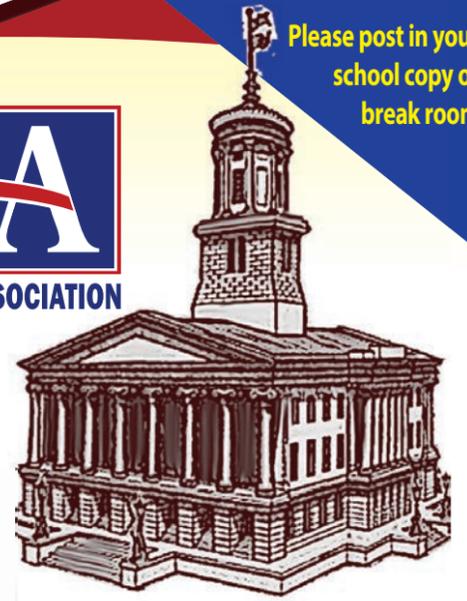


TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

TEA Legislative Priorities poster on pgs. 4-5.

Please post in your school copy or break room



LEGISLATIVE REPORT | December 29, 2017 | VOLUME 3, ISSUE 9

Lawmakers, TEA question TNReady

Low proficiency rates, strange "bowl" curves, compact cut scores, huge TVAAS assumptions, and a disconnect from ACT outcomes

Teachers believe in assessments, we were the ones who invented them. Yet TEA and others have growing concerns about TNReady as the testing data is provided to schools, teachers and parents from last year.

In a House Government Operations committee hearing December 15, Chairman Rep. Jeremy Faison had

Education Commissioner Candice McQueen and her staff, along with a testing vendor official, testify on issues of TNReady. Prior to McQueen's testimony, TEA lobbyist Jim Wrye made a presentation on the problems the association sees.

"TNReady issues go well beyond the mis-scored tests, glitches, and lateness in data. There are fundamental

problems in the test data, and what it says about our students, teachers, and schools," said Wrye. "The more we look into it, the bigger the problems become."

Faison was blunt with the commissioner.

TNReady questions
cont. page 8



"From what I'm hearing from 99.9 percent of my educators, principals and superintendents, there are a lot of things in testing the department scores a 'one'"

- Rep. Jeremy Faison, R-Cosby



"I run a race, then you'll tell me after what a winning time is? That makes no sense."

- Rep. Antonio Parkinson, D-Memphis

With growing concerns, TEA proposes K, Pre-K portfolio be a pilot year

The majority of Tennessee kindergarten teachers would like to see the new state portfolio standards to be implemented as a pilot this year in light of many problems associated with their roll out, a TEA survey has found. TEA is working with the legislature to ensure it is so.

For many teachers, the new standards came as a surprise after the hard work to implement the standards and portfolio system for the 2016-17 school year, which many teachers supported.

While the new math standards are still being developed, implementation of the new English Language Arts

Kindergarten portfolio
cont. page 8

2017

On-time graduation - 95.6%
Going directly to college - 83%
Average ACT score - 25.3

A tale of two Williamson Counties

ACT and student outcomes show the system has almost all students college and career ready, yet TnReady says the county is failing most students. One of these indicators is wrong. TEA looks at the data.

TEA to push for licensure changes

Independent professional standards board of educators should rule on licenses, not State Board

A licensed professional should report to a standards board composed of their peers. A board of medical professionals oversee licensing for doctors in the state. A board of experienced law practitioners oversee licensing for lawyers in the state.

A board of business and community leaders, and one teacher, make up the Tennessee Board of Education, which issues and revokes teacher licenses. That means the body which determines who should and should not be educating our children are not – and have never been – professional educators themselves.

"It is absurd that a board of business people are making decisions about teacher licensure issues," said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder.

Standards board
cont. page 6

Credit where credit is due

While many states still haven't recovered from the Great Recession, TN is a leader in K-12 state funding increases

In 2014, Gov. Haslam promised to lead the nation in teacher salary increases, but had no pay funds in the budget when revenue dropped. TEA was *highly* critical, and the governor took *exception*. We explained to him that when he was wrong he'd hear it, and when right, well, he'd hear that too.

Over the past three years as TEA pushed for Haslam's promise to be fulfilled, the administration and General Assembly have made record increases in the state K-12 budget, including back-to-back 4 percent raises totaling more than \$400 million. With state coffers still full as the state economy grows, the revenue is available for another major teacher pay increase.

Salary increase
cont. page 7



Senate leader,
Lt. Gov. Randy
McNally

Gov. Bill
Haslam

House leader,
Speaker
Beth Harwell

Finish in style, Gov. Haslam and 110th General Assembly

A 5% increase in the budget for teacher pay may fulfill the promise for the fastest improving salaries in the nation. Revenue is there, how about the will?



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

We can challenge students, teachers without punishment

By TEA President Barbara Gray



Drill. Drill. Drill. Test. Punish. Repeat.

This is the education system our current generation of children is experiencing. Our children are growing up in a time when all they know is the test-and-punish model that has ruled public education for too many years now.

Years of elected officials and administration leaders buying into the “education reform” movement have brought us to a place where our children and teachers are stressed, anxious and making themselves physically

ill as a result of high-stakes testing in Tennessee. In the name of rigor and challenging students and teachers, reformers are destroying the joy of learning and teaching.

But here is the thing – it doesn’t have to be this way! You know it, I know it, and elected officials are finally starting to realize it, too. It is time to bring the joy back to our classrooms.

No teacher or student should view themselves as “below basic” or “just a one.” It is time to reclaim our classrooms and our profession.

Educators have been successfully teaching and challenging children in our public schools for centuries, without creating an environment that is detrimental to our students. Teachers are motivated by their love

for their students and their profession. There is no need to hang the weight of a high-stakes test around their necks, threatening their professional livelihood based on flawed testing data.

Statewide assessments have their place in public education. As a diagnostic tool, an assessment is a powerful tool in identifying gaps in knowledge, disparities between different communities and more. Assessments became a tool for punishment when the state tied so many high-stakes decisions to their outcomes.

A TEA field staff recently told me a story of going into an elementary school to read to students. Three students came up to introduce themselves to her. In addition to their names, one student identified herself as “advanced” and the other two students identified themselves as “below basic” – completely unprompted.

I have experienced the same thing myself with teachers. I have lost count of the number of teachers who have said, “I’m a three,” or “I’m just a one.”

The state has placed these damaging labels on students and teachers. Labels that they are internalizing. Labels that have become part of their identities. No teacher or student should view themselves as “below basic” or “just a one.”

It is time to reclaim our classrooms and our profession. TEA will be working diligently this legislative session to greatly reduce or eliminate TVAAS in all high-stakes decisions, but we need your help!

Once the session begins in a few weeks, The Advocate will resume its every-other-week print schedule to keep you informed of important actions you can take to advocate for your students and your profession.

Betsy DeVos: Naughty or Nice list?

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder

I heard Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos ended up on Santa’s Naughty list in 2017. I also heard she seems confused as to how she got there. Just in case Ms. DeVos reads the TEA Advocate and wants to understand the performance issues that need to be improved before the 2018 Holiday Season, we have listed the top 5 reasons she landed on the bad list.

Reason #5: She was not truthful when she said she was qualified to be the Secretary of Education.

Betsy DeVos has no training or experience in education. She has never worked in a school in any capacity, and does not hold a degree in education.

Reason #4: She ran with bad company -- in fact, she led the bad company.

In Michigan, Betsy and her husband have pushed for decades for so-called “choice” schemes and corporate charter schools, most of which have performed worse than the state average. In 2017, Ms. DeVos not only continued these activities, but promised to expand them nationwide.

Reason #3: Betsy keeps trying to steal from public schools.

DeVos has invested millions lobbying for laws that drain resources from public schools into private school voucher initiatives. She has promoted these measures as chair of the American Federation for Children, and the DeVos family has spent millions to push for the expansion of vouchers in other states. In 2017, DeVos tried to expand her ability to steal from Tennessee public schools by spending thousands of dollars to take out Tennessee legislators who have voted against vouchers. Thanks to TEA member involvement in these elections, she was unsuccessful.

Reason #2: She promotes unfairness and downright cheating

DeVos has fought against the regulation of charter schools. The DeVos family gave nearly \$1 million to GOP lawmakers in the Michigan legislature who gutted a bill that included accountability measures for charter schools in Detroit. Those charters will not be subject to the same oversight or regulation as public schools, thanks largely to DeVos. During 2017, Betsy suggested more states need to follow Michigan’s example.

Betsy DeVos has no training or experience in education. She has never worked in a school in any capacity, and does not hold a degree in education.

Reason #1: DeVos helped design proposals to hurt children, families and the elderly

The Trump-DeVos budget presented to Congress in 2017 eliminated at least 22 programs, and cut \$10.6 billion from federal education initiatives overall, including cuts to after-school programs, professional development and class size reduction, and elimination of public loan forgiveness programs meant to encourage students to go into teaching and public service. Her proposed education program cuts are estimated to slash \$78,934,799 from Tennessee public schools.

So, Secretary DeVos, if you would like for TEA to design an improvement plan to bring up your performance before the 2018 Holiday Season, feel free to give us a call!



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UniServ Staff contact information
can be found on page 6.

Community schools model better meets students' needs

By Lee-Ann Nolan, Tipton County EA member



With many Tennessee students living in poverty, we must recognize the struggle that teachers face every day to meet their needs.

These students are the ones that come to school unprepared, hungry, tired, unbathed, afraid, unhealthy, or just mentally drained. We must meet these needs before we can expect them to succeed in school. This takes parents, community stakeholders, teachers, school staff, and students working together.

Community Schools are known as wraparound schools because they offer many wraparound services for students and their family members. They basically become the center of the community. The students, their families, teachers, and other community partners work together to offer their students the best in academics, physical, mental, and dental health and social services, enrichment activities, and more. Some Community Schools offer counseling, GED classes, job training, and specialized classes.

Community Schools remain open later than regular school hours though the hours may vary from school to school. Some are even open on weekends. The teachers and staff working the after-school hours are different than the ones

working regular school hours therefore offering fresh faces and more energy. These schools also provide meals for the students and their families. Some even provide washers and dryers for families to do their laundry. The after-school teachers and staff can meet with parents in the evenings as needed to answer questions and solve problems.

As a teacher that has seen many needy students throughout my career, I can honestly say that Community Schools seems like an answer to a consistent problem that educators face daily. I am a strong believer in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Engaging the community to work with the school faculty and staff can only encourage the students and show improvement in attendance, behavior, and test scores. This type of improvement has been proven through years of data of specific Community Schools.

Community Schools may be a solution to the inequity in our schools. This has been an ongoing problem that will take fixing our communities, not just our schools. One is dependent on the other. This is a suggestion that should be taken to all school boards, whether urban, suburban, or rural. Don't overlook Community Schools as an option to improve our schools, help our students, and work with our communities.

