

## State Funding for Education Technology

By Heather Grinager

*States are preparing students for a technology-driven society.*

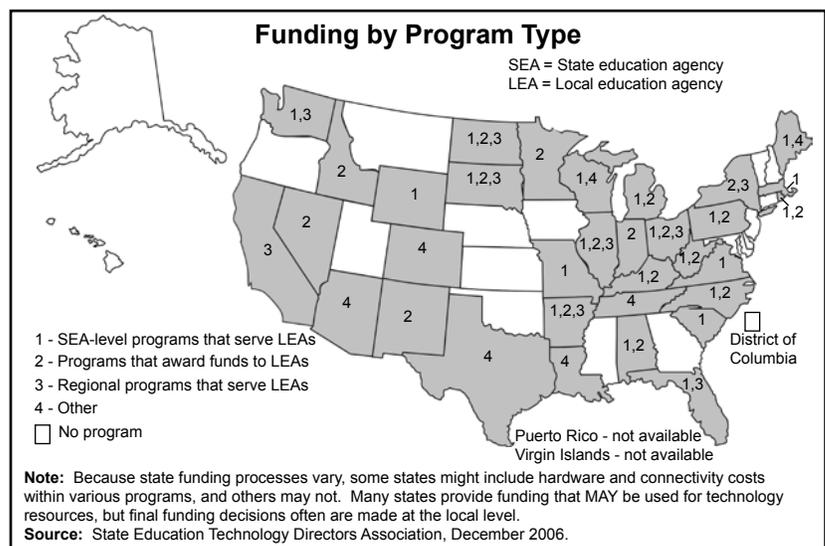
Despite recent attention given to 21st century learning and to ensuring that students have high levels of achievement in science, technology, engineering and math, there still is a wide range of activity from state legislatures in preparing students for a technology-driven society. In addition, federal funding for education technology under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has significantly decreased since 2002, raising questions about who will provide the future funding and vision for technology in education.

The State Education Technology Directors Association (SETDA) produces an annual National Trends report that documents how NCLB education technology money is spent and innovations in the classroom. In 2006, SETDA also collected data on state funding and policies for education technology. All states and the District of Columbia were surveyed, and responses typically were submitted by state education technology directors. A full report on the current condition of state funding for education technology will be released soon.

### State Action

*Twenty-one states support state-level education technology programs.*

**Dedicated and General Funding for Education Technology.** State financial commitments to education technology differ widely. Although 33 states indicate that their state budget includes education technology as a line item, the amount and purpose vary. Twenty-one states reported funding state-level programs that provide support to local districts through virtual high schools, technical assistance, or by providing a state portal for teachers. Eighteen states provide funding to local districts for equipment networking or integration. Nine states fund regional programs that serve local districts, and seven states provide funds for other activities. Eighteen states provide no dedicated funding for education technology.



In addition to funding that is specifically designated for education technology, 31 states report they have other state funding that districts can use to purchase curriculum hardware or software. In 2008, for example, California will provide \$100 million in grants to local districts to purchase library materials, curriculum materials or education technology. Illinois has a School Technology Revolving Loan Program that allows schools to borrow money from the state at low interest rates to support technology infrastructure. Although Maryland does not include education technology as a line item in the state budget, school systems can purchase education technology under the Bridge to Excellence Program after outlining how it will be integrated into curriculum, instruction and high-quality professional development.

*Some states specifically fund district technology purchases.*

**Does Flexibility Dilute Funding?** State requirements for how districts spend education technology funds also differ. In fact, 24 states report that state education technology funds can be—but are not required to be—spent on education technology. Although Maine started the first statewide student laptop program, state rules and legislation allow local officials to decide how state technology funds are spent. North Carolina recommends that 20 percent to 30 percent of state education technology funds be spent on staff development. Texas requires that funds be spent only to 1) purchase electronic textbooks or technological equipment that contributes to student learning, or 2) train teachers in the appropriate use of electronic textbooks and to provide access to technological equipment for instructional use.

*In some states, education technology funds need not be spent on education technology.*

**Virtual and Online Learning.** Twenty-four states provide direct funding for distance, virtual or online programs, although the amounts vary from \$25,000 to more than \$10 million. Funding may cover only the cost of offering state-led classes or may include connections and hardware for local schools to offer virtual courses plus the actual cost of the courses.

**Are Our Students Technologically Literate?** SETDA also collected data on how states define and assess “technology literacy,” since NCLB requires students to be technologically literate by the time they reach eighth grade. Nineteen states have adopted a definition put forth by the International Society for Technology in Education, while 14 states have adopted their own definitions. Nine states allow districts to locally determine the definition, while nine states use a different process. Only eight states currently assess eighth graders at the state level, while four are progressing toward an assessment, and 10 are considering it.

*NCLB requires students to be technologically literate by eighth grade.*

**What This Means for Legislatures.** This new data reveal that states have taken different approaches to funding education technology. Several have deferred to local control and remain relatively uninvolved, others believe their role is to support districts, while others have been leaders in expanding district successes at the state level. With the importance of American competitiveness, coupled with a decrease in federal funding, state legislatures have an opportunity to make a difference by funding education technology.

## Contacts For More Information

Heather Grinager  
NCSL—Denver  
(303) 364-7700, ext. 1392  
heather.grinager@ncsl.org

MaryAnn Wolf  
State Education Technology Directors Association  
(410) 647-6965  
mwolf@setda.org

National Conference of State Legislatures  
STEM site, <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/STEMMain.htm>

State Education Technology Directors Association,  
<http://www.setda.org>