

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

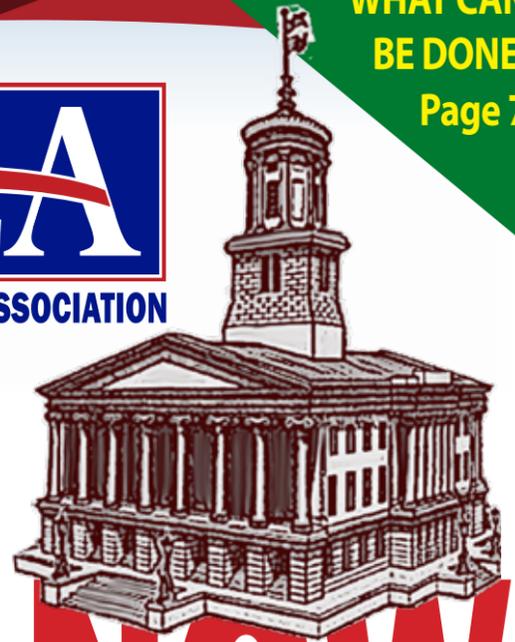


THE PROBLEMS AND
SHIFTS ON TREADY,
WHAT'S NEXT AND
WHAT CAN
BE DONE.
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TEA LEGISLATIVE REPORT | FEBRUARY 19, 2016 | VOL. 2, ISSUE 3

VOUCHER SPONSOR PULLS BILL BEFORE FLOOR VOTE

VICTORY FOR NOW



Calls came into the statehouse more than 12-to-1 against vouchers, due in large part to TEA members statewide. Above, TEA members run a phone bank in Johnson City with Rep. Matthew Hill on the Saturday before the voucher vote.

VOICES FROM BACK HOME WERE CRITICAL

Voucher bill isn't dead, but the limbo it's placed in means a difficult road for vouchers in Tennessee

It was the biggest battle in the capital in years. On one side was TEA and its members, along with allies in county commissions, school boards and parent groups. On the other side were out-of-state special interest groups and, in the end, Gov. Haslam. Each

side battled for every vote to pass or defeat vouchers. The future of public education in Tennessee hung in the balance, with folks back home saying "no," and the dozens of high-priced privatization lobbyists telling representatives to vote "yes."

In spite of spending millions of dollars to push unproven and dangerous vouchers into Tennessee schools, privatizers didn't have the votes on the floor of the Tennessee House of Representatives. TEA's vote count was right - our

opponents did not have the 50 votes needed to pass the voucher bill.

For the fourth year in a row, Tennessee teachers, education support professionals and administrators were the force that kept vouchers out of our state by educating elected officials and communities on the dangers of vouchers.

TEA members made thousands

VOUCHER FIGHT
go to page 7

HASLAM BUDGET HAS HISTORIC INCREASES

*\$105 million increase for teacher salaries,
\$30 million for health insurance,
more than \$200 million in all*



Governor Haslam has proposed some of the largest increases in education funding ever of his administration, and the largest increase in teacher salaries without a corresponding increase in taxes.

For the past year TEA has said that Tennessee invests less in its students than most neighboring states, and that more funding was not only wise, but would yield great dividends as our schools have demonstrated tremendous value for every taxpayer dollar.

HISTORIC INCREASES IN STATE K-12 FUNDING
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GROWING THE BEP PIE:
The Haslam administration has proposed changes in the BEP law governing state education funding while he has moved to increase the overall funding in the BEP.

Working to make sure increases get into teacher paychecks

It is always great news when the governor announces a huge increase in teacher salary funds. The problem is many Tennessee teachers didn't really see the last state raise, and without changes many won't see a significant raise in the coming year either.

TEA has been working to ensure state funds go into paychecks, and now there is movement from the administration.

For more than three years—since former education commissioner Kevin Huffman pushed gutting the minimum salary schedule—TEA has been documenting salary stagnation for teachers across Tennessee. In systems with small local tax bases, an average raise has been less than half of what the state has given for salary increases. Last year the state provided for a 4 percent raise, and the average teacher saw less than two.

GETTING STATE FUNDS INTO PAYCHECKS
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THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

With tide turning in our favor, we must push forward

By TEA President Barbara Gray



After the system-wide failure of TNReady on its very first day – in its very first hours – the state was quick to reassure us that switching to a pencil and paper test wouldn't cost any additional money. Phew! And here we were worried about the intangible costs of additional student stress and anxiety, the lost instructional time spent taking computer-based pre-tests, and the implications of what these last-minute changes will mean for our professional livelihood.

