

In Virginia. . .

Virginia's Success in Utilizing Educational Technology...

... to increase student achievement was highlighted in a January 12, 2005 report from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). The report, "Toward a New Golden Age in American Education: How the Internet, the Law and Today's Students are Revolutionizing Expectations," focused on the increasing use of educational technology, technology partnerships between teachers and students, and greater accountability in the nation's public schools. Improved utilization of technology is expected to improve the access of all students, including students with disabilities, to instructional, remedial and testing resources and to improve data collection and analysis needed for oversight of instructional services.

Virginia was praised in the USDOE report for pioneering online testing and improving instruction through the Web-based Standards of Learning (SOL) Technology Initiative. The article noted that, beginning in 2000, Virginia students have taken more than 400,000 SOL tests online, including 47,000 tests taken online during the course of a single day in the spring of 2004. All of the Commonwealth's high schools and 40 percent of Virginia's middle schools now meet the initiative's objectives for educational technology. (Source: VDOE Press Release)

Rebuilding and Downsizing Facilities

... has been proposed by the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) as part of the agency's ongoing restructuring plan. The latest announcement includes the replacement of Amherst County's largest employer, Central Virginia Training Center (CVTC), with a smaller, updated facility, according to an article in the Lynchburg press. A fixture in Amherst County since 1911, CVTC currently has about 560 patients and 1,500 to 1,800 employees. Several of the training facility's 97 buildings on the 350-acre campus need repairs which, according to DMHMRSAS staff, would be less expensive to replace than renovate. The CVTC is the largest of five state facilities serving patients with mental retardation.

The proposal by DMHMRSAS includes a new \$136 million facility. If approved, construction would begin around 2008 or later. Another \$1.5 million would be spent in construction planning costs. If the plan is approved by the General Assembly in 2006, there would be fewer patients and employees at the center. The initiative is consistent with Virginia's Olmstead Report which, to comply with the Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision, recommended closure of the state's facilities and replacing Virginia's long-standing emphasis on institutional care for persons with disabilities with a consumer-driven model of care in which people are served in the communities of their choice.

DOLPHIN System Contains Information...

...On Assisted Living Facilities and Adult Day Care Centers in Virginia. The public Department of Social Services website, <http://www.dss.state.va.us/index.html>, has links that allow users to select information about Assisted Living Facilities and Adult Day Care Centers. The data contains information about who to contact at the facility/provider, the license type, the expiration date, capacity and other critical data about the provider. (Source: DSS Web Site)

In the Nation. . .



IDEA (H.R. 1350) Approved by House with Bipartisan Support...

... on November 17, 2004, and signed into law by President Bush on December 3rd. The new law is based on legislation -- authored by House Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Mike Castle (R-DE)-- that passed the House in 2003 with bipartisan support. After a year of preliminary public forums on the existing IDEA in 2001 and two years of subsequent work in House and Senate committees, the final, compromise bill includes reforms recommended in 2002 by the President's special education commission as well as key elements of the IDEA reauthorization bill passed by the Senate in 2004.

According to a press released issued by the Committee on Education and the Workforce (12/3/2004), the reauthorized IDEA contains provisions that address issues of school safety and discipline; gives local schools more flexibility in implementation; reduces the paperwork burden on teachers; and expands choices and gives parents more control over their children's education. H.R. 1350 will ensure states align their accountability systems for students with disabilities to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a nonprofit advocacy group that seeks to improve working conditions for all special educators and for improved results for children and youth with disabilities and their families, began providing analysis of the IDEA to its constituency groups prior to the bill's final passage. In a report released in November, 2004, entitled, "The New IDEA," CEC expressed concerns about the reauthorized bill in several areas including but not limited to: 1) possible negative unintended consequences regarding enhancements to special educator qualification requirements; 2) lack of "full funding" -- promised for IDEA -- and never fulfilled; 3) need for strengthened advocacy regarding performance indicators relating to dropout rates, graduation rates, maintenance of adequate yearly progress for students with disabilities; 4) need for sustained vigilance by advocates that LEAs do not reduce levels of expenditures if they have action taken against them by the SEA under Section 616 of IDEA; 5) IEP content and IEP Team membership and attendance; and 6) provisions concerning student discipline. The CEC intends to work with advocates and federal representatives during the regulations development phase the new IDEA legislation to iron out some of the problems. (Source; Council for Exceptional Children)



The U.S. Department of Education...

... published a notice on December 29, 2004 in the Federal Register soliciting comments and recommendations for regulations for the new IDEA law. The notice states that all comments and recommendations for regulations need to be sent into the department no later than February 28, 2005. Comments on IDEA regulations can be submitted at www.regulations.gov or emailed to comments@ed.gov. The Department of Education will be holding informal meetings in six cities in early 2005 to gain input from the public on IDEA regulations.



Congressman Strickland Introduces New Legislation Concerning Test Scores and Students with Disabilities...

... in the Comprehensive Learning Assessment for Schools (CLASS) Act which he has proposed to address problems with the testing mandates contained in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Among other changes, the legislation will also allow student scores on retests to count toward data reporting, and allow students with disabilities whose instructional level is at least three years behind grade level to be tested at an appropriate level rather than forcing them to take grade-level assessments. "It's not fair to severely disabled students to insist that they be evaluated using the same grade-level tests as other students," noted Strickland. "My legislation will treat these students with the respect they deserve and allow them to grow and learn at a rate that is appropriate for their abilities." Congressman Strickland also noted, "The No Child Left Behind Act forces unfair and inappropriate decisions about our schools based on a single test score," said Strickland. "My bill will change that."

✚ *Policy Flash is an e-publication of Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council—the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. The publication is funded with federal funds under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 106-402, 2000). The publication is available in alternative format by request. For comments or to be added to the distribution list contact the Board's Director of Policy, Evaluation & Research, Dr. Barbara Ettner at Barbara.Ettner@vbpd.state.va.us.*