

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

LEGISLATIVE REPORT | January 1, 2021 | VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1



2021 Legislative Priorities
See poster on pages 4-5.
Please hang in your
break room
at school!



BONUS and a RAISE FOR ALL OUR EXTRA DAYS

We've done our job. Gov. Lee must do his.

Tennessee's educators have gone to unimaginable lengths to keep instruction going and students engaged during this disastrous pandemic.

The Lee administration pushed for schools to reopen during the summer spike in COVID cases, sending educators into the pandemic with sporadic guidance and supplies to mitigate risk and disruption. Educators did their job. Now it is time for the governor to do his.

TEA calls for an educator bonus this school year and a substantial raise for next year. With state revenue remaining strong (see story at right), billions in cash reserves and a federal stimulus just passed, the state has the resources for a bonus and a raise.

Bonus and a raise
cont. page 8

The state has the money.
We've earned it. TEA's proposal:

\$3,000 BONUS

Direct payment this school year for every certified personnel working in school systems. 76,000 eligible.
One-time cost: \$228 million

\$2,000 BONUS

Payment this school year for every classified personnel working in school systems. 42,000 eligible.
One-time cost: \$84 million

10% ED RAISE

An increase in the BEP Instructional Component for current educators in FY22. Recurring cost: \$292 million

Revenue is soaring. The fight will be to get it into schools.

In the first four months of the 2020-2021 fiscal year, state general fund tax collections have come in far higher than expected, exceeding budget estimates by a record \$557.1 million.

Last June, the General Assembly passed a budget eliminating most state spending increases in anticipation of COVID-related revenue loss, including \$117 million for a proposed 4% teachers' raise. The expected revenue downturn hasn't occurred.

"Last spring, the pandemic drove up unemployment and dropped tax collections. TEA advocated tapping the vast state cash reserves for an educator bonus, but revenue uncertainty carried the day," said TEA Chief Lobbyist Jim Wrye. "We have far less uncertainty now. State revenue is strong and available. We'll need a united push to get it for education. Knowing the facts is key."

Revenue
cont. page 7

Evaluations and state testing are not valid, reliable or a good use of time during COVID

Standardized tests must be reliable and valid. The same is true with an evaluation system for teachers and schools. Conditions must be uniform. Assessment areas are connected to instruction. All who participate should be treated equally.

None of these occur in a pandemic.

TEA is calling on the administration and General Assembly to suspend TNReady and spring EOCs, and halt the evaluation system for the rest of the school year. TEA has legislation ready to achieve these goals.

"None of the state-approved teacher evaluation models deal with the reality of instructing students in a pandemic," said TEA President Beth Brown. "Remote instruction, engaging students while socially distanced and masked, and overcoming disruptions of quarantine and sickness are just a fraction of what teachers are coping with and not remotely addressed by the evaluation system. Why are we forcing administrators and educators to go through mandatory observations when there is no validity to it? Time would be better spent working with students."

Testing and Evaluations
cont. page 8



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Policymakers can ease educators' tremendous burden

By TEA President Beth Brown



We have all heard the expression “There’s no tired like end-of-the-year teacher tired.” I think it is safe to say that has been proven categorically untrue by our experiences this year. There is no tired like “trying to survive a pandemic while balancing a significantly increased workload and caring for one’s own family” tired.

Yes, educators are tired. But we’re doing our jobs, just as we have since before the onset of the pandemic and just as we will continue to do after the pandemic passes. There are steps to be taken that would make our jobs easier, though.

Our jobs would be easier if standardized testing were suspended this year. The weeks traditionally consumed with administering standardized tests would be better spent offering instruction to help mitigate the disruption to students’ learning experienced this year. Moreover, standardized testing conducted this year will yield exceptionally flawed data that is of no practical use.

There is no tired like “trying to survive a pandemic while balancing a significantly increased workload and caring for one’s own family” tired.

Our jobs would be easier if evaluations were suspended this year. There is no state-approved evaluation model that can fairly and accurately measure educators’ performance during a pandemic. Instead of conducting unreasonable observations,

administrators could better use their time identifying and securing the resources required to meet students’ increased needs.

