

House passes Bush education bill by wide margin

By Greg Toppo
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WASHINGTON — The House overwhelmingly passed President Bush's broad education plan yesterday, which would require millions of students to take annual reading and math tests.

For the first time, the scores could affect how much federal funds schools get and how they spend them.

The 381-to-41 vote (all Bay Area representatives voted in favor) gave Bush a bipartisan victory on what he has said was the top item on his domestic agenda. Senate passage was expected next week, which would allow Bush to sign it before Christmas.

"We can no longer accept the level of failure that we have in the past, and this legislation says that we won't," said Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, who helped write the bill.

The House and Senate spent months refining the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act, which provides most of the financing and overall regulation for K-12 education.

GOP Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, who led the committee that forged a compromise between the House and Senate versions, said it would help fulfill the government's promise of "no more false hope for our children, no more broken promises and no more mixed results."

In addition to the testing, the bill would require schools to come up with plans to close the achievement gap between low-income and middle-class students as well as white and minority students.

States and school districts would get more freedom over how they spend federal dollars. Money intended for teacher improvement, for example, could instead pay for salary increases or additional instructors.

Districts would have to submit annual "report cards" showing a

school's standardized test scores compared with other schools, both locally and statewide.

Schools would have to test students with limited English skills in English after students had spent three consecutive years of school in the United States. Schools would also get a share of Bush's signature reading program, which provides nearly \$1 billion per year for the next five years, in hopes that every student can read by the third grade.

Overall, the bill authorizes \$26.5 billion for elementary and secondary education in the 2002 budget year, which began Oct. 1. That would be about \$8 billion more than the year before — and about \$4 billion more than Bush requested — but nearly \$6 billion less than Senate Democrats wanted. The actual amount could be lowered once Congress makes its annual spending decisions.

The annual state reading and math tests, to be given to all students in grades three through

The \$26.5 billion education plan

Details of the education bill passed by the House:

■ **Financing:** Authorizes \$26.5 billion for the 2002 budget year, which began Oct. 1, for K-12 education. That is about \$8 billion more than the year before. It is \$4 billion above what President Bush requested but nearly \$6 billion below what Senate Democrats wanted.

■ **Mandatory testing:** Requires annual state tests in reading and math for every child in grades three through eight beginning in the 2004-05 school year. Schools whose scores do not improve two years in a row could receive more federal aid. If scores still fail to im-

prove, low-income students can receive money for tutoring or transportation to another public school.

■ **Proficiency levels:** Requires schools to raise all students to reading and math proficiency in the next 12 years. Schools also must close gaps in scores between wealthy and poor students and white and minority students.

■ **Tutoring:** Allows churches or other religious groups to provide tutoring and after-school programs.

■ **Charter schools:** Provides aid to build new charter schools and help existing ones.

■ **English proficiency:** Requires schools to test students with limited English skills to ensure that they are proficient in English after three consecutive years of attending school in the United States.

■ **Boy Scout discrimination:** Takes away federal funds from any district that discriminates against the Boy Scouts or similar groups that bar homosexuals.

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eight, would gauge the effectiveness of schools, especially those serving poor students. Those with persistently low scores would have to give some of their federal aid to students for tutoring or transportation to another public

school. More aid would flow to schools where scores do not improve for two years in a row. If scores do not rise afterward, a school's staff could be changed.

Some lawmakers wondered how much help low-income stu-

dents would get. "It is a giant step forward, but we are still far away from making sure poor children do not end up with a poor quality instructor and poor quality teaching materials," said Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa.