

Gregoire proposes \$197 million math and science blitz

By David Ammons

The Associated Press

OLYMPIA — Gov. Chris Gregoire today urged lawmakers to plow nearly \$200 million into Washington's classrooms to help students who are struggling with math and science.

The governor's sweeping proposal includes smaller middle school and high school math and science classes, recruiting hundreds of new math and science teachers, offering master teachers up to \$10,000 in annual pay bonuses, and expanding tutoring and other help for struggling students. She also wants to beef up local districts' curriculum to "world-class" standards and then design achievement tests accordingly.

The proposal is a major new initiative in the state budget that Democrat Gregoire will send to the Democratic-controlled Legislature next week. The education plan is the first of a series of budget rollouts planned this week across the state.

The cost, \$197 million, would come out of the state's budget reserves in the next two years. The state spends about \$13.8 billion on the kindergarten through 12th grade system every two years. The state has 1 million pupils.

The latest plan is a follow up to her surprise proposal last month to postpone until 2011 a requirement that students pass a high-stakes math test to graduate. Many of this year's juniors have failed the test and risk not graduating on time in 2008 unless lawmakers freeze the math test requirement.

Science is a looming problem, too. Only about 34 percent of last year's 10th graders met the science standard of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, and in 2010, it becomes a graduation requirement unless lawmakers intervene.

Gregoire and state school chief Terry Bergeson, jointly proposing the three-year pause in the math WASL graduation requirement, said last month that the system is failing to properly prepare many students in math and science.

"We already know that our students are not getting the math and science education they deserve and we know that our teachers don't always have the tools to provide that education," the governor said in a written statement.

"The best way to grow our economy and secure a bright future for our students is to make comprehensive, smart, responsible and accountable investments in math and science now.

"With personalized instruction, rigorous coursework, expanded opportunities and consistent support and encouragement, we can fundamentally change Washington education so that students will improve their math and science skills to compete for jobs in the global economy."

Her plan would:

- Reduce class size. The state already is working to reduce elementary school class size via a citizen-approved initiative. Gregoire's new plan would send districts money to hire more middle and high school math and science teachers, with the goal of having one teacher per 25 students. Cost: \$90 million.
- Recruit 750 more math and science teachers, including faculty who are teaching other subjects and didn't major in math and science in college. Additional college and teacher training would be available.
- Offer math and science scholarships to college students who agree to teach in those areas. Cost is \$14 million.
- Pay annual bonuses of \$5,000 to nationally certified teachers who teach in a "challenging" school and another \$5,000 if they teach math or science. Currently, 900 teachers have this extra certification.
- Expand the alternative path to certification for non-teachers in the private sector who are experts in math and science, or paraprofessionals.

The professional development proposals total \$62 million.

- Provide hands-on science learning for 1,000 K-8 classrooms, using the Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform (LASER) program. Cost is \$12 million.
- Provide extra help to students who are struggling with the WASLs. Gregoire proposes \$12 million.
- Standardize math curricula across the state.