In early May TEA received word that there were school systems telling their employees to expect a 5% increase in their premiums for those in the state plan, in which almost 90% of school systems participate. TEA immediately began researching and conferring with the staff that administer the state plan. It was confirmed that there was guidance going out to school systems to expect up to a 5% increase in premiums.

"Local budgets are devastated as a result of the pandemic, so we know these costs are very likely going to be passed on to educators," said TEA President Beth Brown. "This comes at a time when their own family budgets have been damaged by loss of summer jobs or perhaps a spouse who lost employment."

The state cannot unilaterally raise rates, though. There is a local education insurance committee that TEA pushes back on 5% increase in insurance premiums.

The $260 million in federal CARES Act K-12 aid is essential to get Tennessee public schools up and running this fall and will be distributed by Title I student enrollment. But guidance from U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has the Lee Administration ready to siphon millions for private schools. It is something TEA and local school districts will fight, and the General Assembly is poised to weigh in against.

Under federal law districts make a share of Title I funds available for low-income students attending private schools for services—not tuition, which is prohibited. DeVos has stretched the interpretation to say CARES Act emergency relief dollars should be distributed by all students attending private schools, not just students who qualify for Title I funding.

If followed, the guidance will shift millions in CARES Act relief from low-income public school students to wealthier private school students. "Our

Voucher law taking a beating in state courts

TEA said it violated the state constitution, now courts hit pause on program. The "constitutional blocks" TEA was successful in adding to Gov. Bill Lee’s voucher law have begun to pay off.

A state court ruled the voucher law violates the state constitution because it only affects Nashville and Shelby County, violating the "home rule" provision that a law must be general in application.

Needed federal school aid threatened by DeVos, second round stalled in Senate

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TEA pushes back on 5% insurance premium increase

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There is no adequate substitute for classroom instruction

By TEA President Beth Brown

I gave up long ago believing a book can be properly adapted into a movie. With the exception of *The Ultimate Gift* by Jim Stovall, I can’t think of a single book-to-movie adaptation that hasn’t left me disappointed. You simply cannot capture in a two-hour movie the depth of character experienced when reading a book.

Students, educators and parents are having a similarly disappointing experience with the classroom-to-virtual learning adaptation caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

There is simply no replacement for in-person instruction from a trained teacher. While educators across Tennessee spent the final quarter of the school year using creative ways to stay connected to students and continue teaching online, we did this because a global pandemic required it, not because distance learning is the most effective way to teach our students.

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It requires skill and expertise to be an effective teacher. It also requires face-to-face instruction to address our students. As elected leaders at the local, state and national levels make difficult budget decisions, safely reopening our public schools and getting our students back in the classroom for the 2020-2021 school year must be a top priority.

The classroom-to-virtual learning adaptation got us through in a pinch, but there is no *The Ultimate Gift* potential here. Virtual learning is not a sustainable long-term model for providing the quality, well-rounded education our students need and deserve.

I have spent much of the past two years asking you to fight with me for the funding our schools deserve. While things look very different now and we didn’t get to Rally for Our Schools back in March, the fight is not over. Now more than ever our students and public schools need us to stand together to fund the needs we get our kids safely back in the classroom.

There are those who want to use this pandemic to erode our strong public schools and promote virtual learning. Tennessee already conducted that experiment with K12, Inc., which proved to be one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Our kids don’t need further experimentation when it comes to their education. We know what works, and that is in-person instruction from a trained educator.

We have tens of thousands of educators in Tennessee. We are a force to be reckoned with when we stand together to fight for the students and profession we love.

Our students, families and educators are counting on local, state and federal officials to provide the funding needed to safely reopen public schools. It is up to us to pressure those elected officials to do the right thing and prioritize public education and the one million students Tennessee’s public schools serve.

Amid so much uncertainty, you can count on TEA

By TEA Interim Executive Director Terrance J. Gibson

While in-person instruction abruptly ended weeks ago, the 2019-2020 school year has officially come to an end in most districts across the state. I think whether we admit it to ourselves or not, we are all struggling to regain a sense of stability and normalcy amid so much uncertainty.

