

2012 State of the State Addresses: Governors' Top Education Issues

By Emily Workman

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The leaders of 43 states and the District of Columbia have come before us to lay out plans for improving their states in the coming year. For many, their focus on education was notably prominent and often led the discussion. Governors explained that increasing the quality and availability of education, from preschool through postsecondary, was essential to recovering from the recession, spurring economic growth, remaining competitive, and to the health and wellbeing of each state's citizens. The following brief provides a summary of the top education issues highlighted in the 2012 state of the state addresses. A summary of each address can be found [here](#).

Top priorities for Governors:

- Finance (K-12 & Postsecondary)
- Teaching Quality
 - Evaluations & Effectiveness
 - Tenure
 - Pay-for-Performance
- Postsecondary Affordability/Access
- School Choice
- Workforce Development
- Early Learning (P-3)
- Reading & Literacy

Finance

Following the 2008 economic crisis, state budgets experienced their worst three-year period since the Great Depression. School district budgets across the country took a hit as they lost funding from both state and local sources. As a result, essential programs like those for low-wealth districts, teacher salaries and employee benefits were cut. It is no surprise, then, that following seven consecutive quarters of revenue growth in most states, at least 20 governors have made restoring funding for public K-12 education and universities a top priority.

Highlights: Finance

Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy	Called for a funding increase of \$128 million and asked that it be targeted at the state's lowest performing and poorest districts.
Florida Governor Rick Scott	Recommended a \$1 billion increase in new state funding for education.
Georgia Governor Nathan Deal	Proposed appropriation of an additional \$146.6 million to fully fund enrollment growth in K-12 schools, \$55.8 million to fund salary increases for teachers, and \$3.7 million toward funding for school nurses, nutrition programs and transportation.

Idaho Governor Butch Otter	Called on the legislature to fully fund the cost of enrollment growth going forward for universities, colleges, and community colleges.
Illinois Governor Pat Quinn	Asked the legislature to make an investment to upgrade K-12 classrooms with modern labs, smart technology, digital books, high-speed Internet access and 21st century efficiency.
Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee	Proposed devoting \$40 million in additional education funding to cities and towns.
Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell	Proposed a K-12 funding increase of \$438 million over the next two years to: strengthen the Virginia Retirement System for teachers and school employees; increase dollars going to the classroom; hire more teachers in science, technology and math; improve financial literacy; and strengthen Virginia's diploma requirements.

Teaching Quality

A high-quality education system is dependent on having a highly effective teacher in every classroom. Many state and local leaders have gone to great lengths in trying to ensure they have the best teachers — from overhauling teacher evaluation systems, preparation and professional development programs, tenure and seniority policies, and performance pay. These important issues have remained at the forefront of K-12 education issues, evidenced by their prominence in at least 20 of the state of the state addresses.

"Highly effective teachers in the classroom and principals who are leaders are key to student success."

~ Washington
Governor Chris Gregoire

Highlights: Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness	
Washington Governor Chris Gregoire	Proposed an overhaul to the state's teacher evaluation system that would be focused on high-quality instruction, student achievement and growth. Governor Gregoire also plans to create a system that evaluates principal performance based on student achievement.
West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin	Proposed incorporating student achievement into teacher evaluations and requiring annual evaluations.
South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard	Announced he is rolling out the <i>Investing in Teachers</i> initiative that, among other things, will require that the teacher evaluation system consider student growth in test scores as well as classroom observations of evidence-based factors. Governor Daugaard also plans to invest in training administrators on the new evaluation system.
Delaware Governor Jack Markell	By implementing the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS – II), a statewide educator evaluation system, teachers will be evaluated on their planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, professional responsibilities and student improvement.

Highlights: Tenure/Continuing Contracts

Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy	Proposed tenure reform whereby teachers will be required to earn and re-earn tenure based on student performance, school performance, and parent and peer reviews. In order to retain their tenure status, teachers will need to continue to prove their effectiveness in the classroom throughout their career.
New Jersey Governor Chris Christie	Proposed giving tenure only to teachers with strong evaluations and taking it away from those whose ratings are weak.
South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard	Intends to end the availability of tenure, effective July 1.
Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell	Proposed eliminating continuing contracts for teachers and principals and replacing them with annual contracts.

