an increase of nearly 1 percent. Support for HOPE scholarships at public colleges and universities increases 5.2 percent to \$446.6 million. HOPE grants for technical college students total nearly \$109.1 million, an increase of 12.7 percent. Award amounts rise by 3 percent for qualifying students in both programs. In addition, the General Assembly established the Zell Miller Grant for tech-

nical college students that will provide full tuition for students who maintain a least a 3.5 grade-point average — this mirrors the Zell Miller Scholarship created for college and university students in 2011. The budget also allocates \$10 million to provide technical college students with low-interest loans when they have used all other forms of financial assistance.

House Bill 766 amends the Youth Apprenticeship Act to replace references to the Youth Apprenticeship Program with work-based learning to better reflect the role of employer participation in developing the quality of the work force. Students over 16 years of age may participate in these programs to experience work opportunities that prepare them for future careers. The state board of education will “encourage local school systems to work with their industry partners to develop and provide opportunities for industry experience” in work-based learning programs.

House Bill 405 requires both initial and annual governance training for charter school board members. The bill also requires local school systems to annually provide each high school student his or her grade-point average for HOPE scholarship eligibility as calculated by the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

Senate Bill 288 reinstates the Joint Legislative High School Athletics Overview Committee repealed by the general assembly in 2006. The committee will periodically review the operations of high school athletic associations. The bill prohibits high schools that receive funding through the state’s finance formula from participating in interscholastic events sponsored by, or under the authority of, any athletic association that fails to comply with requirements to publish and release financial reports of its activities.

Other legislation

HR 1186 asks the state board of education and department of education to require high school students to complete, prior to graduation, a “Skills for Success” financial literacy class.

SR 875 creates a joint legislative committee to study the reporting of local tax revenues that impact funds available to local districts, including equalization and the district’s 5 mill share of formula funding.

SR 1201 urges the state board of education to integrate Braille instruction into the classroom.

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

The Kentucky General Assembly adopted a general fund budget for the 2014-16 biennium that provides \$9.7 billion in 2014-15 and \$9.9 billion in 2015-16, increases of 2.6 percent and 1.9 percent respectively. Funding for elementary and secondary education rises 3.7 percent in the first year of the biennium to \$4 billion and another 2.2 percent in the second year of the biennium to nearly \$4.1 billion. These amounts include nearly \$3 billion in 2014-15 for the SEEK finance formula, an increase of 2.5 percent, and just over \$3 billion, 1.3 percent more, in 2015-16. Teachers receive a 1 percent pay raise in the first year and a 2 percent raise in the second.

Extended School Services, which provides struggling learners with additional instructional time and assistance, receives \$19.1 million in the first year of the biennium, an increase of 55.3 percent. In the second year, funding rises another 33.5 percent to \$25.5 million. While funding for preschool programs remains level at \$71.3 million in 2014-15, the \$90.1 million appropriated for 2015-16 is an increase of 26.4 percent. The budget allocates \$8.8 million for professional and staff development in the first year of the biennium and \$11.9 million in the second year, increases of 64.8 percent and 34.8 percent, respectively. The budget also funds a new effort, Advanced Kentucky, to improve participation in rigorous college-level instruction in high

school, especially for traditionally under-represented student populations (\$800,000 in 2014-15 and \$1.2 million in 2015-16).

Total general funds for postsecondary education decline 1.4 percent to less than \$1.2 billion in 2014-15 but will increase 2.9 percent to nearly \$1.2 billion in 2015-16. Community and technical colleges operate with nearly \$190.2 million, a decrease of 0.7 percent, in the first year of the biennium; funding remains level in the second year. Universities will see a decrease of 3.6 percent to \$837.9 million in the first year and a slight increase to \$841.6 million in the second year. Faculty pay raises are determined by institutional boards. The Council on Postsecondary Education set maximum tuition and fee increases for 2014-15 and 2015-16. For comprehensive and research universities, the increases may average a maximum of 4 percent per year, with a 5 percent maximum increase in any one year. For the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, the maximum permitted increase is an average of 2 percent per year.

House Bill 2 establishes the Kentucky Coal County College Completion Program to increase the bachelor degree attainment rate in coal-producing counties where degree attainment rates traditionally are lower than in other areas of the commonwealth. The program includes scholarships for residents of coal-producing counties who attend a postsecondary institution located in a coal-producing county, and is intended to decrease financial barriers for these residents and encourage them to remain in the area. It also provides grants to community colleges located in these counties to improve student support services and other programs necessary to increase student success and degree completion.

Other legislation

HB 75 adds to the list of topics included in the state department of education's superintendents training program, and requires first-time superintendents to complete the program within two years (previously one year) of taking office.

HB 79 authorizes each local district to enroll a refugee or legal alien in high school until the student graduates or until the end of the school year in which the student reaches age 21.

HB 87 requires the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics, in cooperation with the Council on Postsecondary Education and the department of education, to make available information on the employment and earnings of Kentucky's public postsecondary institution graduates.

HB 98 permits diabetic students to self-treat symptoms in school, with parental consent, and outlines training requirements for school personnel who may assist with the administration of diabetes medication.

HB 154 increases training requirements for school board members and requires a school district financial officer to present annual financial reports to the department of education and a monthly financial report to the local board for its approval.

SB 20 designates October as Anti-Bullying Month in the commonwealth.

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

In June, the Legislature completed its 2014 regular legislative session with the approval of a \$16.9 billion state-funded budget for 2014-15, up 3 percent over the original 2013-14 appropriation. State funds for K-12 education total over \$3.8 billion, up 2.4 percent; this includes a 2.7 percent increase in formula funding to schools under the Minimum Foundation Program to \$3.6 billion. Higher education will operate with \$2.6 bil-

lion, a 4.2 percent increase. Two-year colleges raised tuition and required fees, by institution, between 6.6 percent and 12.9 percent; one college did not raise its rates. Four-year college and university tuition and fees increases, by institution, range from 2 percent to 15.1 percent; one university maintained its tuition and fees with no increase.

The Legislature established the Louisiana Public School Choice Act with the approval of Senate Bill 61. Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, parents or legal guardians may enroll their children in the public school of their choice if the school the student's home address is zoned for received a performance grade of D or F in the most recent school year. In addition, the school in which they seek to enroll their children must have received a grade of A, B or C in the most recent school year and have sufficient enrollment capacity. The act specifies that students may not enroll in a school if their enrollment would violate a court order, and that a receiving school is not required to provide transportation to students who reside outside of the district if it would result in additional costs to the school system.