Here at TEA, we’ve had some big changes, too. Executive Director Carolyn Crowder retired in early April, and I was appointed by the TEA Board of Directors to serve as interim executive director. I may be new to this role and to this column, but I have been Team TEA for more than 20 years. I have spent essentially my entire life in or around Tennessee public schools. I am a proud product of what was then Memphis City Schools. I went on to earn my higher education degrees at Tennessee State University and Middle Tennessee State University, where I first got involved with the association as a Student TEA member.

As a former STEA leader and brand new classroom teacher in Metro Nashville, I quickly understood the value of not just being a member of TEA, but of getting actively involved in my local association. Just as our strong schools are the foundation of the communities they serve, strong local associations are the foundation of TEA and NEA.

It is an honor to fill this interim executive director role and continue the important work of the association. TEA has been around for 150-plus years fighting for public education and protecting the rights of Tennessee’s educators. I can assure you a global pandemic and change in leadership hasn’t changed that.

As educators, students and parents eagerly await word on what the new school year will look like in the fall, I want to remind you that your association is here to be the calm in the storm. TEA and local leaders are working diligently all across the state to ensure educators have a voice in the important decisions being made and that the rights of educators are protected as districts determine how to safely reopen schools in the fall.

TEA’s commitment to our members, Tennessee students and public schools is steadfast. I hope you can find comfort in knowing that even though we cannot see you face-to-face right now, Team TEA is working for you every day. TEA staff are hard at work in every corner of the state (and working from every corner of their homes) to stay connected to members and provide reliable updates and answers to member questions.

Just as communities have relied on you in various ways to support students during these times, you can count on TEA.
When the coronavirus pandemic reached Tennessee, TEA was at the forefront of the effort to close school buildings across the state and insisted on keeping them closed until the safety of students and educators could be guaranteed. TEA also led the successful push for a suspension of state testing and held harmless legislation for our students, teachers and schools.

When reports began circulating that some districts were requiring staff to return to school buildings, TEA staff were quick to respond and advocate for the health and safety of all school employees. TEAS COVID-19 resource page and frequently asked questions related to school closures became the most popular and timely information resource for Tennessee educators as the association continued to update members with analysis of the rapidly changing situation in school districts throughout the state.

TEA shared information, promoted online professional development for educators, advocated to keep our schools fully funded, and blocked numerous threats to our state’s public education system.

TEA members statewide have gone above and beyond to support their students and communities.

As soon as the Lee Administration announced plans to delay an increase in the State Minimum Salary Schedule for teachers in the 2020-2021 school year, citing financial concerns for local governments caused by the pandemic, TEA was the loudest and strongest critic of the governor’s decision.

“Lee had proposed a $2,000 schedule increase impacting approximately one in 10 Tennessee teachers, and backing away from it is unacceptable when so many Tennessee families already face incredible financial strain,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “As the governor pushes a voucher law that was found unconstitutional—and that took money appropriated for teacher compensation to pay a multi-million dollar no-bid voucher contract—he is retreating from the commitment he made to Tennessee’s lowest-paid teachers.”

TEA leaders and staff have produced numerous videos to keep members informed and up-to-date during the pandemic.

TEA leaders and staff have produced numerous videos to keep members informed and up-to-date during the pandemic. TEA members and public ed advocates received a call-to-action from TEA to lobby federal leaders to support our public schools.

“The coronavirus pandemic should not be used as an excuse to advance bad ideas repeatedly rejected by Congress and Tennessee voters that would weaken public education,” Brown said in a statement to media.

TEA continues to be the leader in promoting the need for more federal education funding to support local budgets that are in crisis. A TEA call-to-action reached hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans as an ask to contact legislators in Washington to ensure the funding is there when schools reopen.