Teaching is hard. No matter how much you love it or how much you love your kids, it is just an exceptionally tough profession. But no one goes into teaching expecting it to be easy (or to be well paid, unfortunately). Educators make the decision to go into a tough, demanding, low-paying profession because of their love and

passion for educating children. We know many of the challenges that lie ahead. The problem is when you add the frustrations of failed test platforms and the countless high-stakes decisions inappropriately tied to test scores.

Injustice and rampant misunderstanding of what exactly our children need to succeed is draining the joy right out of teaching. It is things like the TNReady fiasco and the private school voucher fight from recent weeks that are making teachers question their choice in profession.

As a lifelong educator, I want to encourage you to keep going and stay focused on why you chose to become an educator. Your students need experienced, committed educators to get the best education possible.

I also want to encourage you to not just grin

Educators make the decision to go into a tough, demanding, low-paying profession because of their love and passion for educating children.

and bear it when you see injustices in public education, when you see our students and our profession under attack. You are the real expert on what our students need to succeed. Educators are in our schools every single day interacting with students and their families. You are the expert. It is important that your voice be heard.

TEA stood up to powerful out-of-state interest groups interested in privatizing our local schools – and we won (see front page voucher story for more). Last year, TEA started pushing the idea of “test transparency” in the legislature to allow parents and teachers to see state standardized test questions – and now the department is running the bill themselves. The past two years, TEA has called for much-needed teacher raises – an effort that led to significant investment in teacher salaries from the governor.

TEA has proven in recent weeks that it is a force to be reckoned with. The only way that remains true is if educators statewide stand united to fight for our students, our schools and our profession.

The moral of the story? Don't lose sight of our purpose – our calling – as educators. The tide is turning in our favor. We just need to keep pushing forward. Together.

Our victory over vouchers proves again: Elections matter

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder



I will never forget my first political campaign. To say that my Association colleagues and I worked hard would be an understatement.

The Mustang Association of Classroom Teachers (MACT) literally ran the entire campaign to elect, Ross Duckett, a retired Mustang teacher, to the Oklahoma House of

Representatives. Prior to the swearing in ceremony, Mr. Duckett called me and asked if I would like to come to the capitol to represent all of those that put him there. He told me he needed the president of MACT to remind him that he should never forget those who “brought me to the dance!”

Over the past few weeks, Tennessee legislators across our state were reminded by TEA members that educators vote, which means we can bring them to the dance and/or send them back home.

Thank goodness, we didn't wait until the voucher vote to remind them of this. During the past few election cycles, TEA members have been the difference in primary and general elections in both political parties. In addition, large groups of TEA members have come to Nashville each spring during *Civication* to lobby for education improvement and stop the ideas that would have devastated our schools.

So when thousands of TEA members and supporters flooded the phone lines at the Capitol on the voucher issue, legislators listened and those who clearly remembered “who brought them to the dance” joined with us to lobby their legislative colleagues.

If you were at the state Capitol on that snowy

Next time someone tells you elections don't matter, mention Rep. David Byrd and Rep. Kevin Dunlap, a Republican and a Democrat, helping defeat vouchers in a bipartisan effort.

Thursday, you would have been proud of Rep. David Byrd (R-Waynesboro) and Rep. Kevin Dunlap (D-Rock Island), who told reporters why there is no place for vouchers in Tennessee schools. It's a simple concept, really, – because people don't want them.

Both career educators, Representatives Byrd and Dunlap received a lot of support from educators back home during their election campaigns and are now making sure educators' voices are heard and trusted at the statehouse.

That's why next time someone tells you elections don't matter, feel free to bring up the example of two teachers, a Republican and a Democrat, helping defeat voucher in a bipartisan effort. It's not about an “R” or a “D,” it's about the “E.”

Those who lost in this voucher round also understand that elections matter. They are demonstrating this by targeting TEA in their payroll deduction bill. Anyone who reads the bill, immediately understands its purpose is to reduce TEA's membership and clout, because we have shown how powerful we can be during elections and at the legislature. Please continue to let your representatives know you understand that elections do matter.

ATTACKS ON TEA FROM OUT-OF-STATE SPECIAL INTERESTS CONTINUE

You can tell how effective TEA members are by the powerful enemies we've made.

Five years ago, some legislators and powerful out-of-state interest groups led the fight to silence teachers and end collective bargaining in an attempt to weaken TEA. Unfortunately for them, the plan backfired.

While they were successful in ending collective bargaining, TEA has become an even more powerful and vocal advocate for public education.

Educators statewide are more engaged in the political process than ever before and legislators are taking notice. Together we have beaten private school voucher proposals every legislative session for three straight years - and are poised to make 2016 the fourth year with a recent victory on the House floor.

In addition to our successful voucher fights, together we have prohibited the use of TVAAS in licensure decisions, blocked for-profit charter schools, secured teacher raises, protected health insurance benefits and more. When you start racking up so many wins, you become a target.

“Out-of-state privatizers have seemingly endless pots of money to pour into Tennessee elections, but what they do not have is votes,” said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder. “The voucher bill has stalled again because of pro-public education legislators our members helped elect.”

Groups like Americans for Prosperity, Students First and American Federation for Children have their sights set on TEA and our powerful network of

educators statewide. The latest attempt to weaken the association is to go after educators' ability to pay TEA dues through payroll deduction - something that has been in place for decades and places no additional burden on local districts or taxpayers.

“I take it as a compliment that these big, wealthy out-of-state groups feel the need to try to undermine TEA,” said Crowder. “It tells me we are doing something right when those seeking to dismantle public education in our state view us a threat. Tennessee educators are not just going to roll over and let some privatizer threaten our students and our schools.”

TEA's government relations team expects the attacks to keep coming, which means all Tennessee educators and supporters of public education must stay engaged.

Members need to constantly call and email their legislators to let them know that the folks back home do not agree with what these out-of-state organizations are trying to do to our schools. Hearing from constituents is the number one way to sway a legislator's vote.

“These groups have very deep pockets, but we have a powerful network of tens of thousands of educators across the state who show up on election day,” Crowder said.

Keep up the great work!



AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY

studentsfirst



AMERICAN FEDERATION for Children

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Gov. Haslam responds to TEA hold harmless call

Gov. Bill Haslam announced this week he will seek additional flexibility to give teachers the choice of whether to include student results from the 2015-2016 TNReady assessment in their evaluation score. The proposal will need to be passed by the legislature.

“It is encouraging to see the governor listen to the widespread calls from educators, parents and local school boards for a one-year moratorium for TNReady data in teacher evaluations,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “While the governor's proposal is a step in the right direction toward decoupling standardized test scores with high-stakes decisions, these measurements have

proven to be unreliable statistical estimates that are inappropriate for use in teacher evaluations at all. TEA will continue its push to eliminate all standardized test scores from annual teacher evaluations.”

Responding to the TEA call to hold teachers harmless, the proposal keeps student learning and accountability as factors in an educator's evaluation while giving teachers the option to include this year's results if the results benefit them.

Haslam said due to the failed launch of TNReady, he wanted “to provide teachers with additional flexibility for this first year's data.”

State teacher insurance pool destabilized Bill attempts to make problem worse

The insurance committees that oversee the insurance plans for hundreds of thousands of state and local government employees, including teachers, met earlier this month to discuss a big problem.

For nearly a year and a half, TEA has written extensively about a disturbing trend in dozens of local education agencies, whereby teacher insurance has been slashed, and thousands of teachers have been moved into cheaper insurance plans against their will. At the time, many teachers were told that the migration was necessary to become compliant with federal laws such as the Affordable Care Act, a claim that has been thoroughly debunked by officials within state government.

TEA has worked vigorously to ensure LEA's have access to the necessary information to make the best decisions for their employees. Unfortunately, many school systems continued the trend toward trying to encourage teachers to move into the cheapest insurance offered by the state, the Limited PPO. In most cases, employers incentivized the move by pairing this plan with supplemental, or gap, insurance policies to help absorb the substantial increase in out-of-pocket costs.

The resulting enrollment shift has been enormous. According to state officials, the Limited PPO has seen an astonishing growth of 532 percent in just two years, and reports that in a survey conducted of LEA's that nearly half paired the Limited PPO with gap insurance. Nearly all of those offering gap insurance paid all or part of its cost in order to encourage employees to take the cheapest insurance, regardless of their health status and whether or not the plan was a good match for their needs.

The result of the shift to the state plan has been

catastrophic. The premiums for the Limited PPO are much lower, and have led to a decline in revenue used to pay claims. That problem is exacerbated by a spike in claims, which soared 57 percent in members of the Limited PPO in the first half of last year. The problem is that the gap policies are masking the true cost of care to the employees, but does nothing to manage cost for the state. The end result is a massive number of employees enrolled in a plan that does not fit their needs, as the cheapest plans were developed for healthier individuals who rarely utilize insurance, and thus can pay much lower premiums.

The resulting decrease in revenue coupled with the increase in costs has created big problems for the state insurance committees, who may have to make tough decisions to stem the tide and reverse the enrollment trend.

