

Changes seen in state education systems' use of technology

by Mike Murphy
for Stateline Midwest

In the Midwest, as in the rest of the country, the initial allure of technology-assisted education may be wearing off as tight budgets and a philosophical shift in federal policy are dictating new uses for increasingly scarce technology dollars.

According to a comprehensive report recently published by *Education Week*, the strict tracking requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act are funneling K-12 technology dollars into data collection systems. Meanwhile, with public budgets tight and K-12 resources limited, educators are deciding to return to the basics in the classroom.

"The emphasis has really shifted in the last three or four years," says Michael Griffith, a policy analyst for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Education Commission of the States.

"People are kind of taking a step back and saying, 'Let's realize that technology is an important tool, but it is just a tool.' Schools are targeting their dollars on improving teaching quality and reducing class sizes."

For example, most districts faced with a choice of adding 100 new computers or maintaining a teacher's salary are choosing the latter, he says.

The money left for technology-related funding is now more likely to be used to track student progress and help educators develop strategies to improve achievement in core subject areas.

"Four to five years ago, schools were not thinking of data collecting," Griffith says. "Now,

more money is going toward data collecting, and not just to track achievement, but to track funding and attendance."

He adds these collection systems can be "very big and very expensive."

"The states have a finite budget, and the new responsibilities [in No Child Left Behind] require additional resources that are not coming from the feds," Griffith says.

Tech trends

South Dakota is a recognized national

leader among states in education technology. In the past, its efforts have most often concentrated on improving student access to computers and training teachers on new technology.

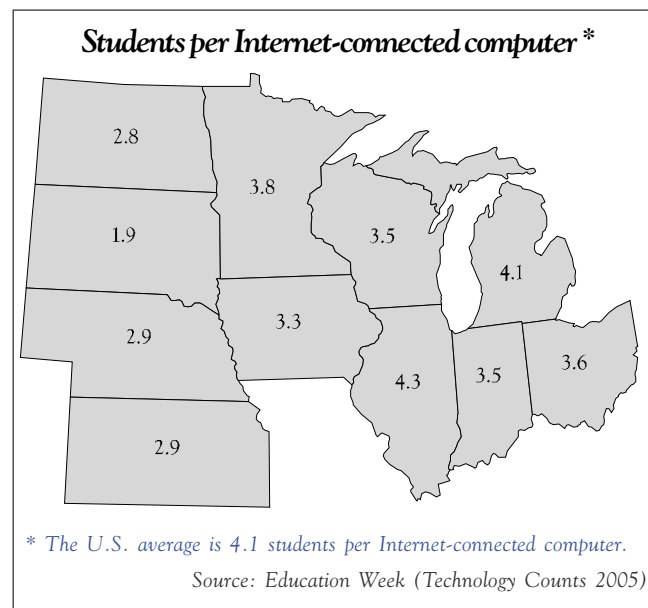
"We have great access now and a 2:1 student-to-computer ratio," South Dakota Department of Education curriculum technology specialist Peg Henson says. "Two-thirds of our teachers have been trained on basic technology usage."

Now, the state is focusing on ways to utilize technology to improve overall instruction and student performance. For example, 43 schools and districts recently were awarded state grants to implement curriculum mapping, which tracks an individual teacher's plan of instruction.

This mapping allows schools to "identify gaps

or redundancies in the curriculum and to adjust their instruction accordingly," says Wade Pogany, the state Department of Education's director of curriculum and instruction.

Despite the new emphasis on core curricula and data collection, as well as current fiscal restraints, Midwestern states have not abandoned some ongoing efforts to incorporate technology into the classroom, as several examples cited by *Education Week* underscore.



Next year, Illinois plans to test the technology skills of eighth-graders who attend schools that have received competitive technology grants from the federal government. Indiana has an ongoing strategy to equip all high schools with a computer for each student in core subject areas by 2009. Meanwhile, Michigan is increasing the number of laptop computers available to sixth-graders, and Wisconsin is subsidizing school links to a statewide telecommunications base. Ohio continues to phase in school districts to its Third Frontier Network, a statewide fiber-optic system designed to connect K-12 schools with the resources of the state's higher education institutions.

More information on the *Education Week* study is available at www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2005/05/05.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

One of the many services provided by the Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments is its Information Help Line, a research service intended to help lawmakers, legislative staff and state officials from across the region. The CSG Midwest staff is always available to respond to members' inquiries or research needs regarding various public policy issues. The Question of the Month section highlights an inquiry received by this office. To request assistance through CSG Midwest's Information Help Line, call 630/810-0210 or use the online form available at www.csamidwest.org

QUESTION: DO ANY MIDWESTERN STATES MANDATE A MINIMUM WAGE HIGHER THAN THE REQUIREMENT SET IN THE U.S. FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT?

ANSWER: Illinois is currently the only Midwestern state that has a minimum wage requirement higher than the federal standard, though Minnesota and Wisconsin will soon be added to the list as the result of actions taken earlier this year.

The Illinois measure was signed into law in 2003 and phased in over two years. On January 1, 2004, the state's rate went from \$5.15 an hour (the same as the federally mandated level) up to \$5.50. At the beginning of this year, the rate increased again to \$6.50. Workers under the age of 18 may be paid 50 cents less. According to the office of Gov. Rod Blagojevich, an estimated 450,000 workers were making \$5.15 an hour before the law was signed.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed a bill last month that will boost the state's minimum wage to \$6.15 for large employers beginning in August. The requirement for small businesses (those whose annual gross volume of sales or business is less than \$625,000) will be \$5.25. Workers under the age of 20 can be paid \$4.90 an hour during their first 90 consecutive days

on the job. Meanwhile, in Wisconsin, lawmakers and Gov. Jim Doyle have worked out a deal that will, through a two-step process, raise the state's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.50 an hour. The agreement also prohibits its local communities from instituting their own wage requirements.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 11 states outside the Midwest have minimum wages above the federal standard. Seven states (none in the Midwest) do not have any wage laws. It is most common for a state to have the same requirement as the federal standard. Midwestern states that fall into this category are Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Kansas (\$2.65 an hour) and Ohio (\$4.25 an hour for larger businesses and \$3.35 and \$2.80 for smaller ones) are the only states in the country that have rates lower than the federal requirement.

Like the U.S. wage and hour law, the Department of Labor says, state statutes often exempt particular occupations or industries. More information is available at www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm.