

**Southern Region Report
Submitted by Mike Carr,**

Alabama

Former State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Joseph B. Morton, announced his retirement, effective August 31, 2011. State Board of Education members are searching for his replacement. Meanwhile, Mr. Larry Craven, J.D., our former General Counsel, is serving as the Interim State Superintendent.

Tremendous progress is being made in efforts to convert from GLink, our database held together for too many years with prayer, bandages, etc., to TEACH. Stage One should be fully tested and operational soon, thus streamlining information accessibility and processes. Advanced stages are planned.

In adopting a revised Teacher Education Chapter of the Administrative Code, the State Board of Education established more stringent requirements for individuals seeking participation in alternative approaches to earn a Professional Educator Certificate. Those new requirements are applicable for 2011-2012.

Changes in insurance costs for teachers and their need to make decisions soon may result in a significant number of retirements and, thus, a significant number of teacher vacancies. That fact could reverse the decline in vacancies experienced because of LEA funding cuts. Unfortunately, the insurance cost changes will result in the earlier-than-planned retirement of far too many excellent and experienced teachers and administrators. Teachers and prospective employers are making excellent use of our Teach in Alabama resource.

We are about to begin a more concentrated round of Alabama/NCATE reviews of educator preparation institutions and programs. Of our 27 institutions, 21 are NCATE accredited. Reviews will also include the non-NCATE accredited institutions, of course. We are moving forward to expand testing requirements for prospective educators.

Arkansas

The Department of Education is responding to Act 1178 of 2011, that has created significant changes for teachers licensing by reciprocity, teachers licensing through Non-Traditional Teach for America and Non-Traditional Master of Arts in Teaching programs. This act has also created an additional Non-Traditional route to licensure called the Provisional Professional Teacher Licensure Program that the Department of Education is currently implementing.

The Department of Education is also working through a Licensure Taskforce to review all aspects of licensure and making recommendations for change to the State Board of Education. Their work should be completed by late December.

Teacher Licensure is overhauling (updating and making improvements to) its electronic records management system for licensure. This system should come on line and be fully operational by the end of summer, 2012.

The 2011 Arkansas Legislature passed Act 1045 that codified some operating procedures for the Professional Licensure Standard Board Ethics Subcommittee and set specific timelines for the resolution of complaints. As a result, the Department is in the process of revising its Rules Governing the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators to comply with Act 1045. The Professional Licensure Standards Board also took this opportunity to propose revisions to the remainder of the rule to reflect lessons learned since Code of Ethics enactment in September 2008.

ADE is also forming committees to review the mentoring programs for the teachers and for beginning administrators. The mentoring programs are going to be formatted to the standards

of the new evaluation systems. A new superintendent mentoring program is also being piloted next year.

Florida

There is not much to share since we updated in June which was just after the end of the 2011 legislative session. We are already in the midst of committee meetings for the 2012 session which starts early in January for redistricting for Congress and the state legislature. All indications are the 2012 session will be no different than last CUT<CUT<CUT especially state government budgets, staff, and benefits. Health insurance will likely be the focus in 2012.

All school districts have now complied with Race to the Top and Senate Bill 736 and submitted instructional personnel evaluation systems that base the overall rating on 50% student achievement. The state student growth model was approved by the Commissioner in June. The state education association has filed suit regarding SB 736 challenging the constitutionality of the annual contracts for new hires, performance pay, and evaluation based on student performance. We will wait and see. The corrections officers have successfully challenged privatization of prisons since the whole plan was only included in proviso language in the budget and not in statute.

Georgia

Race to the Top: Georgia continues work on the Race to the Top initiatives, as task-forces and inter-agency committees work with the pilot school districts. Special emphasis is being placed on a new teacher/leader evaluation system, which will be piloted shortly after the start of the new calendar year. Upcoming changes affecting preparation and certification include development of an educator career ladder with a new induction certificate, as well as refocusing professional learning and certificate renewal from pure coursework to performance-based evidence.

Certificate “Upgrade” Implementation: In December, 2010 a new system was put in place regarding educator salary compensation for earning advanced degrees. Under the new rule, to obtain compensation the advanced degrees must be either in a field in which the educator already holds a valid certificate or must result in the addition of a new Georgia certificate. At the same time, the degrees must be from institutions that are either NCATE or TEAC accredited or hold a Carnegie Classification of RU/VH or RU/H. We believe that the higher institutional rigor and degree relevance to the educator’s job will enhance student achievement. Specific implementation details and several web-based support tools continue to be developed to assist Georgia educators.