Our jobs would be easier if everyone recognized that pandemic teaching and learning is not the same as typical teaching and learning. As we continue to experience disruption to learning, it is imperative that educators address students’ mental and emotional health needs as we prioritize the skills students need before moving on to the next grade. It is unrealistic to expect students and educators to cover all customary content while surviving these extraordinary times.

Our jobs would be easier if educators did not have to worry about the negative financial impact on our households caused by exhausting our sick leave due to COVID exposure and/or infection quarantine.

Our jobs would be easier if school districts had increased funding for nurses, counselors, and other educators to help meet the increased physical, emotional, and academic needs of our students.

Our jobs would be easier if educators were recognized as the professionals that we are. No one knows better than we do how our students are faring and what their needs are. Educators have the training, skill, and passion to overcome the disruption to students’ learning, but we must first survive the pandemic.

For anyone who has not yet seen this message circulating social media, please remember that “2020 teaching is not forever teaching. We will hug our students again. We will turn the pages of an amazing book together. We will see each other’s smiles.”

And you know what else we will do again? We will help our students catch up on their unfinished learning because we are professionals, and we do our jobs.

It is time that the policymakers in Nashville do theirs: suspend standardized testing and evaluations, increase funding and resources for our public schools, and respect educators’ professionalism.

Educators have done their part, now it’s legislators’ turn

By TEA Interim Executive Director Terrance J. Gibson



As we gear up for 2021 General Assembly, legislators and policymakers need to be reminded over and over that throughout the past nine months educators have continued to do their jobs.

Educators are serving their communities whether buildings are physically open or not. Educators are ensuring students have food to eat, communicating with families and creating virtual curriculum, all while tackling the unanticipated issues that come with teaching during a pandemic.

Though it may be some time before we truly know the long-term academic impacts of COVID-19 on our teaching and learning environment, what we do know is that educators have continued to do their jobs through it all.

Resource gaps that existed prior to the spring tornadoes and global pandemic have now been amplified by this medical crisis that has also created a financial crisis. As the legislature convenes, it is pivotal that we as educators are engaged through advocacy efforts to strengthen the awareness of the roles educators continue to play and the critical financial needs of public education.

While some question the effectiveness of our public schools as many districts bounced between in-person, virtual and hybrid learning environment, the one constant has been the commitment and focus of Tennessee educators. In all instances, educators continued to teach and support students as they fought through one disruption after another over the past nine months.

We must educate and remind legislators that it is their turn to serve their communities. They can do this by creating the funding to support educator raises and bonuses and providing relief from disruptive standardized testing and evaluations.

While some shifted to online instructions, our schools never closed. Educators proved that lack of access to buildings or technological resources would not stop them from engaging their students academically and supporting the social and emotional needs of students.

Now it is time for those who took the oath of public office to do their jobs and support Tennessee students and educators.

The General Assembly now has the opportunity and ability to recognize and reward the dedication of Tennessee educators by funding educator pay raises and bonuses.

In addition, legislators can limit further disruptions to instruction by suspending testing and evaluations. Waiving LOEs is not enough. Only suspension of state testing and teacher evaluations will protect much-needed time to teach.

WE must educate and remind legislators that it is their turn to serve their communities. They can do this by creating the funding to support educator raises and bonuses and providing relief from disruptive standardized testing and evaluations.

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE (USPS 17201) is published nine times, biweekly, mid-January through mid-May, by the Tennessee Education Association, 801 Second Avenue North, Nashville TN 37201-1099. Periodicals Postage Paid at Nashville, TN, and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE**, 801 Second Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37201-1099. The subscription price of \$6.89 is allocated from annual membership dues of \$258.00 for active members; \$129.00 for associate, education support and staff members; \$16.00 for retired members; and \$10.00 for student members. Member of State Education Association of Communicators (SEAC).