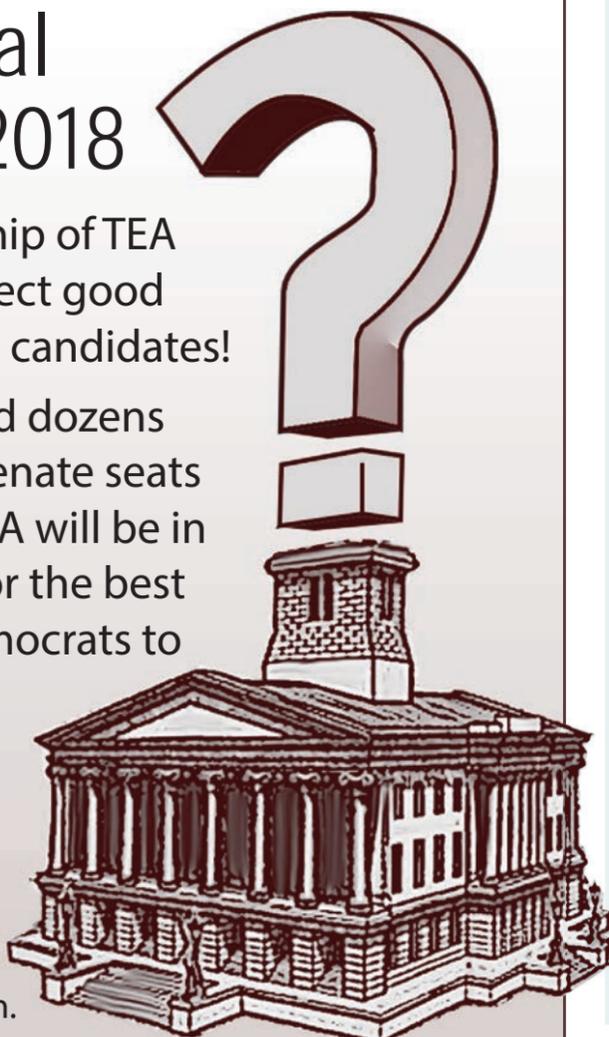
To find out more information regarding Community Schools, connect with the Tennessee Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools or Coalition for Community Schools on social media.

Huge political changes in 2018

The active membership of TEA can be *the* force to elect good pro-public education candidates!

The governorship and dozens of state House and Senate seats are open this year. TEA will be in every race, looking for the best Republicans and Democrats to support our schools and the people who work in them.

Be ready to get involved, and to go vote in August primaries *and* the November General Election.



ASK TEA

ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

Q: I have heard there is a change in 2017-18 regarding the "teaching materials" money provided through the BEP. What's different this year?

A: As a result of TEA's efforts in the state legislature, there's a change in law such that each teacher receives \$200 to use individually rather than "pooling" half of the instructional supply money.

Specifically, the law states "There is included in the Tennessee BEP an amount of money sufficient to pay two hundred dollars (\$200) for every teacher in kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12). This money shall be used by the teachers for instructional supplies and shall be given to each teacher by October 31 of each school year so that the teacher may spend it at any time during that school year on instructional supplies as determined necessary by the teacher."

Q: If a student makes false claims accusing me of criminal behavior, what recourse do I have?

A: A new law passed in the 2017 General Assembly is intended to "...deter the filing of meritless litigation and to sanction deliberately false reports levied against educators..."

The full language can be found in Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 12. This new law includes freedom from liability when acting as an educator "within the course and scope of ... employment" and it also addresses the educator's right to take civil action when faced with false accusations.

Q: Is there a new law called the Teacher Bill of Rights? What does it include?

A: Yes! TEA's lobbying efforts resulted in the addition of TCA § 49-5-209, which states the following:

An educator has the right to:

1. Be treated with civility and respect;
2. Have his or her professional judgment and discretion respected;
3. Report any errant, offensive, or abusive content or behavior of students to school officials or appropriate agencies;
4. Provide students with a classroom and school in which the educators, students, the property of the educator and students, and peers will be safe;
5. Defend themselves and their students from physical violence or physical harm pursuant to § 49-6-4008;
6. Share information regarding a student's educational experience, health, or safety with the student's parent or legal guardian unless otherwise prohibited by state law or the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), (20 U.S.C. § 1232g);
7. Review all instructional material or curriculum prior to those materials being utilized for instruction of students; and
8. Not be required to use their personal money to appropriately equip a classroom.



The TEA Advocacy Hotline supports local leaders and building representatives in answering member questions. If you have an employment-related question, please contact your building rep or UniServ coordinator.

★★★ 2018 TEA Legislative

TESTING AND EVALUATION

Enough is enough. It's time to move to a fair state assessment.

- End punishments tied to TVAAS
- Enforce test transparency
- Repeal A-F school grades
- Pass moratorium on school takeovers
- Make Kindergarten and Pre-K portfolio system a pilot year



SALARY INCR

Every teacher needs a pay raise, plus full

A blue pencil character with arms and legs is holding a white sign with a green border that says "5%".

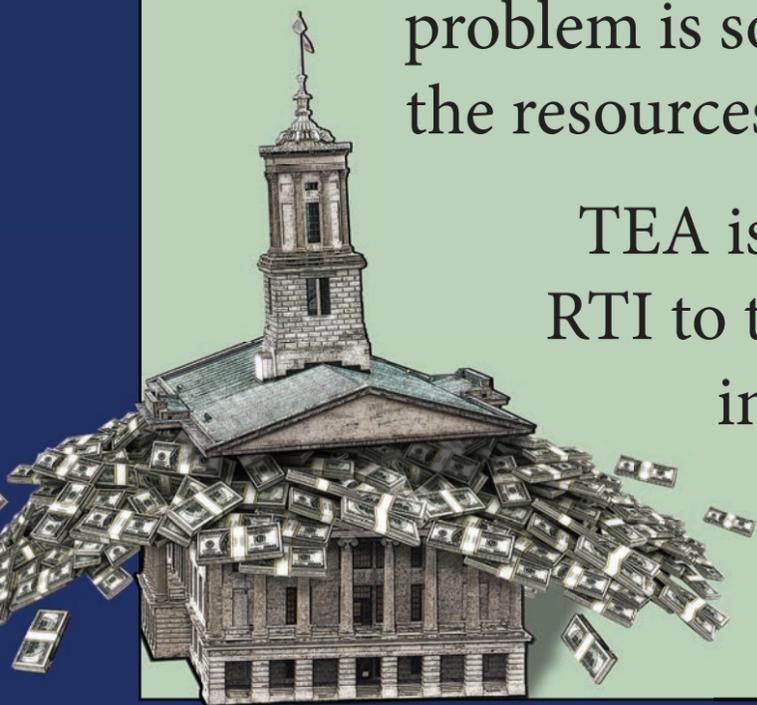
5%

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- 5%
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INCREASE STATE FUNDING