The Course Choice program, established in 2013, provides K-12 students with course options beyond those offered at their local schools. Previously, courses under the program were available at no cost to students at a school that received a performance grade of C, D or F, or to a student at an A or B rated school if their school did not offer the course in question. With the passage of Senate Bill 179, Course Choice options are available at no cost to all students at public elementary and secondary schools, with the approval of the local school district. The legislation also repeals the requirement that participating students must enroll in at least one course at the public school in which they are respectively enrolled.

The Louisiana Scholarship Program provides, for students enrolled in public K-12 schools with performance grades of C, D or F, scholarships to enroll at participating private schools. The Legislature approved Senate Bill 656 to permit any public or private entity, including a nonprofit organization, to make a directed donation to a private school for the purpose of providing a scholarship under the program to a specific student.

House Bill 944 revises the statutes governing career major programs offered to public school students. Under the legislation, public schools are required to offer a career-major program of study recognized by all public colleges and universities in the state. Previously, schools could obtain a good cause waiver from this requirement, and only community and technical colleges were required to recognize the career diploma. Schools are required to align their career-major programs to state and regional work force demands, and to partner with local business, industry, economic development agencies and postsecondary education leaders to review and expand the career-major options the schools provide. Instead of the previously required five-year graduation plan developed by the end of grade eight, career-major students must have a plan that identifies courses required through grade 10, and by the end of grade 10, must have a plan that outlines graduation requirements relevant to students' postsecondary goals.

To support Louisiana's work force development and innovation needs, the Legislature approved House Bill 1033, creating the Workforce and Innovation for a Stronger Economy Fund. The fund, which will receive \$40 million per year (subject to legislative appropriation), is designed to support increased degree and certificate production and research in high-demand fields at public colleges and universities in the state.

House Bill 954 repeals existing legislation governing the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, which provides early childhood education to children who are four years old and from disadvantaged families. The bill establishes a new statute that requires the state department of education to provide the LA 4 program to every child if sufficient funding is available. Program enrollment is open to any student who meets state immunization requirements for school enrollment and who is either age four or will be eligible

to enroll in kindergarten the following year. Previously, students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and who were not likely to be otherwise enrolled in early childhood education received priority for enrollment. LA 4 services will be provided at no cost to students considered at risk by the state board of education. The legislation permits a public school to charge tuition for students who are not considered at risk, though that tuition may not exceed the school's cost of providing the program. Public schools are required to use a portion of the increase in LA 4 funding they receive each year to provide LA 4 classes through collaborative agreements with child day care facilities, Head Start centers or private prekindergarten programs.

Senate Bill 533 establishes a local enrollment coordination process for early childhood education. The bill requires the state board of education, by October 1, 2015, to coordinate the enrollment of eligible children into publically funded early childhood education programs in school systems in which there is no coordinated effort to provide information to families and students. The state board will authorize local entities to serve as early learning enrollment coordinators beginning in the 2015-16 school year. Coordinators will disseminate information about early childhood care and education programs, provide a common application process for families and make recommendations regarding the distribution of public funding for early childhood care and education within their service area.

Other legislation

HB 38 extends the standard retirement age from 60 to 62 years of age for state retirement system participants, including Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana employees. The change applies to individuals employed on or after July 1, 2015.

HB 407 specifies that a school district may not deny admission or readmission to a student who voluntarily withdrew from school, is pregnant, a parent or married.

HB 415 reconvenes the Educator Evaluation Advisory Committee and requires the committee to report on the effectiveness of the state's educator evaluation program.

HB 533 specifies that the value-added assessment model and measures of student growth used to evaluate educators may not include the test scores of any student with 10 or more unexcused absences in a semester.

HB 968, the Louisiana School Dropout Prevention and Recovery Act of 2014, permits a school district or charter school that provides high school instruction to offer a dropout-recovery program for students who have been withdrawn from school for at least 30 days.

HB 988 permits a local school district to implement school curriculum, content and methodology for required subjects in lieu of the curriculum, content and methodology approved or recommended by the state board of education and the state department of education.

HB 1283 requires the state department of education and local education agencies, by January 1, 2015, to make information regarding the transfer of personally identifiable student information available on their websites, including authorized recipients and intended uses of the information.

SB 191 requires the state board of education to equally recognize International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement and dual enrollment courses for purposes of determining school performance scores and grades.

SB 312 establishes the Parents' Bill of Rights for Public Schools, providing parents of public school children the right to examine instructional materials, inspect their child's school records, and be notified if their child is provided medical services or is involved in a criminal or law enforcement action.

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

The Maryland General Assembly concluded its session in early April with the passage of measures to raise the statewide minimum wage, decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana, and increase the penalties for drivers who cause serious traffic accidents while using mobile phones. The overall state general fund budget for 2014-15 totals \$16.1 billion, a 2.3 percent increase. The budget includes \$4.3 million to support implementation of Senate Bill 332, which expands eligibility for the state-supported prekindergarten program to families who earn up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level (previously, 185 percent).

State general fund aid to school districts totals nearly \$5.9 billion, up 1.6 percent. While basic formula funding through the foundation program declines slightly (down 0.5 percent) to less than \$2.7 billion, aid to school districts with larger numbers of economically-disadvantaged students is up 4.7 percent to over \$1.2 billion. State aid to schools also includes funds for teacher and school district employee benefits (up 1.3 percent to \$884.2 million), disabled student education (up 4.1 percent to \$405.3 million), and student transportation (up 0.6 percent to \$258.4 million).

General funds for the Maryland Higher Education Commission are up 4.4 percent to \$463.3 million. This includes \$242.7 million in state aid to community colleges (up 6 percent), \$59.8 million for community college employee benefits (up 3.9 percent), and \$44.4 million to support private institutions of higher education (up 7.6 percent). General funds for state colleges and universities are up 10.5 percent to \$1.3 billion; the funding will limit tuition increases for the 2014-15 academic year to 3 percent.

To address potential challenges in the state's implementation of the Common Core State Standards, the General Assembly approved House Bill 1164, which establishes the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards and PARCC Implementation Review Workgroup. The workgroup will recommend best practices for the implementation of the Common Core and the PARCC assessments, and new curriculum resources needed to support implementation. The workgroup also will assess the technological needs of schools as they implement the standards and assessments and will develop a plan for the transition from the existing high school assessments to the PARCC assessments.