Highlights: Pay-for-Performance

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant	Recommended compensating teachers based on student attainment and not on subjective evaluations.
New Jersey Governor Chris Christie	Proposed higher pay for teachers who are assigned to a failing school or teach a difficult subject.
Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy	Proposed leaving the decision to local districts on whether teachers should receive financial incentives for consistently receiving high performance ratings.
South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard	Proposed paying every middle and high school math or science teacher a bonus of \$3500 annually beginning in 2013 and rewarding the top 20% best teachers with a bonus of \$5000 annually as of 2014.

Postsecondary Affordability/Access

More than ever, a college education is critical in order to remain competitive in the increasingly global marketplace. Those who leave school with a high school diploma (or below) are severely limited in job prospects, earnings and career progression. Unfortunately, however, tuition expenses continue to increase, leaving postsecondary access out of reach for many students. As a result, at least seven Governors are making college affordability and access a priority for all.

"The American dream becomes more attainable when a college degree is more accessible and affordable."

~ Virginia

Governor Bob McDonnell

Highlights: Postsecondary Affordability/Access

Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber	Recommended expanding the capacity of state universities to accommodate "tens of thousands" of additional graduates.
New York Governor Andrew Cuomo	Plans to expand his NYSUNY2020 Challenge Grants Program to 60 additional universities. The grant winners will, among other things, establish tuition credits and institute fair tuition reform that raise tuition by \$300 annually for five years. In doing so, sudden tuition spikes will be eliminated so that parents and students can better plan for college expenses.

Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell	Asked the legislature to invest \$200 million in new funding for colleges and universities. The Governor also recommended rewarding institutions for increasing the number of degrees, especially in STEM-H fields, improving graduation rates and expanding practical research.
Georgia Governor Nathan Deal	Recommended committing an additional \$20 million to the state's needs-based student loan program.
Alaska Governor Sean Parnell	Proposed investing \$400 million in a fund that will pay for Alaska Performance Scholarships for future generations.
Illinois Governor Pat Quinn	Asked that a significant investment be made in the state MAP scholarship program for this year after noting that last year, the same number of students were denied a scholarships as those that received one.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools but have been freed from some of the rules and regulations that apply to traditional public schools, in exchange for increased accountability. The freedom from bureaucracy has allowed charters to be innovative in their approach to learning. The autonomy granted to charter schools, however, requires that they be held accountable for producing results and concerns have been raised about the degree to which this is being monitored. The state of the state addresses have reflected both the desire to expand the charter school movement by passing new charter school laws or making the approval process easier, and to ensure the schools' performance is properly accounted for. At least 11 governors prioritized discussions on charter schools.

"The way forward is very simple – it is to provide more choices and more opportunities for parents, for families, for children."

~ Louisiana
Governor Bobby Jindal

Highlights: Charter Schools	
Missouri Governor Jay Nixon	Proposed an accountability bill that holds charter schools and their sponsors to high standards of academic achievement and financial integrity.
Ohio Governor John Kasich	Asked the legislature to exercise proper oversight over the state's charter schools and if a school continues to fail, to let parents and teachers have the power to take the school over themselves.
New Jersey Governor Chris Christie	Proposed streamlining the charter school authorizing process for the best performers in order to attract the best operators.
Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell	Proposed to expand charter schools, make the approval process and acquisition of property easier, and to require that a portion of state and local share of Standards of Quality student funding follow the child to a charter school.
Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant	Mississippi does not currently have a charter school law but the governor asked the legislature to pass one and begin creating schools across the state.
South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley	Recommended the expansion of charter schools across the state.

Workforce Development

Too many jobs are going unfilled because businesses are unable to find qualified workers to fill open positions. State leaders recognize that this void is negatively affecting their economy's ability to bounce back from the recession. Many are therefore making it a priority to ensure that their schools are producing students qualified to work in the current labor market and that community and technical colleges are available to provide new or additional training to those who need it. Workforce development was mentioned in at least nine addresses.