To make matters even worse, a bill has been introduced this session that would sanction the selling of gap insurance policies to all local government and education employees. HB2410/SB2111, sponsored by Rep. Casada and Sen. Johnson, both of Williamson County, would allow supplemental policies outside the state's plans to be offered to all such employees in Tennessee. It is unclear at this time whether LEA's were ever permitted to offer these gap plans to begin with, as the resulting destabilization of the insurance pool makes apparent the problems with doing so. The bill would remove any possibility that the state could take action to address the current problem.

The local education insurance plan covers more than one hundred thousand current and retired educators and their families, TEA will vigorously oppose any efforts to further undermine the integrity of the plan, and will fight to protect quality, affordable insurance for all school employees.

There are hundreds of education bills filed during the session. Below is a partial list of bills of interest.

Bills TEA Supports

HB1794/SB2030 (Byrd/Briggs) - Expanding tenure eligibility
This would expand tenure eligibility to teachers whose evaluations rate them as effective, or a 3, rather than just 4 and 5 as in current law.

HB1453/SB2242 (Byrd/Hensley) - Establishing a two-year hold harmless period in teacher evaluations
This is the two-year hold harmless on the use of growth data from TNReady in teacher evaluations.

HB2503/SB2525 (Brooks, K./Dickerson) - Preference for tenured teachers
This would establish a preference for effective tenured teachers to be retained over non-tenured teachers in the event of a staff reduction.

HB1537/SB2540 (McCormick/Norris) - Release of test questions
Requires release of test questions and answers to parents and teachers, notification of and justification for all assessments, and eliminates two standardized tests.

HB1787/SB1797 (Parkinson/Nicely) - Abolishing the ASD
As introduced, this bill abolishes the Achievement School District.

Bills TEA Opposes

HB1049/SB999 (Dunn/Gardenhire) - Voucher bill
This is the private school voucher bill.

HB294/SB151 (Spivey/Gardenhire) - Eliminating payroll dues deduction
This would eliminate payroll deduction of dues for any school system engaged in collaborative conferencing.

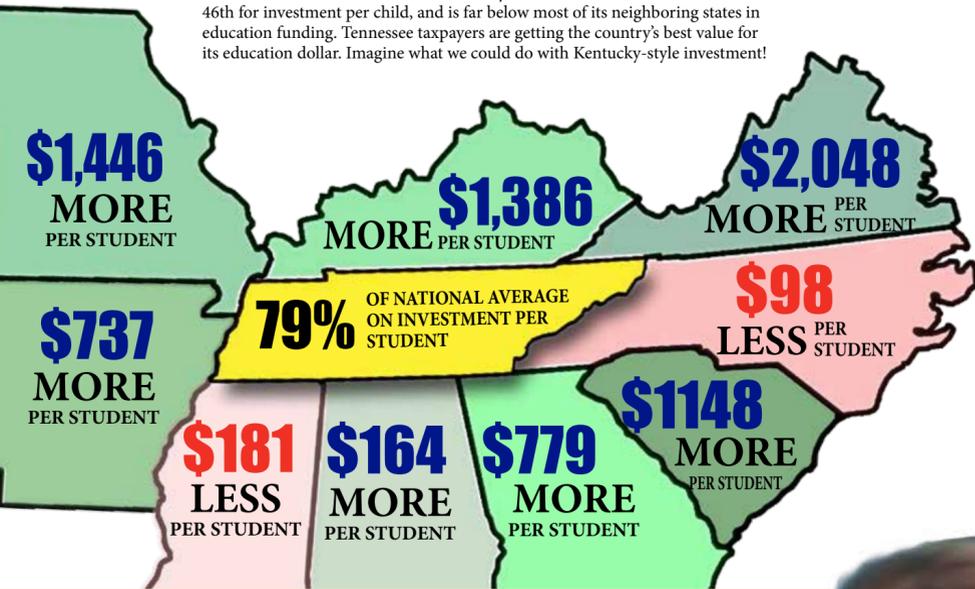
HB2229/SB1707 (Spivey/Gresham) - Attack on payroll dues
This is another attack on payroll deduction, that would include all school systems, including the state special schools.

HB985/SB466 (Rogers/Bell) - Keeping teachers off county commissions
This would prohibit teachers from serving on their county commissions.

HB1879/SB2497 (Kane/Gresham) - Bypassing LEAs in favor of private schools
Creates a catalog of online courses that would enable portability of per pupil funding to go to private schools and online providers, bypassing the LEA's ability to make decisions about offerings.