The General Assembly also approved House Bill 1167 and Senate Bill 676, which prohibit school districts from using student growth data on state assessments to make personnel decisions prior to the 2016-17 school year.

In 2011, SREB published *A New Mission for the Middle Grades*. House Bill 265 establishes the Task Force to Study How to Improve Student Achievement in Middle School, which will review the report's findings and recommendations and, if they are feasible and appropriate for implementation in the state, will develop a plan to create a framework to redesign the middle grades in Maryland. The task force also will make recommendations on legislation and policies to address the educational needs of middle grades students.

To support the development of work force skills among students, the General Assembly passed House Bill 811 and Senate Bill 876, which establish the Summer Career Academy Pilot Program. For three summers, beginning in the summer of 2015, up to four school districts may offer the program. Each participating student will receive a summer employment opportunity and a summer career counselor, may receive a stipend of up to \$4,500 and upon completion of the program, may receive either a \$500 grant or a \$2,000 scholarship.

In 2012, the General Assembly approved legislation to regulate any fully online distance education program that enrolls students in Maryland. To reflect advances in technology since passage of the original legislation, Senate Bill 110 clarifies the definition of a fully online distance education program as a program offered by an out-of-state institution where 51 percent or more of the program is offered electronically.

Other legislation

HB 461 codifies the State Early Childhood Advisory Council and requires the council to submit, by December 1, 2015, a statewide strategic report on early childhood education and care.

HB 1001 requires the state department of education to submit any proposed flexibility waiver request under the federal No Child Left Behind Act to the Legislative Policy Committee at least 30 days prior to the submission of that request to the U.S. Department of Education.

HB 1215 and SB 785 rename the Community College Transfer Scholarship Program as the 2+2 Transfer Scholarship Program and modify the program's eligibility criteria.

HB 1366 and SB 503 require all high school students to complete instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation as part of the health or physical education curriculum.

HB 1388 and SB 988 require the state department of education to report to the General Assembly on schools' high-speed Internet connection capabilities by December 1, 2014.

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

The Mississippi Legislature ended its session early, passing a state-funded budget for 2014-15 of nearly \$6.1 billion, up 4.4 percent from the original appropriation for 2013-14. The budget includes \$2.4 billion for elementary and secondary education, an increase of 4.1 percent, most of which will go to schools through the funding formula (more than \$2.1 billion, up 3.5 percent). Funding includes a teacher pay raise (see House Bill 504 below). Universities will operate with \$746.8 million, an increase of 4.6 percent, which includes funding for the agricultural units (\$84.9 million, up 5 percent). Community colleges will see an increase of 4.5 percent, bringing general funds to \$258.1 million.

At colleges and universities across the state, tuition and required fees rose for most students as the 2014 semester began. Students at community colleges are paying increases averaging 4.2 percent. The increases range from 0.8 percent to 13.3 percent with no increase at six of 15 colleges. Tuition and fees at four-year universities rose between 1.4 percent and 5.4 percent with no increase at three of nine institutions.

House Bill 504 provides K-12 teachers with a pay raise of \$1,500 in 2014-15 and of \$1,000 in 2015-16. In addition, it raises the beginning pay for a teacher with a bachelor's degree by \$2,500 and for those with a master's degree by \$2,800. Pay for beginning teachers with a specialist degree and for those with a doctorate degree will rise by nearly \$3,000 and \$3,100, respectively. Employees who meet special certification requirements — such as those from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Board for Certification of School Nurses, National Board of Certified Counselors and others — may qualify for a \$6,000 supplement for only one of the certifications. A new school recognition program will provide rewards to high-performing schools and schools that improve by at least one letter grade beginning in 2016-17. The bill expresses the intent of the Legislature to create, by July 1, 2016, a reward program to recognize high-performing teachers in schools rated C or below on the A to F accountability scale.

House Bill 455 modifies laws governing the New Start School Program under the jurisdiction of the Mississippi Recovery School District, created in 2010 legislation to transform low-performing schools into quality educational options. The bill specifies that a school rated as “failing” for two consecutive years (previously three years) is classified as a New Start School. The local school board may petition the state board of education for an additional year for a “failing” school by submitting a comprehensive improvement plan.

The bill also specifies that when a New Start School achieves an accountability rating of C or better for two consecutive years, it will cease to be a New Start School and the local school board will resume control of the school.

Other provisions in the bill permit the state board of education to suspend or revoke the license of a superintendent or principal serving in a school district at the time the board places the district into conservatorship, and it specifies that a licensed employee of a low-performing district whose employment is terminated for good cause will not have the right to request a hearing on the termination. The bill also voids the requirement that the executive director of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board must be a licensed attorney.

Senate Bill 2572 addresses early and middle grades success in school. The bill requires the department of education to conduct a pilot program in average- or low-performing districts that focuses on using data coaches to improve reading and literacy and on determining the effectiveness of data-focused professional development. It also requires the department of education to adopt a common statewide kindergarten readiness assessment. Beginning in 2016, teacher candidates seeking initial licensure in elementary education must earn a passing score on a “rigorous test of scientifically research-based reading instruction and intervention and data-based decision-making principles.” Finally, the state board of education will implement a middle grades dropout prevention and recovery pilot program in low-performing districts; the program will be designed to re-engage students and increase graduation rates in the state.

Senate Bill 2499 addresses student financial aid. The bill transfers responsibility for administering student aid programs from the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning to the newly expanded Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board, and it establishes uniform terms for the conversion and repayment of all forgivable loans. Relative to teachers, the bill converts the Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship and the Mississippi Dyslexia Education Scholarship into forgivable loan programs, and it creates two new scholarship programs: the Teaching Fellows Program and the Teacher Education Alternate Route Certification Scholars Program. It also establishes a number of forgivable loan programs in the areas of medicine, dentistry, nursing, teaching, speech language pathology, health care professions and family protection under the Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board.

Other legislation

HB 454 exempts the department of education, for a period of two years, from certain State Personnel Board procedures to permit the superintendent and state board of education to reorganize the department.

HB 542 requires the State and School Employees Health Insurance Management Board to research and prepare a report by December 1 of this year on whether to expand the current health insurance coverage for the treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

HB 432 requires that students complete one-half credit in physical education or physical activity for high school graduation and that the curriculum include the administration of cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of automated external defibrillators.