Another example of TEA advocacy during the pandemic was urging the State Department of Education to reconstitute its survey on school closures and the hundreds of TEA members and parents took issue with it, pointing out loaded and leading questions which were then removed and the survey revised. TEA completed its own survey of educators, which was shared with the department.

“A global pandemic has not and will not shake TEAs’ focus on preserving a strong system of public schools for Tennessee children,” Brown said. “As we look ahead to the 2020-2021 school year, our advocacy continues at the local, state and federal levels.”
The future of public education and our profession depend on a STRONG TEA.

TEA’s Funding Fight:

- Keep students and educators safe with small class sizes, social distancing and a nurse in every school.
- Prevent layoffs and reductions in positions.
- Protect related arts programs.
- Ensure Gov. Lee’s 2% teacher raise shows up in every paycheck.

FACT: TENNESSEE GETS MORE FOR EVERY K-12 DOLLAR

Where TN is for national ranking

Investment per student: 4th
On-time graduation: 3rd
Minority on-time graduation: 5th
Average ACT score: 11th
Funding by ACT states: 17th of states requiring all students to take ACT

Join the #TN2020Vision

JOIN

TEAteachers.org/JOIN
Virtual action is needed now!

**FEDERAL:** Urge your congressperson to prioritize funding to stabilize our state and local public education budgets in the next round of COVID-19 legislation.

**STATE:** Tell your state legislators to defund the unconstitutional voucher program and increase the state’s per-student investment.

**LOCAL:** Work with your local school board and funding body to ensure public education is prioritized during difficult budgeting decisions.

Budget shortfalls must not be balanced on the backs of Tennessee’s hardworking students and educators!

/Fight! /#RedforEd /TennesseeEA /@TEA_teachers /TEA_teachers
While so much came to an abrupt halt due to the coronavirus pandemic, local associations did not allow things to grind to a halt in the way of continuing collaborative conferencing. In Williamson County, WCMEA’s PECCA team and the school board had essentially come to an agreement on the MOU at an urgent meeting, with a final vote by the school board when a Williamson County parent became the first ever county member to vote via Zoom.

Due to the ensuing school closure and dramatic budget changes, the final MOU presented virtually to the school board last week did not include the original 3% increase for the 2019-2020 school year and a two percent increase for the 2021-2022 school year.

“We are fortunate to have a strong relationship with our Director of Schools and the members of our school board,” said WCMEA PECCAP president Laura Kinser. “We were able to work quickly and collaboratively to tweak the MOU and not lose our months of hard work.”

Throughout recent weeks, WCMEA has held informational calls with distribution reps and communicated regularly with members via email.

“We are coming out of this pandemic stronger than ever and have signed up new members every day,” Kinser said. “Our ability to work in partnership with district leaders and serve as a reliable source of information during this time has demonstrated to potential members the value of membership.”

Another was change the state’s prescription model to a plan more restrictive that would remove 159 drugs from the “prescribed list.” Many of the drugs are related to diabetes care, but there will be generics and other options available. The only other change was to suspend the restrictions on plan document changes for Middle Tennessee Hamilton County plan members members who have the Cigna Local Plus plan, as the Tristar hospital network is leaving that plan. Members will be able to move out of that plan into another if they are affected by the change.

“Any increase is unfortunate, and two, while far better than five, is still going to create hardships for educators and their families. We will continue to fight moving forward to ensure members maintain access to high-quality, affordable benefits,” said Brown.

Another state plan should prioritize providing a quality public education for every child in Tennessee, instead of following the lead of the Secretary of Education who has repeatedly prioritized corporate profits over students’ education,” said TEA President Lisa Ellis. The amount allocated to the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund for Tennessee is $63.6 million to provide emergency support through grants to school districts, so the current demands to have been most significantly impacted by coronavirus.

This federal aid will provide principals and other school leaders with the necessary resources to address the needs of their individual schools. It will also support other activities that are necessary to maintain the operation of local educational agencies, and most staff of the local educational agency.