First in the South for graduation and standards, behind the South for funding. The governor's effort may get us out of the investment basement

Tennessee ranks 8th in the nation for on-time graduation rates, and has the country's second highest academic standards for graduation. Tennessee schools achieve this remarkable outcome with very few resources. Our state ranks 46th for investment per child, and is far below most of its neighboring states in education funding. Tennessee taxpayers are getting the country's best value for its education dollar. Imagine what we could do with Kentucky-style investment!



HISTORIC INCREASES IN STATE K-12 FUNDING from page 1

Stagnation created a growing disparity in teacher pay that has been documented in the *Advocate*. For the past year, TEA has outlined the problem to the administration, state officials, and legislators and offered solutions.

It seems we were heard. Gov. Haslam is now taking action.

A provision in his BEP revision proposal would drive state raise dollars into teacher paychecks in systems that pay below the state average. It is a proposal that TEA believes will benefit the majority of educators, and help stop the growing pay gap between districts.

"The provision says all BEP instructional component salary funds must be expended on instructional salaries and wages in systems below the state average, and that is a big step in the right direction," said Jim Wrye, TEA's chief lobbyist. "Our initial numbers show that almost two-thirds of all teachers are affected by this provision, and it will help TEA to ensure state funds get into teacher paychecks."

In recent years state salary funds in many systems had been used for health benefits, part-time employees and shifts in local school funding, blunting the overall raise teachers received. Many of these shifts and benefit payments had the tacit approval of state officials, but now it seems that has changed. Requiring state raise money to go to compensation is a big first step to meeting the governor's goal of having Tennessee teacher salaries to be among the fastest improving in the nation.

The governor's proposal is a good step in the right direction, but it still does not solve the problem of local match the state minimum salary schedule leveraged before it was gutted.

Putting in a record \$105 million for next year's raises also will have a lot to do with meeting the goal.

However, the continued weakness of the state minimum salary schedule still poses problems. The schedule was the way the state leveraged local matches of state increases, and without a strong schedule there is continued likelihood the local dollars will not materialize in poorer counties.

"We have a bill to restore the salary schedule and have it increase the same percentage as the state raise. It has administration opposition, but we are working with key legislators on this issue," said Wrye.

Wrye notes that prior to the gutting of the schedule, the average raise and the state raise were about the same for decades.

"Leveraging local dollars is critical to get us back on track to improving salaries."

Progress is being made, and if the provision becomes law many Tennessee teachers—especially in rural districts—should see state funds show up in a good sized raise.

GETTING STATE FUNDS INTO PAYCHECKS from page 1

While Tennessee ranks 46th in the nation on investment per student, the state ranks 9th in on-time graduation and is 34th in national academic ranking. More investment can only be a wise move. Now the governor is saying so himself.

"I personally believe that investing in education is the smartest thing we can do for economic development. But I also believe it's a smart long-term investment. One of the things I want to make certain that we do with this budget is invest money that will save us money down the road. The facts are clear: a more educated population will spend less money on health care. Less money on incarceration. If we're going to be about anything, it has to be about opportunity for all Tennessee students," said Haslam.

The Haslam budget includes \$104.6 million for teacher salaries – the largest investment without a tax increase in the history of the BEP and an increase of more than 4 percent. The budget has nearly \$30 million to fund the 12th month of insurance for teachers, an 8.6 percent increase in funds to systems to help with insurance costs. There is \$15 million for recurring technology funds for our schools – an amount that doubles our current investment and addresses concerns related to devices, infrastructure and instruction, and critical in light of the failure of TNReady. The budget includes nearly \$20 million to better serve high-need student populations, and almost \$50 million to address enrollment growth and inflationary costs of the BEP. In all more than \$240 million increased investment.

"We are still reviewing the budget and checking to ensure funds are new and not shifted, but

our first read on the budget is it is a major step to improve overall investment," said TEA President Barbara Gray. "The governor deserves praise for his efforts, recognizing that the state has the opportunity to invest, and making sure it does so."

There is still the issue of surplus funds and possible one-time investments for schools, such as technology infrastructure. TEA is working with budget committees and the administration advocating for more.

"We've been in the basement for investment, and efforts like this will start to get us out of it," said TEA Chief Lobbyist Jim Wrye. "We've seen some historic jumps in key academic rankings, it'd be great if we could see similar jumps in funding rankings. It is what Tennessee students deserve."

Proposed BEP changes keeps pie growing, but some systems may lose out

The state's funding formula for schools, the Basic Education Plan (BEP) is set for an update this legislative session. Governor Bill Haslam is proposing three key changes: Elimination of the Cost Differential Factor, a freeze and then phase-out of BEP 2.0, and a change in the way teacher salaries are funded through the BEP.