SB 2091 phases out a provision that guaranteed districts the same level of state funding per student in average daily attendance based on 2002 funding levels.

SB 2218 permits, with parental permission, students with asthma or anaphylactic allergies to possess and self-administer prescription medication while on school property or at a school-related event under certain

circumstances. The bill also permits schools to maintain a supply of auto-injectable epinephrine and requires local boards to adopt policies authorizing trained personnel to administer epinephrine in crisis situations.

SB 2423 requires school counselors to spend a minimum of 80 percent of their contractual time in direct service activities to students, parents, school staff and the community as suggested by the American School Counselor Association.

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

The General Assembly approved revisions to the second year of the biennial budget, bringing total general fund expenditures for 2014-15 to nearly \$21.1 billion, a 2.4 percent increase from the originally approved 2013-14 total. Funding for K-12 education through the Department of Public Instruction is up 2.5 percent to nearly \$8.1 billion. Community colleges receive over \$1 billion (up 2.1 percent), while university funding is up 1.9 percent to over \$2.6 billion.

Tuition for community college students rose 0.7 percent to \$72 per credit hour; local fees are set by the colleges. Tuition will not increase at University of North Carolina institutions but required fees will — increases for in-state undergraduates average 1.1 percent and range by institution from 0.8 percent to nearly 4.2 percent. Students at one institution will pay slightly less (0.2 percent) and those at one other will see no increase.

Proviso language in the budget replaces the previous teacher salary schedule with a new schedule that effectively provides teacher salary increases averaging 7 percent; however, those increases vary based on a teacher's level of experience. The budget also removes the average daily membership calculation that has previously been used to automatically adjust state funding for school districts based on enrollment growth. Additionally, the budget establishes a virtual charter school pilot program. The state board of education is required to authorize the establishment of two virtual charter schools that will begin enrolling students in kindergarten through grade 12 beginning with the 2015-16 school year.

Reflecting widespread concern over state educational standards, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 812, which establishes the Academic Standards Review Commission. The commission is required to conduct a comprehensive review of the English and mathematics standards previously adopted by the state board of education and to propose modifications to the standards that will increase student academic achievement and ensure that they are among the highest standards in the nation. The commission will deliver its recommendations prior to the General Assembly's 2016 legislative session.

Under Senate Bill 812, the state board of education is required to report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by July 15, 2015 on the acquisition of new assessments to measure student achievement under the state's current educational standards. The bill specifies that the state board may not purchase the assessments without legislative authorization.

Similar to actions in Florida, South Carolina and Tennessee, the General Assembly moved to safeguard personally-identifiable student data by passing Senate Bill 815. The bill requires the state board of education to develop a detailed security plan for personally-identifiable student information and develop rules that restrict access to that data to certain staff, administrators, researchers and parents. The legislation prohibits the collection of student biometric information as well as information on political affiliation, religion or voting history, and requires local school boards to provide annual notice to parents on their rights with regards to student records as well as opportunities to opt out of providing certain information.

Senate Bill 793 modifies state laws governing charter schools by requiring the state board of education to adopt procedures for a competitive bid process for an entity to assume management of a charter school that has demonstrated inadequate performance and procedures for fast-track replication of high-quality charter schools currently operating in the state. Under the legislation, a charter school that has operated for less than three years may expand its offerings by one grade without approval from the state board of education if it meets certain conditions for academic and financial performance, legal compliance, and compliance with the provisions of its charter contract. The legislation also permits the creation of single-sex charter schools, and clarifies that charter school boards are subject to the state's Public Records Act and Open Meetings Law.

In 2013, the General Assembly established a scholarship grant program for children with disabilities to attend nonpublic schools. House Bill 712 specifies that awards under the program are scholarships (previously, scholarship grants), and that they are provided so that students may receive special education on a daily basis at either a nonpublic school or at a public school in a district outside of the student's home district. In place of the previous eligibility requirement that a student needs an Individualized Education Plan, the bill requires that the student is a child with a disability. The legislation also expands the program to cover reimbursement for educational technology for students with disabilities.

House Bill 230 makes several minor and technical modifications to the North Carolina Read to Achieve Program, which was enacted in 2012 to ensure that all students read at or above grade level by the end of grade three. The bill permits a local school district to charge up to \$825 to parents who choose to enroll their student in the district's summer reading camp if the student already demonstrates reading proficiency appropriate for a child in grade three. The bill also modifies the statewide school performance grading system, applying a less rigorous grading scale from the 2013-14 academic year; this modified scale was extended to all years by proviso language in the state budget, Senate Bill 744.

Other legislation

HB 884 requires the state board of education to establish a two-year dropout prevention and recovery pilot program and to select an established charter school that will deliver the pilot program services.

HB 1060 requires the state board of education to develop a process for local school boards to annually identify military-connected students using the Uniform Education Reporting System.

SB 370 clarifies student rights to engage in religious activities at school and creates an administrative process to remedy complaints regarding student exercise of those rights.

SB 761 requires the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina system and the State Board of Community Colleges to develop a joint plan for a uniform system of granting course credits based on students' military training and experience. The bill also requires the system and the board to study the creation of programs that provide maximum credit for military training and experience toward meeting licensing, certification and credential standards.

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

Oklahoma finished its 2014 legislative session late in May by passing a \$7.1 billion state funded budget, a decrease of 1.4 percent. The budget provides the common education funding area, which includes education-related areas such as the Arts Council, with \$2.5 billion, an increase of 3 percent. Elementary and secondary school funding increases 3.3 percent to nearly \$2.5 billion. The increase provides \$40 million for employee

benefits and a \$40 million increase to the school funding formula. The budget consolidates the Teacher Preparation Commission into the Office of Education Quality and Accountability – total funding for both is nearly \$1.3 million, a reduction of nearly 42 percent. Funding for the School of Science and Mathematics remains level at \$6.3 million.

Support for career and technical education increases 0.5 percent to \$138.9 million due to the transfer of adult education programs from the state department of education. Otherwise, funding remains level. Overall, higher education funding declines slightly to \$1 billion (down 0.1 percent). This amount includes level funding of \$988.5 million for the board of regents, and decreases of 5.5 percent for physician manpower training (to \$4.1 million) and for the Center for Science and Technology (to \$16.8 million). The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education approved tuition and mandatory fee increases for 2014-15. Students at the University of Oklahoma will pay 4.8 percent more, while students at Oklahoma State University will not see an increase. Students at the state's regional universities will see increases averaging 6.4 percent (ranging by institution from 2 percent to 8.3 percent), and community college students will pay an average of 6 percent more (ranging from no increase to 8.1 percent).