On the heels of the CARES Act, the U.S. House passed the HEROES Act, a $3 trillion relief package. It contained more than $1 billion in education stabilization funds, most of which would go directly to backfill shortfalls for public school systems. The chief component of this legislation was $915 billion for state and local governments to pay essential personnel, of which $63.6 million to provide emergency support through grants to school districts.

Concrete proposals in the HEROES Act could help school districts avoid cuts to teacher and support staff positions.

Governor Bill Lee announced a $41 million package for Tennesseans, including $116 million to0 help with health care and $10 million to help students with the new school year.

“The impact of the pandemic is going to have a long-term effect on the health and economic wellbeing of Tennesseans,” Lee said. “We will continue to fight to keep state dollars.”

As districts work to balance budgets, TEA steps in to protect educator benefits as districts work to balance budgets

TEA steps in to protect educator benefits as districts work to balance budgets

Member advocacy needed to ensure federal aid reaches public schools that need it most

Federal aid from page 1

Funding fights continue against unconstitutional voucher law

Voucher lawsuit from page 1

With the court ruling the ESA voucher plan unconstitutional, the common sense next step is for the Lee Administration and the General Assembly to remove funding for any supplemental program. The Lee Administration gave a total of $41 million to the program, money that should go to safely reopening our public schools.

The court ruling stopped the state’s voucher plan. The state appealed the court’s injunction at the local and appellate level, and their motions were denied quickly each time.

It has been fun to watch voucher advocates trot out the same tired falsehood in a court case that they do lobbying. The courts are about facts, and the facts are not on their side.

Member advocacy needed to ensure federal aid reaches public schools that need it most

Federal aid from page 1

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Budget from page 1

There is $1.2 billion in the Rainy Day Fund, and $5 billion in appropriations carry forward. While most carry-forward funds are needed to pay services such as teacher group insurance and unemployment benefits, there are substantial funds that can be used to avoid cuts.

“What we learned in the voucher fight when Career Ladder reserves were taken to pay for a $2.4 million no-bid contract was that the administration can access pots of money at its discretion. Every reserve not required for important services should be accessed,” said TEA lobbyist Jim Wrye. “And we need to stop tax cuts like the planned phase out of Tennessee’s income tax on investments. Every dollar matters.”

Revenue loss estimates range from $500 million to $1.5 billion. Where the final dollar matters.

“WHAT WE LEARNED IN THE VOUCHER FIGHT WHEN CAREER LADDER RESERVES WERE TAKEN TO PAY FOR A $2.4 MILLION NO-BID CONTRACT WAS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION CAN ACCESS POTS OF MONEY AT ITS DISCRETION. EVERY RESERVE NOT REQUIRED FOR IMPORTANT SERVICES SHOULD BE ACCESSSED,” SAID TEA LOBBYIST JIM WRYE. “AND WE NEED TO STOP TAX CUTS LIKE THE PLANNED PHASE OUT OF TENNESSEE’S INCOME TAX ON INVESTMENTS. EVERY DOLLAR MATTERS.”

Factors to protect K-12 funding

As this unprecedented public health crisis continues, the General Assembly intends to amend the budget and consider several bills deemed essential to the functioning of state government during its special called session beginning June 1. At the time of publication, we do not yet have a comprehensive list of what might be considered.

Due to the abrupt end of the session back in March, a number of significant pieces of legislation had not yet received final approval. This includes the following:

- The governor’s early literacy initiative
- The reduction in the professional privilege tax
- Improving the funding ratios for support staff such as school nurses and social workers
- Eliminating the pre-k/Kindergarten portfolio and prohibiting mandated assessments in the early grades
- Eliminating the A-F school grading system
- Eliminating the school voucher program

If not taken up during the special session, these and other concepts will need to be reintroduced when the 112th General Assembly convenes next year.

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Gaylord Opryland Resort

Save the date: Nov. 6-7

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Early Career Educators
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Education Support Professionals

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More details: TEAteachers.org/Symposium