While the full impact of these changes is not clear, what is clear is that the update is designed to avoid another Small Schools funding equity lawsuit. The change to teacher pay calculation will almost certainly begin to decrease the disparity in teacher pay among the highest- and lowest-paying districts. It does this while also hardwiring raises into the formula, meaning most teachers will see a real pay increase in any year the General Assembly increases teacher compensation dollars.

TEA supports efforts to lift all boats by way of teacher pay increases and we will fight to ensure that provisions are adopted that improve pay for teachers across the board.

The other two changes certainly have implications for both rural and urban districts. As designed by Governor Bredesen in 2007, BEP 2.0 would have directed more funds to districts with larger concentrations of at-risk students. This change would have sent more of the BEP pie to larger urban districts. Currently, BEP 2.0 is not fully funded and the Haslam plan freezes it and ultimately seeks to phase it out.

Some suggest this will mean less money available for urban districts, but the change to teacher pay may offset this to some degree.

Additionally, the Cost Differential Factor is cut in half in the first year of the proposal and eliminated after that. Again, this will redistribute the BEP pie, providing more dollars to rural districts in the way of salary funds.

TEA is closely monitoring all the proposed changes to ensure that teacher pay is treated fairly and that districts across the state have the resources they need to educate students.



"TEA is interested in both equity and adequacy when it comes to school funding," said President Barbara Gray. "We see some positives in this legislation and we also have concerns. Students in all districts – rural, urban, and suburban – should have access to the resources they need to succeed."

Growing the BEP pie: Permanent increases in BEP spending in the administration budget

\$104.6 million for teacher salaries

The largest investment without a tax increase in BEP history and an increase of more than 4 percent.

\$30 million for health insurance

Funding the 12th month of insurance, an 8.6 percent increase to systems for insurance costs.

\$15 million for technology

Doubling current investment for devices, infrastructure and instruction.

\$20 million for high-need students

Recurring investment to better serve high-need student populations, including English Language Learners.

\$50 million for growth and inflation

Funds to address enrollment growth and inflationary costs of the BEP.

Schools experience significant TNReady failure on first day

It's campaign season, and candidate after candidate is telling voters they are the clear choice because they will be "ready on day one."

Likewise, it's the beginning of statewide testing season in Tennessee and districts have been told the state's new system would be ready on day one.

Except it wasn't.

As TEA had warned school systems prior to the test launch, a technology failure from a state vendor halted standardized testing across Tennessee on the first day of TNReady testing. The failure of the state's new online assessment caused Education Commissioner Candice McQueen to shift all TNReady tests to paper and pencil.

The commissioner's memo informed school directors that the state testing platform "experienced major outages across the state" during its first run on Monday, Feb. 8, because of network issues with Measurement, Inc., which is contracted to administer the standardized exams.

Don't call us, we'll call you ...

As problems began, the Department of Education sent the following notice to school districts:

"At 8:25 a.m. CST the MIST platform experienced major outages across the state. These outages were caused

because the network utilized by Measurement Inc. experienced a failure. We are urgently working with Measurement Inc. to identify the causes and correct the problem. At this time, we are advising that schools experiencing problems with the test discontinue testing, and return to their normal classes. Please do not begin any new additional testing you had planned for today until the department provides further information. However, if you have students that are successfully testing, please allow them to complete the current session."

It was noted that the problem affected both the MICA and MIST platforms.

"The MIST Help Desk is aware of the problem and will be not accepting additional phone calls on this issue," according to the memo. Please encourage your technology directors to call the department's TNReady Focus Room. We will provide frequent updates as information becomes available. Thank you for your patience."

Prior to Monday's scheduled test administration, some educators across the state were raising concerns about the testing system and its ability to handle the load of students across the state.

A Call for Fairness

Immediately following the test failure, TEA President Barbara Gray called for

fair treatment of teachers in light of the TNReady problems.

"TEA has long had concerns about this transition to a statewide online assessment," Gray said. "We have seen problems with pilot assessments and practice tests in the past, and unfortunately the first day of TNReady resulted in more issues and frustrations for our students and teachers."

Leading up to TNReady launch, TEA heard from educators and parents statewide about concerns with the state's capacity to handle so many students on the server at one time, as well as concerns about local districts having enough resources to complete the testing with so little funding from the state.

"It is unacceptable to have this kind of statewide failure when the state has tied so many high-stakes decisions to the results of this assessment," Gray said. "Our students and teachers have enough stress and anxiety around these assessments without adding additional worries about technical issues."