The Legislature revised state education standards by approving House Bill 3399, which repeals the Common Core State Standards adopted in 2010 and replaces them with the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) standards that were in place at the time. The bill requires the state board of education to seek certification from the state regents that the PASS standards are sufficient to ensure college and career readiness. Under the legislation, the state board of education, in consultation with the state regents, the state department of commerce and the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, is required to adopt new college- and career-readiness standards prior to the 2016-17 school year, and to develop student assessments for those standards prior to the 2017-18 school year. The legislation requires the state board of education to obtain legislative approval of any new educational standards or revisions to statewide educational standards.

Under Oklahoma's Reading Sufficiency Act, schools generally are required to retain a student in grade three if the student does not demonstrate adequate reading proficiency. House Bill 2497 requires the state department of education to conduct a study on reading instruction and the retention of students in grade three under the act and to issue annual reports beginning in 2015. The reports will include best practices to help students become successful readers as well as recommended legislative changes to the Reading Sufficiency Act. House Bill 2625 authorizes schools for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years to grant probationary promotion to students who do not qualify for automatic grade promotion under the act; such promotions are evaluated by a Student Reading Proficiency Team and receive approval from the school district superintendent. The bill also permits schools to promote students based either on scoring at the limited knowledge level of the statewide third-grade reading test or by demonstrating of proficiency through an alternative screening instrument.

In 2013, the Legislature established a fast-track teacher certification program for special education instructors. House Bill 2683 adds to the requirements for a provisional certificate under the program to specify that a candidate must possess a bachelor's degree. The bill also specifies that a teacher must complete an appropriate teacher education program to receive a standard early childhood education or elementary education certification and may satisfy the highly qualified teacher requirement through successful completion of the early childhood education or elementary education examinations.

The Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship for Students with Disabilities was established in 2010 to provide private school scholarships to students with disabilities who have individualized education programs. House

Bill 2414 specifies that a student who receives SoonerStart early intervention services under an Individual Family Service Plan is exempt from the program eligibility requirement of spending the prior year in attendance at a public school.

Other legislation

HB 1384 establishes the “Parents’ Bill of Rights,” which reserves all parental rights to the parent of a minor child without obstruction or interference from the state, political subdivisions of the state or other governmental entities or institutions. The bill also requires each school district to adopt a policy that promotes the involvement of parents and guardians of children attending schools in the district.

HB 2614 permits an individual to store a licensed handgun in a locked motor vehicle parked on school property if the handgun is hidden from view.

HB 2885 calls for the creation of a paid internship program at each college and university for prospective teachers.

HB 3173 and SB 1828 specify that all Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System records of employees and former employees are confidential and not subject to disclosure under the Oklahoma Open Records Act.

SB 1181 allows for the designation of STEM Communities and STEM Regions for the purposes of creating awareness of and developing and executing action plans for improving STEM education and training in that community or region.

SB 1377 requires the provision of on-site educational services to students requiring in-patient psychiatric treatment beginning on the 11th day following admission.

SB 1469 extends by two years, to June 30, 2016, certain cost-saving exemptions from media program, advisory council and textbook adoption requirements provided to school districts.

SB 1653 adds a science, technology, engineering and math course to the list of courses that satisfy the math requirements under the state high school curriculum.

SB 1830 establishes the Oklahoma Student Veteran Leave of Absence Act of 2014.

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

The Legislature approved a nearly \$6.7 billion general fund budget for 2014-15, up 4.5 percent over the original 2013-14 budget. General funds for K-12 education are up 6.6 percent to over \$2.4 billion, of which \$2.3 billion is direct aid to school districts (up 9.9 percent). Education Improvement Act (EIA) funding, from an earmarked 1 percent sales tax, is up 1.7 percent to \$647.6 million. This funding includes \$56.2 million for the statewide public charter school district, which previously was funded with general funds; this is a total funding increase of 32.4 percent.

General funds for universities are up 2.8 percent to \$345.5 million; general funds for technical and comprehensive education are up 3.2 percent to \$123.7 million. Total combined lottery and general funds for the merit-based LIFE Scholarship are up 12.2 percent to \$189.7 million. Funds for the merit-based HOPE Scholarship are up 8.7 percent to \$8.7 million, and funds for the merit-based Palmetto Fellows scholarship are up 17.5 percent to \$46.1 million.

At four-year colleges and universities, tuition increases will range by institution from 2.4 percent to 4.8 percent, averaging 3.2 percent. Average tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduates at Medical University of South Carolina will decline 6.5 percent. This is due to the addition of a new academic program with fees that are lower than average. Students at two-year colleges will pay 3.1 percent more, while students at the state's technical colleges will see increases averaging nearly 3 percent but ranging by institution from 1.2 percent to 7.2 percent.

Responding to the governor's call for students to become proficient readers before they advance beyond grade three and to improve student outcomes by emphasizing student reading and literacy, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 516, which establishes the South Carolina Read to Succeed Act. The bill requires the state department of education to develop and implement a comprehensive state reading proficiency plan to improve reading achievement in public schools; the plan must be approved by the state board of education by February 1, 2015. Beginning with the 2015-16 school year, each district must prepare a comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan for prekindergarten through grade 12.

The Read to Succeed Act requires the state superintendent to ensure that, beginning in 2014-15, a readiness assessment is administered to every student entering publically funded prekindergarten and kindergarten. School districts must provide intensive reading intervention to any student in prekindergarten through grade three who does not demonstrate proficiency in reading; beginning in 2017-18, a school district must retain students in grade three if they fail to demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of that grade. The bill further requires districts to employ a reading and literacy coach in each elementary school and requires teacher education programs in the state to prioritize literacy instruction.

Senate Bill 516 also establishes the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program, a full-day kindergarten program for at-risk children who are four years old. The program will be delivered through both public and private prekindergarten programs and will focus on reading in accordance with the State Reading Proficiency Plan and each local school district's comprehensive annual reading proficiency plan.