When a school has the necessary funding to properly implement RTI, it is a valuable program for students. The problem is so few districts have the resources to fully fund RTI.

TEA is proposing adding RTI to the BEP formula to increase funding for this important program.



EMPOWER

Collaborative confer teachers a seat at the their working condi

TEA lawsuits have p of the MOU and its protecting teachers' rights.

It's time to strengthen the law and add good-faith language

Join the fight for great public schools!



Top Priorities ★★

INCREASE FOR ALL

Teachers to receive a 5% increase in benefits funding.

\$25 million to teacher compensation

Full TCRS funding to keep Tennessee strongest in the nation

Health benefits increase (\$40 million)

10% increase in State Minimum Salary Schedule

TEACHERS

Empowering gives teachers a voice at the table in defining the future of our profession.

Strengthened the power of the profession in the state.



DEFEAT PRIVATIZATION

Dangerous privatization schemes will be back again this year. TEA's goals include:

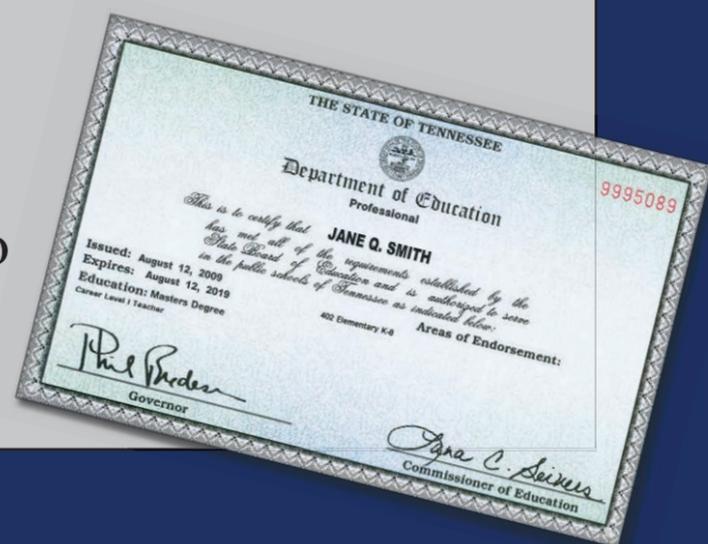
- Stop private school voucher bills
- Repeal charter school operators' access to student data
- Pass reverse parent trigger law to empower parents to take their school back from the ASD
- Sunset IEA special ed voucher program
- Eliminate SBE powers to authorize charters
- Sunset the ASD



STRENGTHEN PROFESSION

TEA is always looking for ways to improve our profession. We will be proposing:

- Creating an independent professional standards board of educators to make licensing decisions
- Strengthening local grievance power to limit State Board interference
- Streamline the discipline process to resolve issues faster



Sec. DeVos, privatization agenda not welcome in Tennessee

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is meeting a lot of resistance from Tennesseans.

At the end of November, DeVos came to Nashville to promote her school privatization agenda and warned teachers she is “not going anywhere.”

“In fact, I’m just getting started,” DeVos said at a Nashville conference that promoted vouchers and privatizing public schools. In response, parents and community groups traveled from across the state to protest DeVos’ Nashville visit and to support teachers in defending their schools against vouchers.

“The message was very clear that night – Sec. DeVos and her privatization schemes are not welcome in Tennessee,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “School voucher legislation failed in Tennessee five years in a row, yet DeVos shows up to Tennessee’s capitol to push more vouchers.”

Rally attendees at Riverfront Park in Nashville, including Tennessee State Rep. Mike Stewart (D-Nashville), chanted, “Nashville schools are not for sale! Johnson City schools are not for sale! Memphis schools are not for sale! Tennessee schools are not for sale!”

Prior to the Thursday night rally, the Metropolitan Nashville Education Association hosted a public screening of the documentary “Backpack Full of Cash,” on Wednesday evening to a standing-room-only crowd of public education advocates.

The film, which features Tennessee educators, TEA staff and Nashville elected

officials, details the real cost of efforts by people like Sec. DeVos to privatize America’s public schools. The film crew visited Tennessee during a TEA Civication day.

Every time Education Secretary Betsy DeVos threatens Tennessee public schools, she gets a healthy dose of protest not just from its citizens, but also its elected officials.

In the summer, Sen. Lamar Alexander phoned DeVos, advising her to back off from trying to change the course of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) he championed to reduce the federal government’s role in K-12 education.

Alexander, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, was reportedly furious when he found out a senior aide to DeVos was circumventing ESSA and trying to expand federal oversight of state ESSA implementation plans. When he saw the agency challenging state officials about setting sufficiently ambitious goals for students, he acted quickly.

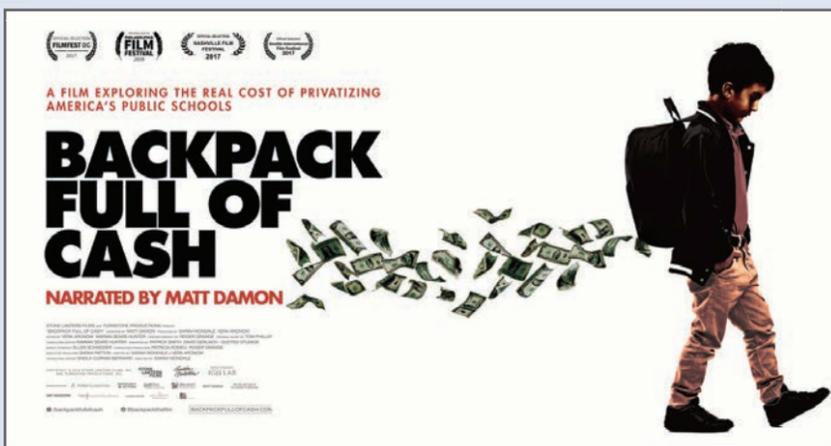
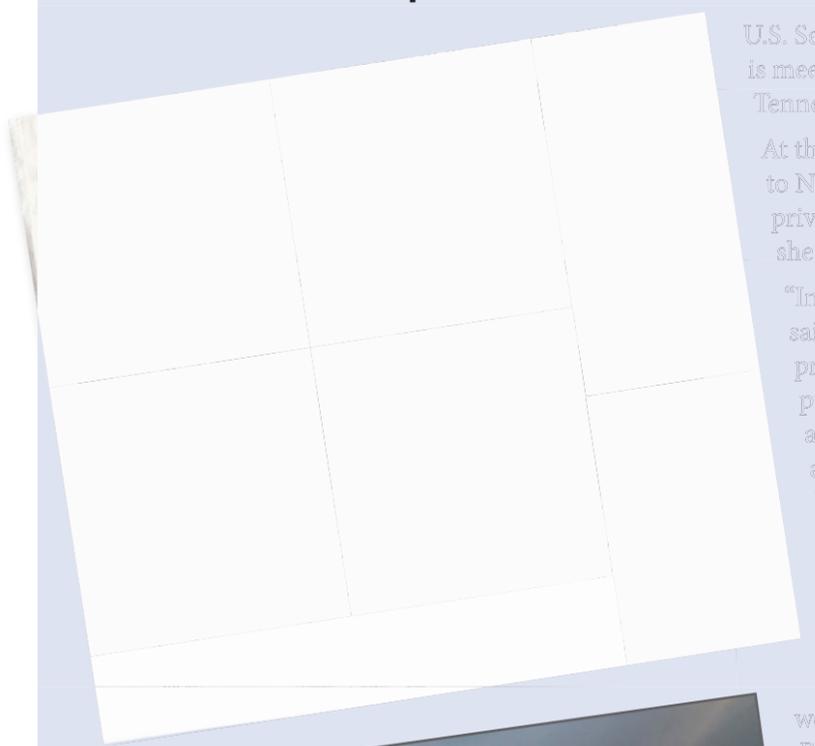
A former secretary of education and Tennessee governor, Alexander said a top DeVos aide “obviously hadn’t read the law, so I called the secretary and told her that,” according to Politico.

ESSA, which replaced the widely unpopular No Child Left Behind, explicitly bars the education secretary from defining state education goals for students. Alexander fought for this provision and when he saw the letter and spirit of the law weren’t being followed, he intervened.

While a DeVos spokesperson declined to provide specifics of the 15-minute telephone call between DeVos and Alexander in June, she told Politico that DeVos “and Senator Alexander agree that the Department should defer to the states.”

Alexander said he feels his intervention helped keep the Department of Education “from going off track,” according to Politico.

Tennesseans will continue to keep an eye on DeVos and push back when needed to protect Tennessee students and public schools.



TEA proposal would put license decisions in hands of experienced educators

Standards board from page 1

educator is in every classroom in the state is an incredible responsibility. It is a disservice to our children and our professional educators for licensing decisions to not be made by a board made up largely of trained, experienced education professionals.”

One of TEA’s legislative priorities for the 2018 session is to establish an independent professional standards board to oversee teacher licensure decisions. As proposed, the majority of the board would be composed of experienced educators.

The new independent standards board would hold the authority to determine the requirements

“Ensuring a qualified, committed

to earn and retain a teaching license. The board would also have the authority to rule on revoking a teacher’s license with cause.

“Teachers are not asking for anything radical here,” Crowder said. “Doctors, lawyers and even barbers are given the professional respect to have their licensure decisions made by boards of their peers. Teachers are merely asking to be given the same respect as many other professions in the state.”

This proposal comes on the heels of the State Board of Education attempting to abuse its powers and make inappropriate licensing decisions. TEA spent much of 2017 fighting the State Board against its creation of a new rule allowing it to revoke licenses without due process and sufficient

cause.

“We have had concerns for a long time about the State Board of Education’s lack of knowledge of the education profession and what is truly best for our students,” Crowder said. “The board’s attempt to increase its power to inappropriately revoke teacher licenses was the final straw. Our teachers deserve better. Their professional livelihood should not be in the hands of people who have never taught.”

TEA is asking all members to contact their legislators to ask for their support in establishing an independent professional standards board for teacher licensing decisions. It is the fair and right thing to do.