"Children who have quality early experiences are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and contribute positively to the economy."
~ Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie

<i>Highlights: Workforce Development</i>	
Washington, D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray	Proposed an overhaul to the city's job training infrastructure so that it equips people with the hard and soft skills necessary to compete for 21 st century jobs.
Georgia Governor Nathan Deal	Launching Go Build, a public-private initiative that will educate young people on the value of learning a trade. The governor is also encouraging community colleges and universities to adapt their programs to meet the needs of local businesses.
Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick	Asked community colleges to become a fully integrated part of the state's workforce development plan. The Governor also proposed to channel more state workforce training dollars through the community colleges, to streamline the funding and governance of community colleges, to increase overall funding by \$10 million, and challenged the business community to match that new funding with an additional \$10 million.
Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant	Asked the state department of education, the community colleges and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security to come together to implement a dual enrollment process to allow students on the verge of dropping out of school to enroll in a community college workforce training program.
Ohio Governor John Kasich	Called for businesses to forecast the jobs they need to fill, for community colleges to educate people for those jobs, and for the creation of a workforce development training plan.
Washington Governor Chris Gregoire	Proposed funding for community and technical colleges to retrain 2,500 workers for the "jobs of tomorrow."

Early Learning (P-3)

A child's success throughout his/her educational career is heavily dependent on the availability and quality of an early childhood program. Without that, children risk entering elementary school already lagging far behind their peers and often struggle to ever catch up. In recognizing that investments in early childhood education can have the greatest return on investment for a state's economy, finding new ways to improve those systems was a central focus for at least 10 governors.

"Investing in our own human capital will pay huge dividends down the road."
~ Washington, D.C.
Mayor Vincent C. Gray

<i>Highlights: Early Learning (P-3)</i>	
Mississippi <i>Governor Phil Bryant</i>	Proposed the development of a Division of Early Childhood Learning under the Department of Human Services to streamline services, monitor the learning opportunities in licensed child care centers and improve the state's ability to identify the quality of programs for early childhood education.
Oregon <i>Governor John Kitzhaber</i>	Recommended streamlining disparate early childhood programs to ensure coordination and accountability, getting programs focused on student outcomes, and measuring program effectiveness. He also emphasized the need to focus on serving more at-risk kids.
Hawaii <i>Governor Neil Abercrombie</i>	Proposed the implementation of an early education plan that will serve as the guide for building a stronger quality early care and education system.
Georgia <i>Governor Nathan Deal</i>	Proposed a funding increase to cover the cost of adding 10 days to the pre-K school year.
Washington <i>Governor Chris Gregoire</i>	Asked the legislature to adopt a bill that creates 'All Start,' a voluntary Washington preschool program that provides early learning opportunities to all 3- and 4-year-olds.
Washington, D.C. <i>Mayor Vincent Gray</i>	Recommended the expansion of access to universal, high-quality infant and toddler care so that children are prepared for the city's universal pre-K program.

Reading/Literacy

Research has shown that children who cannot read by the 3rd grade are likely to struggle throughout their lifetime, and are more likely fail or drop out of school, become socially dependent or enter the criminal justice systems, each severely limiting future prospects. As a result, at least nine state leaders aim to ensure that each child gains this vital skill through literacy campaigns that require early interventions, increased tutoring or retention policies.

"No skill is as fundamental to student achievement as the ability to read."
~ Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker

<i>Highlights: Reading/Literacy</i>	
Wisconsin <i>Governor Scott Walker</i>	Proposed to provide funds for screeners to assess every child entering kindergarten so that teachers know each student's reading level and can create plans to get all reading at grade level, to require child care providers to include a new focus on reading skills and implement a more rigorous licensure exam for elementary education programs.
New Mexico <i>Governor Susana Martinez</i>	Called for a \$17 million investment in reading reforms so that teachers assess reading each year in grades K-3 and provide tutoring for students who are struggling, to increase the number of reading coaches in elementary schools and to provide every child with a book following the completion of kindergarten.
Colorado <i>Governor John Hickenlooper</i>	Proposed the development of intervention strategies with parents and teachers to identify failing students before they reach the 3rd grade.
West Virginia <i>Governor Earl Ray Tomblin</i>	Save the Children is partnering with three elementary schools and their administrators in rural McDowell County in order to focus on literacy.
Virginia <i>Governor Bob McDonnell</i>	Called on the legislature to fund policies to ensure that all young people can read proficiently by 3rd grade.

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