The Legislature addressed state educational standards with the passage of House Bill 3893, which requires the state board of education to replace the state's Common Core State Standards with a new set of standards by the start of the 2015-16 school year. The state board must obtain the consent of the Education Oversight Committee prior to making any changes to state educational standards and must obtain approval from the Legislature prior to implementing any standards not developed by the state department of education. The bill prohibits the state from using Smarter Balanced assessments and requires the department to procure and implement, by the 2014-15 school year, a new assessment system for English and mathematics in grades three through eight. Under the bill, the state also will develop and implement assessments for social studies and science in grades four through eight, and procure and administer a college-readiness assessment to students in grade 11; the state will administer these assessments beginning in 2014-15.

The Education Oversight Committee will develop and recommend a single accountability system that meets federal and state accountability requirements by the fall of 2016. Finally, the bill establishes the South Carolina Department of Education Data Use and Governance Policy, which prohibits the department from collecting individual student data directly from students or families (except for collection requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) or from transferring personally identifiable student data to the U.S. Department of Education. The bill also requires each school district to adopt a student records governance and use policy.

HB 3853 makes several changes to state laws governing charter schools. It requires charter school sponsors to adopt national standards for quality charter schools and to permanently close any charter school that receives the lowest performance rating level for three consecutive years. The bill eliminates the statewide Charter School Advisory Committee, which determined whether charter school applications were in compliance with state requirements and recommended whether to approve or deny charter applications. The bill also permits the establishment of alternative education campuses, which are charter schools that serve students with severe limitations that preclude the appropriate administration of mandated student assessments. At least 50 percent of students enrolled at alternate education campuses have an Individualized Education Program or at least 95 percent of students are defined as high-risk.

Other legislation

HB 3365 establishes the school safety task force, which will make its recommendations to the General Assembly by December 31, 2014.

HB 3410 transfers oversight of the state's Regional Education Centers from the Education and Economic Development Coordinating Council to the state department of commerce.

HB 3438 reauthorizes the South Carolina First Steps to Readiness, which utilizes local partnerships to provide public and private funding for early childhood development and education services.

HB 3905 establishes the Back to Basics in Education Act of 2014, which requires school districts, by the 2015-16 school year, to provide cursive writing instruction and to require students to memorize multiplication tables.

HB 3913 eliminates, beginning with the class of 2015, the requirement that high school students take an exit exam to obtain their high school diplomas.

HB 4840, the High School Equivalency Diploma Accessibility Act, requires the state board of education to select, before January 1, 2015, one or more tests or test batteries eligible candidates (as determined by board regulation) may successfully complete to earn a high school equivalency diploma.

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

The Legislature passed a total state budget of \$32.4 billion (down 2.4 percent) that includes \$14.8 billion in state funds, down 1.9 percent. The state budget includes \$153.2 million in recurring budget reductions and adds \$35.5 million to the Rainy Day Fund. No funding was included for state or education employee salary increases.

The budget provides \$5.9 billion in state funds for education. This includes more than \$4.3 billion for elementary and secondary schools (down 0.1 percent), most of which supports the Basic Education Program funding formula (\$4.1 billion, up 2.4 percent). Part of the overall decrease in K-12 funding is due to the elimination of \$51 million in one-time funds provided in 2013-14 for technology upgrades.

Funding for higher education overall declines slightly to \$1.6 billion. The University of Tennessee System will operate with \$488 million, up 2 percent. The Tennessee Board of Regents system budget decreases 3.5 percent (to nearly \$647 million), in part due to the elimination of one-time funding for equipment purchases. Colleges and universities have set their tuition and mandatory fee increases for the fall. Four-year institutions will raise tuition and fees ranging from 2 percent to 9 percent; two-year colleges will go up 5 percent to 6 percent; and the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology will go up by 8 percent.

House Bill 1549 (Public Chapter 905) prohibits the state from adopting Common Core State Standards in any subject beyond math or English. It also requires the state board of education, if it proposes changes or additions to the state's educational standards or intends to join a testing consortium that requires the adoption of common standards in social studies or science, to provide at least 60 days of notice to the House and Senate education committees and on the board's website. Under the bill, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program tests in English and math will be administered in grades three through 11 for an additional year, in 2014-15. Prior to the 2015-16 school year, the state department of education will contract, through competitive bidding, with one or more entities to provide English and math assessments aligned to state standards.

Finally, the bill establishes the Data Accessibility, Transparency and Accountability Act, which requires the state board of education to establish student data policies and procedures that comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and other relevant privacy laws; restrict the availability, use and transfer of the data; and that guide the development of a security plan for the data. The act restricts what student data schools may gather, establishes parental rights for reviewing their children's student data and requires the state department of education to establish a model student records policy. All local educational agencies must adopt the model policy or another student records policy prior to the start of the 2015-16 school year.

Previously, if a school district denied a charter school application and the applicant appealed to the state board of education, the board could overrule a district and instruct it to approve the charter school with the district as the chartering authority. With the approval of House Bill 702 (Public Chapter 850), if the school district has at least one school on the current or preceding-year list of the lowest-performing schools statewide, and a charter school applicant (seeking either initial approval or renewal) successfully appeals the district's denial to the state board of education, the state board becomes the chartering authority. Under the bill, the academic performance of a charter school approved by the state board in this manner is not attributable to the school district. However, if the state board and local district agree that the district will monitor and oversee the charter school, the school's academic performance is attributable to the school district.

Senate Bill 2285 (Public Chapter 721) specifies that the charter agreement of a startup charter school authorized by a local school board is revoked or automatically denied renewal if the school is identified under the state's accountability system as a priority school. A conversion charter school or school authorized by the achievement school district (a unit of the department of education that oversees underperforming schools) is subject to the same penalties if, beginning in 2015, it is identified as a priority school for two consecutive years. Under the bill, any chartering authority must have in place, prior to the decision to deny renewal of or revoke a charter agreement, a procedure for the closure of a charter school.

With the passage of Senate Bill 2471 (Public Chapter 900), the Legislature established the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, a last dollar scholarship that will enable students who graduate from home schools and Tennessee HOPE-eligible high schools, as well as those who earn a GED, to attend community and technical colleges for free, beginning fall 2015. To receive the scholarship, an eligible student must enroll at an eligible postsecondary institution by the fall semester after he or she obtains a diploma. To continue receiving a scholarship, the student must either maintain satisfactory academic progress (if at a technical college) or maintain a minimum 2.0 grade point average. A student may continue receiving a scholarship until he or she obtains an associate degree or diploma or until two and one-half years after the student initially enrolled at the postsecondary institution.