Contact TEA

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(615)476-3161 (Dalton), fax: (855)299-4968 (Campbell), (855)299-5837 (Dalton); Assns: Dept. of Higher Ed., Metropolitan Nashville, TN School For The Blind, MTSU, Murfreesboro City, NSCC, Rutherford, TSU. **District 14 — Maria Uffelman**, P.O. Box 99, Cumberland City, TN 37050; phone: (931)827-3333, fax: (855)299-4925; Assns: Austin Peay State University, Clarksville-Montgomery Co., Henry Co., Houston Co., Paris, Stewart Co., Weakley Co., UT-Martin. **District 15 — Tim Greene**, P.O. Box 354, Goodlettsville, TN 37070; phone: (615)864-1984, fax: (888)519-4879; Assns: Benton Co., Central, Cheatham Co., Clarksburg, Decatur Co., Dickson Co., Hickman Co., Humphreys Co., Huntingdon, Lewis Co., McKenzie, Perry Co., West Carroll. **District 16 — Lorrie Butler**, P.O. Box 387, Henderson, TN 38340; (731)989-4860, fax: (855)299-4591; Assns: Chester Co., Jackson-Madison Co., Jackson State Community College, Hardin Co., Henderson Co., Lexington, McNairy Co., West Tennessee School for the Deaf. **District 17 — Terri Jones**, P.O. Box 2140, Cordova, TN 38088; (901)258-3902,

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www.teateachers.org
www.nea.org

Salary increase
from page 1

Rebounding from the recession and making needed investments

The Great Recession hit states, and their schools, hard in 2008, and in the years since. Almost half of all states still haven't recovered the level of funding they provided prior to the financial meltdown, with neighboring states of Alabama and Kentucky continuing to see shortfalls almost a decade later (see graph at right).

Back in 2009, because of the fiscal health of the state and the work of then Gov. Phil Bredesen, with the demand that K-12 not be cut by overriding requirements in the BEP, Tennessee was in less of a school funding hole due to the recession than other states. Yet because of just how deep the recession went, for many years state budgets were flat and teacher salaries remained stagnant.

Tennessee has increased overall K-12 spending by more than 10 percent since the Great Recession, with most of that increase coming in the past four years. The state ranks eighth among all states for increases in state spending since 2008.

With Tennessee's economy growing and an unemployment rate at record lows, state revenue continues to grow rapidly. The Haslam administration and leaders in the General Assembly have passed budgets that substantially increased K-12 funds, with the largest share of the increases going to teacher compensation, more than \$700 million since 2014.



Gov. Bill Haslam has made strong K-12 investment.

Yet potential K-12 funding growth has not been tapped. The state has budgeted using conservative revenue estimates that were far lower than what the economy actually generated, creating surpluses totaling more than \$2 billion in the past three years.

Much of the surplus went into the state rainy day fund, and in some one-time expenditures such as the new state museum and archives.

State budgeting begins with past revenue collections and estimates of revenue growth through economic forecasts. The current budget year estimated revenue growth at more than 3 percent, a mark that has been exceeded as in years past, but not at such a high rate.

Adding the estimated growth in revenue during the next fiscal year, there is opportunity to increase state K-12 funding, funds for salaries.

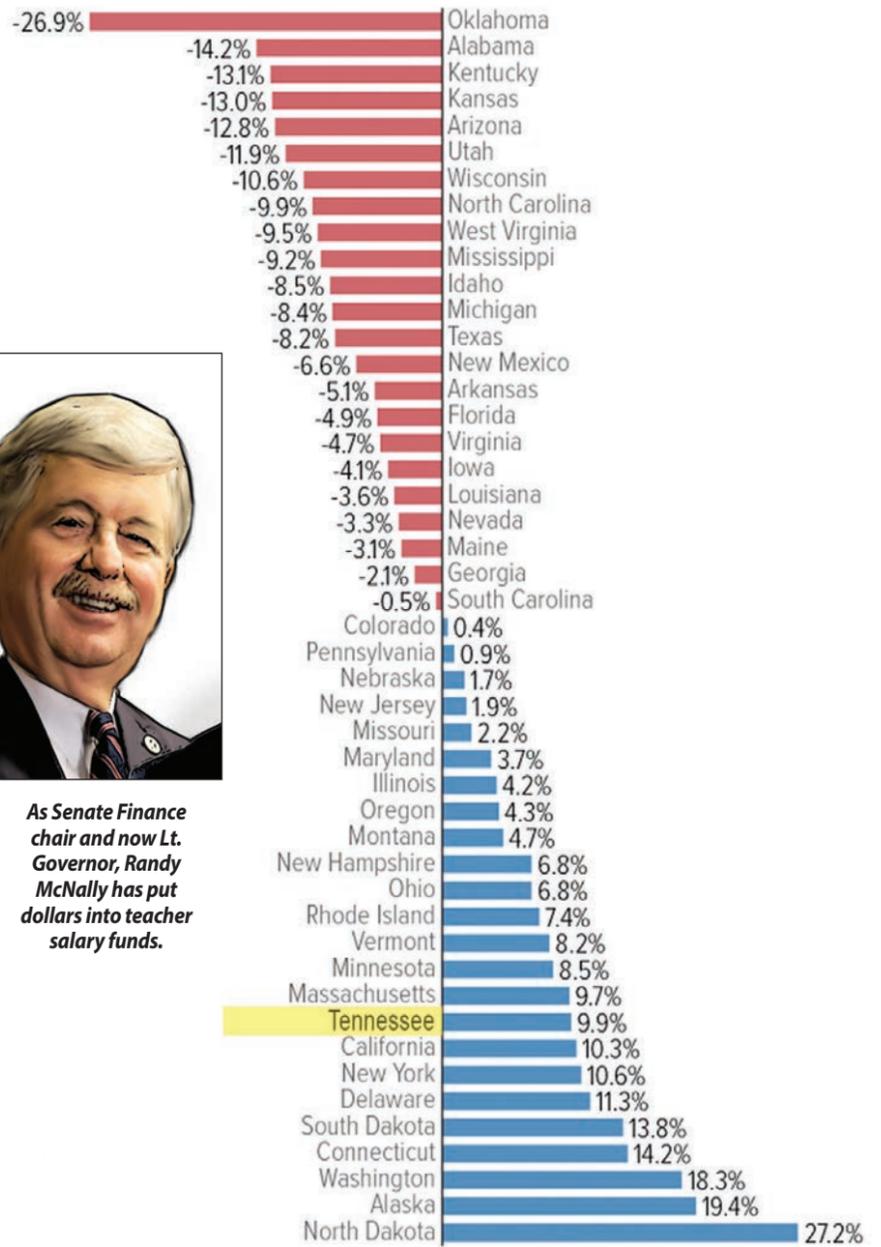
The state budget is currently being planned, and there are a lot of considerations for spending next year, including other areas of education not including salaries. But in a time when revenue is

available, TEA calls on the administration and legislators to add \$125 million to the BEP for teacher compensation, and take steps to ensure it all goes to teacher paychecks.