MANAGING EDITOR: Amanda Chaney
achaney@tnea.org
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Jim Wrye
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & PUBLISHER:
Terrance Gibson

Tennessee Education Association

801 Second Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37201-1099
Telephone: (615) 242-8392,
Toll Free: (800) 342-8367, (800) 342-8262
Fax: (615) 259-4581
Website: www.teateachers.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT: Beth Brown* (800) 342-8367
VICE PRESIDENT: Tanya Coats* (865) 308-2787
SECRETARY-TREASURER: Terrance Gibson
(615) 242-8392
DISTRICT 1 Joe Crabtree (423) 794-9357
DISTRICT 2 Michele Bowman (865) 679-6523
DISTRICT 3 Peter Blair (865) 806-2072
DISTRICT 4 Patricia Fontenot-Ridley (865) 406-1432
DISTRICT 5 Jeanette Omarkhail (423) 413-9114
DISTRICT 6 Lori Cleveland (423) 488-5826
DISTRICT 7 Brent Estes (931) 205-5297

DISTRICT 7 Emily Mitchell (615) 796-4093
DISTRICT 8 Arielle Dyer (919) 810-2226
DISTRICT 9 Paula Pendergrass (615) 604-6544
DISTRICT 10 Samantha Craig (615) 969-6935
DISTRICT 10 Brenda Munusamy (931) 433-0918
DISTRICT 11 John Friend (256) 275-7662
DISTRICT 11 Fred Riley (615) 525-9303
DISTRICT 12 Doris Morton (731) 394-3233
DISTRICT 12 David Ross (931) 305-8397
DISTRICT 13 Paige Nell (731) 607-3820
DISTRICT 14 Renee Baum (901) 604-2035
DISTRICT 15 Neshellda Johnson (901) 857-6042
ADMINISTRATOR EAST Shaunna Foster (865) 591-3536
ADMINISTRATOR MIDDLE Janolyn King (615) 203-5920
ADMINISTRATOR WEST Heather Heard-Davis
(901) 230-4881
HIGHER EDUCATION Clinton Smith (731) 223-0080
BLACK CLASSROOM TEACHER EAST LaDawn Hudgins
(423) 384-3585
BLACK CLASSROOM TEACHER MIDDLE
Kenneth Martin (615) 243-4131

BLACK CLASSROOM TEACHER WEST LaTia Watson
(901) 500-1006
STATE SPECIAL SCHOOLS Ginger Henderson
(865) 548-4615
NEW TEACHER Jessica Barker (901) 282-9123
ESP Jacqueline Burton (931) 220-4384
TN NEA DIRECTOR Tiffany Reed (901) 416-2530
TN NEA DIRECTOR Randall Woodard (615) 594-5632
STEAMEMBER Derrick Sanders, Jr. (513) 418-8973
TN RETIRED Ron Pendergrass (931) 206-5331

AT LARGE ASPIRING DIRECTOR ON NEA BOARD
CarVaughn Page (770) 743-2585

TEA HEADQUARTERS STAFF

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Terrance
Gibson; ASST. EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS: Steve
McCloud, Jim Wrye; DIRECTOR OF FINANCE &
INFORMATION SYSTEMS: Sylvia Claiborne; UNISERV
FIELD MANAGERS: Jamey Merritt, Leigh Phillips;
MEMBERSHIP PROCESSING MANAGER & TECH

SPECIALIST: Vacant; STAFF ATTORNEYS: John
Allen, Virginia A. McCoy; GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
COORDINATOR: Drew Sutton; COMMUNICATIONS
COORDINATORS: Amanda Chaney, Alexei Smirnov;
INSTRUCTIONAL ADVOCACY & PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS: Alexandra
Bonner, Tommie Leaders; ADVOCACY HOTLINE
COORDINATORS: Mary Campbell, Cynthia Wood.

UniServ Staff contact information
can be found on page 6.

TEA survey shows educators struggling under grueling conditions, leveling harsh criticism at state handling of COVID-19 pandemic

A TEA survey found public school educators are close to a breaking point due to the stresses of teaching in a pandemic, working longer hours with little or no training or support—often with inadequately supplied classrooms—and enduring the daily threat of infection.

More than 7,000 teachers, education support professionals, administrators and certified personnel participated in the confidential TEA survey on working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. An overwhelming majority of those polled said their work is more or much more difficult than in past years. Eighty-four percent of teachers, 78% of administrators and 67% of certified professionals said they are working more hours than in the past.

The majority of those surveyed said they have been given new assignments and responsibilities this school year that differ from their training and professional practices, while receiving some or no training and support.

“Tennessee public school educators have been staying strong for months, taking the challenges of teaching in a pandemic head-on, but they are at a breaking point with no solutions in sight,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “As the survey showed, most public school staff are working longer hours with daily disruptions and changing tasks, but with little guidance, support or tangible encouragement from the state. The state must do more to assist with the burdens of teaching in a pandemic.”