Lottery funds will support Tennessee Promise Scholarships. Senate Bill 2471 also modifies award amounts for the Tennessee HOPE Scholarship for students who first enroll in college in fall 2015. While HOPE

awards at four-year institutions currently are \$2,000 per semester, award amounts for freshmen and sophomores will decrease to \$1,750 per semester, and award amounts for juniors and seniors will increase to \$2,250 per semester. In addition, per-semester awards for students at two-year institutions will increase from \$1,000 to \$1,500.

Prior to the 2014 legislative session, college and university systems generally were permitted to define their own rules for determining a student's residency status. Senate Bill 2115 (Public Chapter 745) specifies that the boards of trustees of the state's college and university systems may classify a student as a Tennessee resident if the student has resided within the state for at least one year immediately prior to admission and if the student graduated from a public or private high school in the state or earned a Tennessee high school equivalency diploma.

Other legislation

HB 1697 (Public Chapter 781) requires the state board of education to include cursive writing instruction in the state curriculum standards.

HB 1799 (Public Chapter 672) prohibits the commissioner of education from waiving any regulatory or statutory requirement that applies to school districts when those requirements concern educators' due process rights, teacher salary reductions, or employee rights, salaries, benefits or licensure.

HB 2217 (Public Chapter 717) provides that information and records related to school safety and security are not open for public inspection and that school district meetings concerning school security and safety plans are not subject to open meetings laws. The bill also requires each school district to provide the local law enforcement agency with its school security and safety plans.

HB 2264 (Public Chapter 796) prohibits the state board of education from establishing rules, policies or guidelines that require classroom observations to be aligned with Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System statistical estimates.

SB 1602 (Public Chapter 981) restructures how members are appointed to the State Textbook Commission, requires training for those members, and provides greater transparency and public input in the textbook selection process.

SB 1813 (Public Chapter 740) permits a teacher whose last three evaluations demonstrate performance effectiveness rated as significantly above expectations to petition the commissioner of education for a waiver of any requirement for renewal of the teacher's license.

SB 1924 (Public Chapter 968) establishes the Tennessee Community Schools Act, which authorizes and encourages school districts to form consortiums to establish community schools with an integrated focus on academics, social services, youth and community development and community engagement.

SB 2240 (Public Chapter 746) prohibits the state department of education from basing the decision to revoke or deny renewal of the license of a teacher, principal or supervisor upon student growth data.

SB 2362 (Public Chapter 794) requires the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents systems to develop, by fall 2015, transfer pathways for at least 50 undergraduate majors with the highest demand and for which such a pathway is feasible.

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

The Texas Legislature meets every other year to approve a biennial budget and did not have a regularly scheduled legislative session in 2014. In 2013, the Legislature approved a biennial general fund budget for 2014-15, totaling \$101.4 billion and up 16.7 percent from the original 2012-13 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.

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

The Virginia General Assembly finished its 2014 regular session in March without adopting a budget for the 2014-16 biennium. In the subsequent special session, the Legislature passed a budget that provides nearly \$19 billion in general funds for state operations in 2014-15, an increase of 5.4 percent when compared to the original budget for 2013-14. In 2015-16, the budget increases another 0.1 percent.

Elementary and secondary schools will operate with nearly \$6.2 billion in state funds for direct aid for schools in 2014-15, an increase of 3.8 percent. In the second year of the biennium, the more than \$6.2 billion appropriation is an increase of 0.9 percent. This amount includes nearly \$5.6 billion for the Standards of Quality formula in the first year, an increase of 5.5 percent. Funding in the second year will increase another 1.2 percent. Also included are lottery funds of \$525 million (an increase of 13.6 percent) and \$510 million (a decrease of 2.9 percent) in each year of the biennium, respectively. These funds support efforts such as the Virginia Preschool Initiative, early reading intervention, algebra readiness, and assistance for students whose primary language is not English.

The budget provides colleges and universities with \$1.4 billion in 2014-15 for educational and general programs, an increase of 0.4 percent, and funding will remain about the same in 2015-16. Four-year institutions will operate with \$949.3 million in the first year, a slight increase, and two-year colleges will remain funded at \$346.7 million in both years of the biennium. Tuition and mandatory fees increase, on average, by 5.2 percent for in-state undergraduates at four-year institutions and 4.6 percent at community colleges. Tuition and required fees at Richard Bland College, Virginia's only public junior college, will rise 25.8 percent.

In September, Virginia legislators amended the biennial budget to address an anticipated shortfall in funds. To cover the shortfall, legislators appropriated \$705 million from the rainy day fund, made across-the-board reductions of approximately 3 percent (K-12 education is exempt from the cuts) and transferred unspent funds.

The General Assembly passed House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306 limiting to 17 the number of Standards of Learning assessments that may be administered to students in grades three through eight and specifying by grade what assessments those may be. Each school district must certify annually that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment to students in each subject area in which the standard assessment was not administered. The bill also requires the secretary of education to establish the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee. The committee will make recommendations to the state board of education and legislature on the Standards of Learning assessments, student growth measures, ideas for innovative teaching in the classroom, and alignment between the Standards of Learning, assessments and school performance report cards.

Several bills relating to the teaching profession passed during the session. House Bill 725 increases to 21 (from 19) the number of members on the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure by adding

another two members who are teacher preparation program faculty members. House Bill 758 requires each teacher seeking an initial license, with an endorsement in career and technical education, to have an industry certification credential in the appropriate area for which the endorsement is sought. House Bill 977 and Senate Bill 43 extend the period in which a teacher may request a hearing to 10 days (from five days), upon receiving notification of a recommendation of dismissal.

The Legislature also passed several bills addressing health and safety issues in K-12 and higher education. House Bill 134 and Senate Bill 532 require local districts to permit a diabetic student to carry and use supplies to treat high and low glucose levels and to self-check blood glucose levels while on school property, on a school bus and at school-sponsored activities. The bill also requires the department of education to review and update its manual relating to training school employees on diabetes-related issues.

House Bill 410 and Senate Bill 172 require any sports program that uses school property to follow the local district's policies and procedures for identifying and handling suspected concussions in student athletes or develop and use comparable policies and procedures. Another bill, House Bill 1096, requires school personnel to watch for cognitive and academic issues that may relate to an athlete who has suffered a head injury and to accommodate the gradual return of the student to full participation in academic activities.