Let's hope Gov. Haslam, Lt. Gov McNally, and Speaker Harwell can finish the 110th General Assembly in style with education investment and helping make teacher pay worthy of the profession.

State General Funding Per Student Still Lower Than 2008 in 23 States, Tennessee Ranks Ninth For Increases Per Student

Percent change in state formula funding per student, inflation adjusted, fiscal years 2008-2017



As Senate Finance chair and now Lt. Governor, Randy McNally has put dollars into teacher salary funds.

Credit: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities

Reasons why some teachers have lesser (or no) raises, and the solution to the problem

BEP dollars make up approximately half of all K-12 funding, with local dollars comprising a third of school spending and the rest coming from federal sources such as Title I.

The BEP funding formula does not provide for enough teachers to meet state and federal guidelines, and so every system pays for a portion of the teaching staff solely from local funds.

In years where there were little or no increases in local school funding, the overall raises were less than the increases in state salary dollars, as those dollars were spread to all teachers.

Because of policy changes made by the administration, some systems were allowed to use salary dollars to cover health insurance, or to hire additional staff, reducing or eliminating pay raises in some systems.

The greatest cause in limiting potential raises in a time of record state increases was the 2014 decision by the State Board of Education to gut the State Minimum Salary Schedule for teachers. The schedule changed from five categories to

two, and from 20 steps to four, reducing its overall power to lift all teacher salaries, but especially hitting the lowest paid teachers working in rural Tennessee.

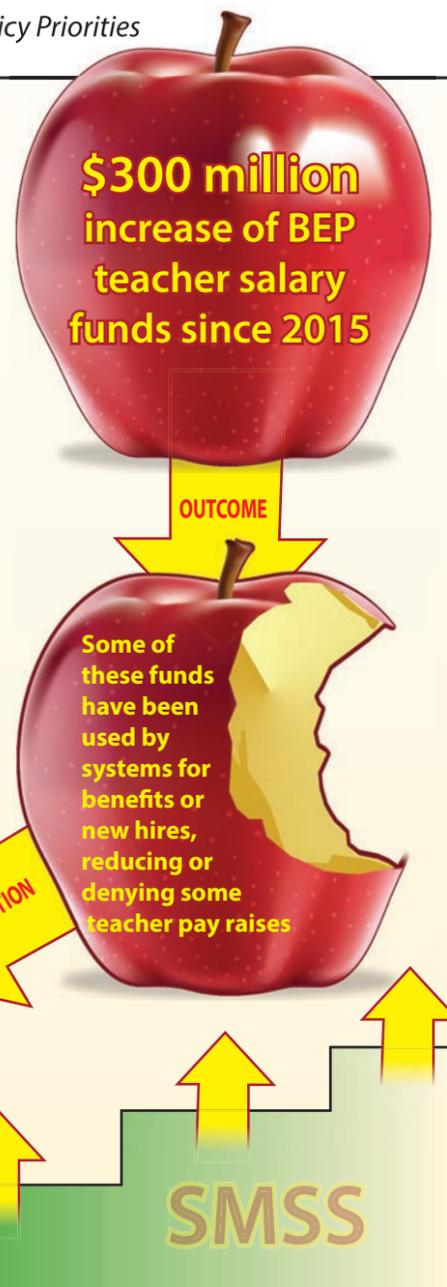
To make matters worse, for several years the state board decided to raise the reduced schedule by only half the percentage of the increase that was appropriated in the state budget, further reducing the requirement for pay raises.

Last May, House Speaker Beth Harwell and House Finance Chairman Charles Sargent sent a letter to the board demanding it raise the schedule by 4 percent, the same increase as in the BEP, and the board complied.

Preliminary research indicates overall compensation in rural counties improved greater than in years past, with some teachers getting the first raise they have seen in years. Even with the gains, the inequity between rural and suburban/urban teacher pay is as large as it has ever been, and it will require more pressure on the board to keep the schedule on pace with state increases.



Speaker Beth Harwell has been a strong proponent of improving teacher pay, and has been very concerned that rural teachers are not receiving the benefits of state increases.



TNReady questions from page 1

“We’ve put an immense amount of pressure on my educators, and when I share with you what I think you’d get a ‘one’ on, I’m speaking...from what I’m hearing from 99.9 percent of my educators, my principals and my school superintendents,” Faison said.

Government Operations does not normally look at education issues, but when problems surfaced for TNReady last spring, House Speaker Beth Harwell requested the oversight committee question the department and the testing vendor. Faison and Harwell have asked TEA about the testing system, and the chair provided an opportunity to present information the department doesn’t share.

TEA sees three very big problems with TNReady: the validity of TVAAS data used in evaluations; the stark contrast between high achievement in ACT and graduation rates, and the very low proficiency scores the state reported for all Tennessee students; and the lack of transparency in the new testing system.

Wrye explained TVAAS is a statistical estimate that uses standard deviations to determine scores between one through five. There are low confidence intervals at each point in the scale, and the scores are not fixed points but are recalculated in later years as more data is added to the statistical model.