Creation of New Certificates: Progress continues on three new certificates being created in the fields of Curriculum and Instruction, Information Technology and Teacher Leadership. Rules establishing the standards for the Instructional Technology and Teacher Leadership programs have been approved by the Commission and the rule for Curriculum and Instruction is currently undergoing a 30-day public review and comment period as part of the rule adoption. A number of state institutions are at work designing new degree programs around these program standards.

Ethics Cases: Decisions in the first 11 disciplinary cases resulting from a state-wide investigation of alleged educator cheating on student tests were made at the October Commission meeting. Commissioners voted to impose 2-year certificate suspensions for 8 teachers and revoke the certificates of 3 administrators. The total number of alleged cheating cases is approximately 200 and it is anticipated the Commission will complete initial decisions on all cases in the Feb-Mar 2012 timeframe. The Commission sanctions are subject to appeal.

Kentucky

The Standards Board will continue to discuss its approach to reciprocity at its retreat meeting later this fall. The move in KY back to post-Masters' principal preparation program and the addition of a required Teacher Leadership Masters' degree for all new teachers in the state has precipitated a look at how out-of-state candidates are viewed on an even plane with KY candidates, especially with regard to a beginning principal's credential. Teach For America began operation in a few eastern counties this fall with 19 new teachers, which is the first time for a non-university provider to operate in KY.

The Board has recently approved new regulations strengthening the admission requirements for all candidates to the state's teacher education programs on both the bachelors' and masters' level and to allow IHEs to submit programs to develop World Language teachers by presenting programs that work exclusively with qualified native speakers.

Mississippi

Since the June report, there have not been many additional changes in Mississippi, just the implementation of the initiatives mentioned in that report. Here are the Mississippi updates:

1. Implementation of The Mississippi Educator Code of Ethics and our new mandatory reporting requirement for sexual misconduct and other infractions has created the need to expand our Ethics division at MDE. This year, we will be asking the state legislature for funds to hire additional personnel to deal with disciplinary issues.
2. The 2011 legislative changes to our reciprocity law require applicants to show documentation of how they obtained the state certification and must meet our minimum requirements. This has eliminated the loopholes of MS applicants going to other states to obtain certification and bringing them back to MS.
3. Our Certification Commission has just approved a proposal to raise the current MS cut score on 13 Praxis tests and has made the recommendation to the State Board of Education.
4. MS is piloting our new Teacher Evaluation Instrument in 12 school districts this school year through a TIF grant. The evaluation system will go statewide next year.
5. MDE now has an office and is in the process of securing personnel to oversee the implementation of the Common Core Standards.
6. MDE, like other states, is in the process of submitting applications for the NCLB waiver.

South Carolina

Under the leadership of Dr. Mick Zais, State Superintendent of Education, the South Carolina Department of Education has undergone a reorganization. There are now three divisions in the agency. The former Division of Educator Quality and Leadership is now the Division of School Effectiveness and is still under the leadership of Mark Bounds, Deputy Superintendent. The office formerly known as Educator Certification expanded its scope and became the Office of Educator Certification, Recruitment and Preparation and is under the direction of Dr. Allison Jacques. Jim Turner, the previous director of certification, postponed his retirement plans and agreed to stay with the agency as Coordinator of Professional Practices, the role previously performed by Jack Singletary. Many of the functions of the former office of Educator Preparation, Support and Assessment, have merged with certification.

Tennessee

With a new administration starting in January of 2011 and a new Commissioner beginning in June of 2011, the Tennessee Department of Education is undergoing major changes. The legislature has extended the time before tenure can be awarded to five years, plus a teacher can easily lose tenure if evaluations (with student achievement as a major component) are poor. Furthermore, collective bargaining agreements have been eliminated once the current agreements expire. Thus, seniority is being phased out and strong consideration is underway to move toward paying teachers by performance rather than a schedule based on degrees and experience. Licensure is likely to undergo considerable revision as well. Many of these comprehensive changes are in the planning stages, so the next report may have more substance.