Gray said the state must grant a one-year waiver – at a minimum – from including TNReady scores in teacher evaluations, which

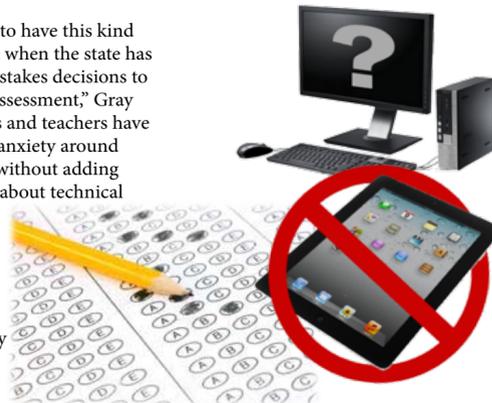
the governor has now announced he intends to do

"It is unfair and inappropriate to stake our teachers' professional standing on flawed, unreliable test scores in any year, but there are even greater implications and uncertainty while implementing a new assessment," Gray added.

School Boards Expressing Concern

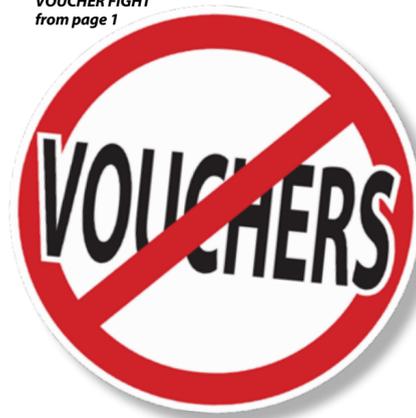
Ahead of the TNReady tests, several school boards have expressed concern about the use of the results in teacher evaluations this year.

While it's still unclear when we'll actually be TNReady, we know for sure it wasn't on day one.



THANKS TO VOICES FROM BACK HOME, VOUCHER BILL STALLED INDEFINITELY; BILL SPONSOR VOWS TO KEEP VOUCHERS ALIVE

VOUCHER FIGHT from page 1



"I vote with my people," Carr told the deputy governor, according to the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*. "My calls are 10-1 or 12-1 against vouchers in Sevier County. I'm hearing from teachers, administrators and retired teachers. All the teachers calling are against it."

"I will not vote for vouchers," Carr continued. "If I support my people, I cannot vote for vouchers."

In a last-ditch effort to boost their vote count, voucher proponents tried to amend the bill to restrict vouchers to Shelby County.

"That strategy didn't work because we stand together, united for our students, our schools and our profession," Gray said. "We saw that morning what happens when the entire state stands together and says, 'NO!' Limiting the voucher proposal did not make it any more palatable to educators and other supporters of public education."

Our victory over vouchers showed the world how powerful we are. Voices from back home were critical in securing support among legislators.

"We have been battling out-of-state interest groups over private school vouchers for four years now," Crowder said. "These groups have more money and more paid lobbyists than we do, but they don't have the power of our membership. For three consecutive years, we have pushed back against these groups and won - and 2016 just might make it four years."

In previous years, we have been able to bottle up vouchers in the House Finance sub-committee. This year, voucher advocates took advantage of key absences from the sub-committee and rushed the bill through the second week of the session.

"The vote in the House would have stripped our schools of hundreds of millions of dollars in funding and threatened every public school, so that's where the real fight was," Crowder said. "Many representatives strongly oppose the voucher legislation, but several key lawmakers were sitting on the fence as the vote approached. Calling those legislators and thanking our friends and supporters for standing strong against vouchers allowed us to tip the vote count in our favor. Voices from back home matter most."

Crowder said that in other states like Wisconsin, vouchers started as a small program targeting an urban area, and then ultimately expanded to every student and every school district.

When Dunn realized he lacked support in the House, he asked for his bill to lay on the clerk's desk, meaning it can be scheduled for a vote at a different time. Tabling the bill effectively stalls it indefinitely. It's a procedural move that makes it difficult for the House to reconsider the measure this session, but Dunn said he would come back with vouchers next year.

"Next year there will still be failing schools and children on the path to failure, and I am not going to stop," Dunn said, according to *The Tennessean*.

With the current legislative session far from being over, it is absolutely crucial that we keep up our momentum and thank our supporters for their resolve.

TEA members have an opportunity to spend a Tuesday of their spring break in Nashville. Dubbed "Civication," a vacation combining civic engagement and fun allows members to visit with their elected officials and make sure we can count on their support going forward.

"Our victory over vouchers showed the state the strength of the association and public education advocates" Gray said.