A growing number of educators are being diagnosed with COVID-19. A positive diagnosis is more likely among administrators and education support professionals (16% in each category). Thirteen percent of librarians,

counselors and other certified personnel, and 12% of certified teachers, said they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 this school year. The rate of reported infections in the survey match TEA tracking data which shows educators having significantly higher infection rates than the general population and in the communities they serve. TEA estimates more than 13,000 public school educators have contracted COVID since July.

The concern of infection and the disruptions in teaching caused by the pandemic are taking a psychological toll on educators, with 84% reporting a negative emotional impact and half reporting being strongly impacted.

“Educators are front-line personnel in this pandemic. From the stress of taking care of students and overcoming the disruptions the virus causes, to dealing with the anxiety of being infected and bringing it home to family and loved ones, these past months have been exhausting mentally, physically, and emotionally,” Brown said.

While educators are critical of the school districts’ response to the pandemic, the harshest criticism is leveled at the state government’s response, with 74% of respondents rating the state response poor and only 19% finding it adequate.

“It is a fact our school districts have been left with little guidance from the state, from how to slow infections or close schools to provide resources to overcome disruptions. The survey shows the high level of frustration with state leadership,” Brown said. “We’re 10 months into the pandemic, and one-third of teachers are still less than adequately supplied with personal protective equipment and cleaning materials.

Most educators have once again dipped into their own pockets to purchase all the necessary cleaning supplies for their classrooms, and there is no excuse for that.”

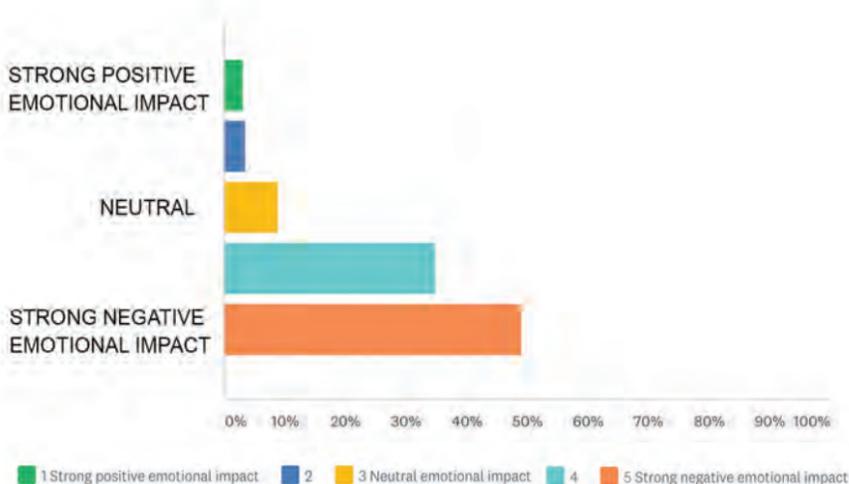
As TEA has been telling policymakers, virtual learning requires enormous time and preparation, and the survey confirms it.

Of those who responded, 79% said they are working more hours than in past years, with 31% working 60 or more hours, 24% working 50 hours and 20% working 55 hours a week. Forty-seven percent of those educators said their work is much more difficult than in past years, while 36% described it as more difficult. An overwhelming 91% of educators teaching virtually said they have been given new assignments and responsibilities that differ from their training and professional practices.

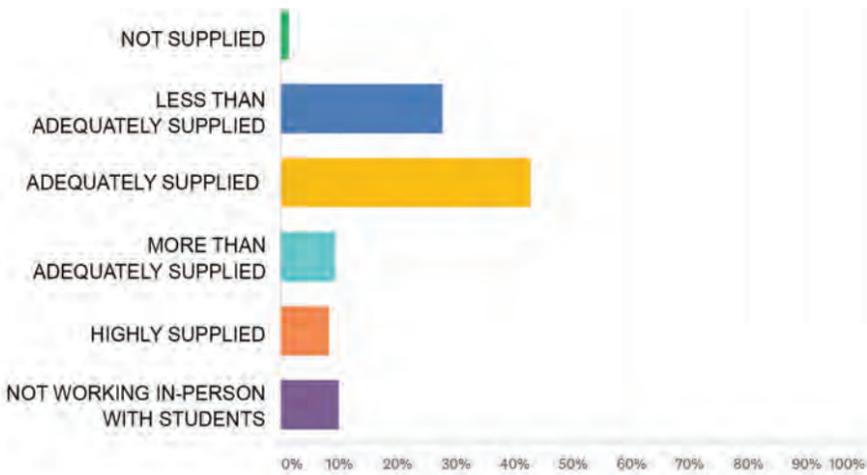
Of the educators working in-person with students, 74% said they are working more hours than in past years, with 30% working 50 hours a week, 20% working 60 or more hours, and 16% working 55 hours a week. Fifty-two percent of those educators said their work is much more difficult than in past years, while 40% said it is more difficult. The majority of educators teaching students in-person said they are asked daily to perform duties beyond the scope of their job position or description.

