

# STATELINE

## Governors Throw Out First Pitches — Will Legislatures Swing?

BY KATHY CHRISTIE

**E**ARLY in January, governors began to throw out the first pitches of the season as they made their state-of-the-state addresses. Fiscal concerns took top billing in many states. Economic development proposals — many of which are tied closely to education systems — also were high on the list. But interest in such areas as early learning remained prominent as well. Here are some highlights.

*Early learning.* Support for giving kids access to learning in the early years continues to grow. Alabama Gov. Bob Riley proposed investing an additional \$20 million to triple the number of children who benefit from voluntary First Class pre-K, contending that such affordable access will fill a gap that has left working families with too few options. In Georgia, where the first alums of that state's subsidized pre-K program will enter college this fall, Gov. Sonny Perdue has proposed allocating an additional \$6.4 million in lottery funds to bring the total number of slots in the program up to 79,000. New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson wants to add 2,000 pre-K slots to his state's program, and Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine wants to increase the number of slots in his state's program from 13,000 to 20,000. Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius wants to give more Kansas children a successful start in school by funding prenatal care and newborn screening, Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, and high-quality child care. She also wants to fund all-day kindergarten.

*Career and technical.* Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle suggested her state should start Creative Academies, modeled after the successful STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) academies, to focus on animation, digital media, game development, writing and publishing, and all the many talents of Hawaii's *keiki*. Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley proposed that state leaders rededicate themselves to reducing the dropout rate with

better career and technical programs in the high schools in every district where kids want them.

*Economic/work force development.* Connecticut Gov. Jodi Rell proposed \$300,000 for a loan reimbursement program for engineers who work in the state. She would also like to establish a "Green Collar" Jobs program at vocational and technical schools to train students in energy-efficient construction and retrofitting work.

Georgia Gov. Perdue suggested investing \$40 million to help commercialize research coming out of the state's universities in such areas as biosciences and medicine. Iowa Gov. Chet Culver wants to create a \$5-million science, technology, engineering, and math center at the University of Northern Iowa to help double the number of math and science teachers in order to make sure that every high school graduate will be ready for the jobs of the future.

Gov. O'Malley of Maryland wants to develop science, technology, and public education in the state in order to combat climate change, improve conservation and energy efficiency, and make Maryland a leader in the development of renewable energy and green building techniques.

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm wants to reward colleges and universities when their students complete degrees, when they create opportunities for low-income students, and when they find ways to turn research ideas into businesses. Last year, Michigan launched the No Worker Left Behind initiative with the goal of giving 100,000 workers displaced by changes in the economy access to college education and other training to prepare them for specific high-demand jobs.

*Finance.* Several governors are advocating changes to property tax systems. Connecticut Gov. Rell, for example, wants a property tax cap. South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds is requesting major changes to a property tax system that is based on a system of agricultural assessments and appraisals that is no longer workable. Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels' property tax relief proposals include adding a penny to the sales tax as the fairest way to make up the lost revenue.

Health care for employees has been a drain on many state budgets. Rhode Island Gov. Donald Carcieri is proposing something that might interest other states: remove the designation of any specific health-care provider from all local contracts. Doing so, he says, will allow a single, umbrella health-care contract to include all state, municipal, and school employees. Over the life of the contract, he estimates that the savings would be more than \$41 million. In Maine, Gov. Jon Baldacci wants to bring together three of the largest purchasers of health care in the state for a new initiative to save

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taxpayer money and provide better care to consumers. The Maine State Employees Health Commission, the University of Maine System, and the Maine Education Association will join forces to put their enormous buying power to work to lower prescription drug costs.

**Financial aid.** Gov. Baldacci also promoted the recently launched Alford College Challenge. The challenge is scheduled to expand statewide in 2009 so that every child born in Maine will have a \$500 education grant to help start a college savings account.

**Health.** While not directly related to education, health insurance for kids was on the minds of a number of governors this year. Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire wants to cover all children with health insurance by 2010. Iowa Gov. Culver proposed expanding health care to 7,500 additional children. Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle wants to launch BadgerCare Plus to provide health care to every single child in the state at a price that families can afford. In West Virginia, Gov. Joe Manchin has proposed the development of Kids First, a kindergarten health screening program that he says would make his state the first in the nation to ensure that every uninsured child entering kindergarten has had a wellness screening. Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour has proposed funding for screening and treatment programs for dyslexia and other learning disabilities for every first-grader.

**High school.** Within 10 years, Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter wants to reduce by half the existing achievement gap between poor and minority students and more affluent and white students. And he wants to see the dropout rate cut in half by the end of the decade.

Kansas Gov. Sebelius has requested funding for the Kansas Academy of Math and Science — to open in 2009 at Fort Hays State University — to ensure that talented young Kansans have the opportunity to be the next generation of world-class innovators.

Michigan Gov. Granholm seeks to establish a 21st

Century Schools Fund to replace large, impersonal, failing high schools with smaller schools that use firm discipline and strong personal relationships to help students reach high expectations. Freed from red tape and bureaucracy, she says, these schools would be able to deploy the new three R's — rigor, relevance, and relationships — to keep students in high school and then get them to college or technical training.

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt wants to invest \$5 million to create 100 technologically advanced classrooms and to equip 300 classrooms with advanced math and science curriculum. Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland noted that state leaders should stop thinking about high school as an end in itself. Whether through college or technical training, he says, young people must be brought up with the expectation that they need to continue their education beyond high school. He wants to create the Seniors to Sophomores program to give every 12th-grader in the state who meets the academic requirements a choice of spending the senior year in their home high school or spending it on a state university campus. Tuition for the year would be free.

**Teaching quality.** Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota proposed improving teacher training and evaluation and focusing on the areas of most need and highest impact — math and science. He would 1) increase funding for regional math and science academies by 50% — to give teachers enhanced knowledge and skills that improve student performance; and 2) design and deploy a world-leading summer training institute for the state's math and science teachers. His goal is to train 1,000 teachers over the next two summers.

In most states, the lineups and the weather conditions in the 2008 legislative session will determine how many of these ideas come to fruition. Where governors and the majorities of both houses are of the same party, wins will go up. Where fiscal breezes are balmy, things might be even better. Where chilly winds of recession blow, there could be some strikeouts. Batter up! **■**



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