“Imagine I’m a pollster and you are a candidate,” Wrye

told lawmakers. “I tell you my poll says you are up 10 points, but then I tell you ‘plus or minus 32 percent.’ That is what most TVAAS scores mean.”

Wrye then noted the statistical model is supposedly based on three years of test data as a means to reduce volatility, and showed a long line of apples of past TCAP tests. Then there was an orange for TNReady.

“The tests are so radically different, it really is apples and oranges. How well a model can take in all the variables of students adapting to this new test is questionable,” Wrye said.

The problems are compounded by the failure of TNReady in 2015-16. For most teachers and students, there is not three years of data to generate an estimate. “Apple, then nothing, then orange is a real problem. The model doesn’t know what student growth was in 2016, but they spit out TVAAS numbers just the same.”

Wrye then used Williamson County to show the disconnect between TNReady and actual student outcomes, indicating real problems in the structure of the test. In 2017, Williamson County had 83 percent of all students go on to college, with an average 25.3 ACT score and 75 percent qualifying for the Hope Scholarship.

TNReady indicated that 54 percent of all Williamson students were below grade level in Math. Wrye countered that 80 percent of all system students

scored a 22 or better in the Math portion of the ACT, the benchmark for college readiness.

“You can’t square the radically different outcomes, either the ACT or TNReady is wrong,” Wrye said, noting the ACT has 80 years of experience measuring college readiness, and TNReady has two.

And if TNReady is wrong about Williamson County, then it is wrong about every system in the state.

McQueen and her panel walked through the misscored tests and how TNReady now correlates with NAEP, the national test used to rank states. Her panel did not go into detail on issues with cut scores and other data problems outlined by the TEA presentation.

Rep. Antonio Parkinson was unimpressed. “What you’re telling me is that I run a race, and then you’ll decide after what a winning time is. That makes no sense to me.”

Faison summed up the testing situation in Tennessee and next steps.

“What we’re doing is driving the teachers crazy. They’re scared to death to teach anything other than get prepared for this test. They’re not even enjoying life right now. They’re not even enjoying teaching because we’ve put so much emphasis on this evaluation,” said Faison. “So I think you’re going to see movement in the legislature this year to detach the evaluation portion of the TNReady test from the teachers and the students.”

ACT has 80+ years measuring college readiness and tracking student outcomes. **TNReady has barely two.**

ACT says Williamson County students are college and career ready. **TNReady says they are behind.**

One of them is flat wrong. If it’s wrong in Williamson, it’s wrong everywhere.

Williamson County data

2017

On-time graduation - 95.6%
Going directly to college - 83%
Average ACT score - 25.3

80% of all students scored a 22 or better on ACT math, the mark of college readiness.

TEA’s TNReady next steps:

- » **Rethink penalties and stakes**
Students and teachers can be challenged and held accountable without high-stakes decisions based on test scores hanging over their heads.
- » **Publish aggressively**
Test transparency will identify any issues with the questions and answers, and work toward establishing trust in the assessment.
- » **Correlate outcomes**
Scores should measure students’ knowledge, instead of punishing students who are not in the top 5 percent.

TEA pushes pilot year for kindergarten, Pre-K portfolio system

Kindergarten portfolio from page 1

standards led to much confusion and stress in kindergarten classrooms across the state.

As TEA members spoke out in school board meetings and on social media, TEA launched an extensive survey asking all Tennessee kindergarten teachers to weigh in on the previous and new standards, their implementation, and asking teachers whether each individual standard is age- and developmentally appropriate.

“The survey results and anecdotal evidence from kindergarten classrooms across the state underscore the need to implement this year’s portfolio standards as a pilot year,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “Legislators we’ve spoken to support this notion and we hope the Tennessee Department of Education recognizes this need as well.”

TEA will present the survey results to the department in the coming weeks. As the 110th General Assembly kicks into gear in January, TEA will be asking kindergarten teachers to reach out to their elected officials with their stories about the difficulties associated with the new portfolio

standards and the need to implement them as a pilot.

“We know the new standards threw everyone for a loop, even those who refuse to admit it,” said Natasha Patchen, a Knox Co. kindergarten teacher whose presentation to the Knox Co. school board in the fall was a viral hit. “Teachers worked hard and accepted the previous standards, and nobody expected to end up with the mess we’re dealing with now.”

Of more than 1,200 Tennessee kindergarten teachers responding to the survey, more than 56 percent said last year’s kindergarten portfolio system worked well and 65 percent said it measured student achievement. While the majority of teachers believe this previous portfolio system reduced instructional time, they thought it was well developed and appropriate for their students.

That contrasts sharply with the new kindergarten standards and portfolio system rolled out by the state in August. A majority of teachers (68 percent) said they were not properly informed and trained by the district in the new portfolio system, while only 14 percent felt the training was adequate.

“When an overwhelming majority of teachers polled received little to no training on the new standards, it would be highly inappropriate and demoralizing to measure their effectiveness based on those standards,” Gray said.

The TEA survey found that 87 percent of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that new assessments to measure student growth are easy to create and implement during an instructional day. Less than 1 percent of respondents strongly agreed with that statement and only 4 percent agreed.

A very small minority (only 3 percent of respondents) believe the new online kindergarten portfolio system works well, while 42 percent agree or strongly disagree and 37 percent are unsure.

“Most teachers are confused by poor design and implementation of the new portfolio system and standards, and the lack of proper training,” Gray said. “We hope the State Department and the legislature hear teachers’ concerns and implement this year’s standards as a pilot. When 76 percent of kindergarten teachers tell you they don’t believe the new portfolio system is developmentally appropriate and will properly measure student growth and achievement, you know something is wrong.”