Relating to health and safety in higher education, House Bill 1268 and Senate Bill 239 require college and university violence prevention committees to establish policies and procedures that require faculty and staff to report threatening behavior that may represent a threat to the community and that address the notification of family members, when appropriate, of these situations.

Other legislation

HB 133 permits a student completing an associate degree to enroll in a four-year institution by the following spring (previously, in the fall) and maintain eligibility for financial assistance under the need-based Two-Year College Transfer Grant Program.

HB 198, HB 752 and SB 441 clarify that districts are not required to expel students for certain weapons or drug offenses.

HB 307 permits school districts to offer after-school hunter safety education for students in grades seven through 12.

HB 467 authorizes the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to enter into reciprocity agreements that permit accredited degree-granting institutions in Virginia to offer postsecondary distance education.

HB 886 requires each local board of education to post on its website an annual notice of the availability of postsecondary education and employment data published by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and requires each college and university to provide on its website a link to the data.

HB 887 requires the board of education to develop a model for establishing a high school with a career and technical education focus as a Governor's Career and Technical Education School.

HB 1086 requires a free and appropriate special education for each disabled student that attends a full-time virtual school program in one district but resides in another district. The bill releases the district where the student resides from responsibility for educating the student and requires it to transfer state and federal funds received on behalf of the student to the district providing the educational program.

HB 1115 permits the department of education to contract with one or more school districts to develop online courses and make them available to other districts and requires the department to establish the Virtual Learning Advisory Committee.

HB 1229 and SB 324 delay for two years (to October 1, 2016) the implementation of the A to F school performance grading system and requires the board of education to develop and report to the legislature by January 1, 2015 a preliminary plan for the development of the grading system.

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

After completing its regular session, the Legislature convened a special session to adopt the 2014-15 state budget. Following the governor's vetoes, the state general fund budget totals more than \$2.4 billion, an increase of 2.5 percent over the budget originally enacted for 2013-14. Postsecondary education funding will decline 2.3 percent to \$414.8 million. This includes \$66 million (down 2.7 percent) for community and technical colleges. The college and university system also will see a decline of 2.7 percent to \$280.1 million. Increases to tuition and required fees for in-state undergraduates at community and technical colleges range by institution from 3 percent to 10 percent and average 6.6 percent. At four-year colleges and universities, increases for most students range from 3 percent to 8.3 percent, though nursing, business and dental hygiene students are seeing increases outside of that range.

The budget provides K-12 education with just over \$2 billion, an increase of less than 1 percent. This amount includes general funds totaling \$1.8 billion for state aid to schools, a slight decrease primarily due to an allocation of \$343.6 million (down from \$370.5 million) for the multi-year effort to reduce the unfunded liability in the retirement system. Separate legislation provides a pay raise for teachers. Senate Bill 391 provides teachers with an across-the-board salary increase of \$1,000 in 2014-15 and expresses the goal that beginning teacher pay reach \$43,000 (from \$31,675) by 2019. Funding for the state board of education's Office of Education Performance Audits will increase 84.3 percent to \$1.7 million and will support increased audits in preparation for the new school grading system.

House Bill 4618 recognizes that strong early learning and early grades education are key to success in school. The bill creates a comprehensive system of support for early literacy aimed at closing the reading achievement gap by third grade and incorporates associated issues such as school readiness, school absenteeism, summer learning loss, the provision of intervention services, extended-day and -year reading programs, and family engagement to create a culture of literacy from birth through third grade. The bill seeks to ensure that all children have access to quality early learning with an emphasis on school readiness and health.

House Bill 4316 requires the state department of education to make publicly available an index of what student data is included in the state data system. It also requires the department to develop a security plan to protect the data and to establish procedures for notifying parents and students of privacy rights and for notifying parents of their ability to opt out of sharing their children's data. In addition, the bill prohibits districts from reporting certain data elements to the state, such as criminal, medical and health records. It also prohibits districts from collecting certain information about students and their families, such as political or religious beliefs, family firearm ownership and other personal information.

House Bill 4619 amends current law relating to school innovation zones and creates a new innovation school district designation. Relative to existing school innovation zones, for which schools and groups of schools may apply, the state board of education will establish a priority for applications that include the

establishment of entrepreneurship education programs — the budget includes \$200,000 for this effort. The new district innovation designation allows county boards of education to apply for an innovation zone status that will permit the district to request exceptions to state statutes and rules. While all boards are eligible to apply for the designation, the state board will approve one district from each of four population categories based on size for an initial period of five years, which the board may extend for two years at the request of the district. A broad-based stakeholder committee in each district that wants to participate will develop an innovation school district plan for local school board approval.

Senate Bill 394 renames the Health Sciences Scholarship Program as the Health Sciences Service Program. It expands award eligibility to students seeking degrees or certification in the fields of dentist, doctoral clinical psychologist, licensed independent social worker, nurse educator, pharmacist and physical therapist. Previously, awards were limited to students seeking degrees or certificates in the fields of nurse practitioner, nurse midwife, physician assistant and other disciplines identified as shortage fields. Award recipients who fail to practice in an underserved area of West Virginia within six months of completing their training, or who fail to complete their training or required teaching, must repay the program award and accrued interest. Any student whose repayment is in arrears will not receive a license, renewal or reciprocity in another state based on licensure in West Virginia.

Other legislation

HB 4003 grants dual jurisdiction, for the purpose of enforcing compulsory attendance policies, to both the county school board in which a student lives and the county board in which he or she attends school, when the districts are not the same.

HB 4196 adds to the duties of the Workforce Investment Council by requiring it to provide information and guidance to local work force investment boards and staff so that they may better educate the populace about careers and higher-paying jobs.

HB 4373 permits the temporary certification of driver education instructors in school districts where a sufficient number of fully certified teachers are not available to provide the number of driver education courses needed.

SB 209 requires each county board of education to adopt a policy that allows a disabled student to participate in a graduation ceremony with his or her classmates, if the parent requests so in writing and if the student's individualized education program provides for a modified diploma. Participation in the ceremony will not negate further services the student is eligible to receive.

SB 461 creates the Future Fund to support education and work force development beginning in 2020. Three percent of severance taxes from coal, limestone, sandstone, natural gas and oil will comprise the revenue to the fund, and only the interest generated by the fund can be used for the specified purposes.

For more information, contact Jeffrey Grove, SREB research associate, at jeffrey.grove@sreb.org; or Gale Gaines, vice president, State Services, at gale.gaines@sreb.org. Both can be reached at (404) 875-9211.