Please see the details on the back page of this issue on how to register for *Civication*.

Push for testing transparency yields results; Governor Haslam joins effort

Following the botched rollout of TNReady earlier this month, teachers and parents around the state have more questions than answers about how the new testing regimen in our state will work. Now more than ever, it is critical that transparency be introduced into the state's testing process.

Last year, TEA pushed aggressively for testing transparency – letting parents and teachers see the questions and answers from state tests. This would allow for a focus on improving skills and eliminate the secrecy surrounding the testing process.

We are pleased to report that our advocacy is getting results. The Haslam administration is proposing legislation supported by legislators and TEA members Jim Coley, Kevin Dunlap, and David Byrd that will both increase testing transparency and reduce the amount of tests Tennessee students take.

Teachers have said for years that the regimen of standardized tests and the required test prep take away valuable instructional time. They've claimed that tests should be transparent – that the questions and answers should be available after administration in order

to truly aid teaching and learning. And, our elementary teachers have been saying that some standardized tests used in early grades are simply developmentally inappropriate.

"Tennessee's teachers know our students deserve clear, transparent tests," said TEA President Barbara Gray. "We're pleased to see that Governor Haslam has gotten the message."

The transparency legislation is based on recommendations from the Tennessee Task Force on Student Testing and Assessment. The recommendations included:

The task force made 16 recommendations with specific emphasis in four areas: (1) culture of transparency, (2) test reduction, (3) postsecondary alignment and readiness, and (4) test scheduling and logistics. Specific highlights of these recommendations include releasing test items for students, parents, and educators, eliminating the kindergarten and first grade standardized test option, eliminating the 8th

and 10th grade EXPLORE and PLAN tests, providing expectations to districts regarding formative assessment usage and communication, creating additional input opportunities for parents, and ensuring higher education guidance, validation, and usage of TNReady.

The task force concluded the report with additional areas for further analysis, including more work on district grading practices and policies and the usage of screening tools in early grades.

The task force also recommended its continued involvement in reviewing new information about the state of assessment during this time of assessment transition.

These recommendations and the corresponding legislation reflect what

many educators have been saying for years: There's too much testing and the process is not transparent.

TEA will continue to work with policymakers to move legislation that reduces our reliance on standardized tests. We believe teachers best understand what their students need and too much testing can detract from valuable instructional time.

Ultimately, testing is about finding the right balance between gaining useful information on student achievement and ensuring adequate time and resources for student learning. As we continue the transition to TNReady, TEA will also be pushing for a transition to a more balanced, student-centered testing plan.



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www.teateachers.org
www.nea.org



TEA members and supporters made a great showing at every voucher hearing this year. Many wore "Stop vouchers" buttons and stickers like the one below. Emily Mitchell (Rutherford EA and TEA board member) tells reporters vouchers are not needed or wanted in Tennessee (above, right).

STAND STRONG FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Rep. David Byrd (R-Waynesboro) and Rep. Kevin Dunlap (D-Rock Island), both career educators, talk to reporters about the dangers of vouchers.

TEA MEMBERS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE TUESDAY OF YOUR SPRING BREAK? HURRY TO REGISTER AND

Take a **CIVICATION**

**Come to the Capitol!
Talk to your legislators!
Stand up for education!
Enjoy a great day in Nashville**

**TEA REIMBURSES FOR MILES!
GREAT BREAKFAST AT TEA HQ!
CAPITOL MEETINGS ARRANGED!
PRE-PAID HOTEL FOR LONG TRAVEL!
OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS!**

Your voice makes a difference at the Capitol. If you haven't already made plans to be in Nashville on Tuesday of your spring break, please register as soon as possible for **Civication**, a vacation combining vacation with civic pride in our profession.

Your voice could be the pivotal point in protecting our payroll deduction and making sure vouchers stay out of Tennessee public schools.

Come to the Capitol to talk to your legislators and enjoy the great entertainment of Nashville!

TEA pays mileage for any members who want to attend Civication during Spring Break. There is complimentary breakfast at TEA Headquarters in downtown Nashville, free parking, shuttle service to the Capitol, and House and Senate Education Committee meetings to see the

Tennessee legislature in action!

If you live more than 100 miles outside of Nashville, TEA has a supply of pre-paid hotel rooms for members for Monday night (limited basis). Come to Music City, enjoy the city and have a successful and important Civication. Members who took part in Civication last year had a huge impact on the legislative success of TEA!

HURRY! SPACE IS LIMITED!

REGISTER ONLINE: WWW.TEATEACHERS.ORG/CIVICATION