“The survey confirms that we’ve worked more hours under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, going above and beyond for our students. The administration and legislature must acknowledge the sacrifices we’ve been making and take concrete steps to give us the support and recognition we have earned,” Brown said.

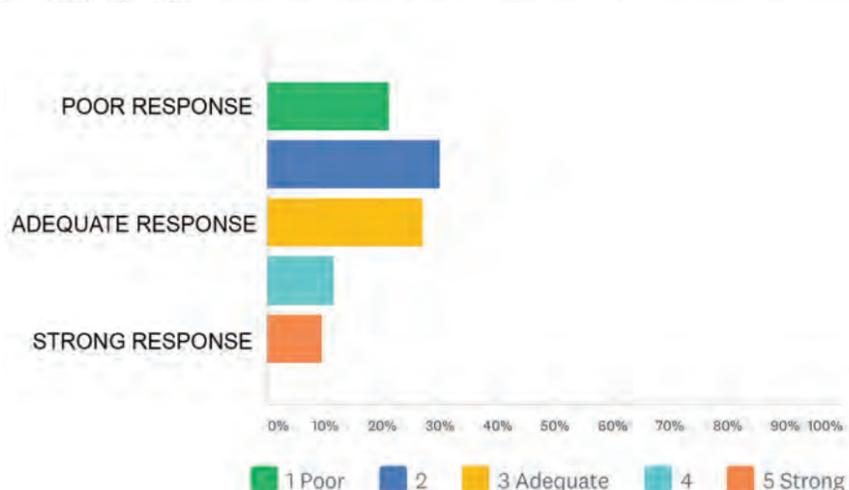
On a scale of 1-5, rate the emotional impact of working in public education during the COVID pandemic, with 1 indicating a strong positive emotional impact and 5 indicating a strong negative emotional impact.



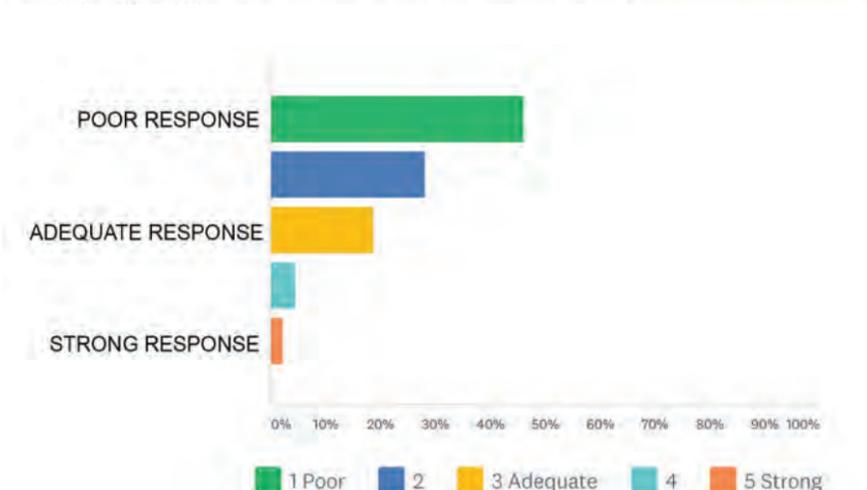
If you are working in-person with students, how well is your classroom, school or other work site (such as a bus) supplied with personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and other anti-viral materials?



On a scale of 1-5, rate the school district response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1 indicating a poor response and 5 a strong response.



On a scale of 1-5, rate state government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1 indicating a poor response and 5 a strong response.



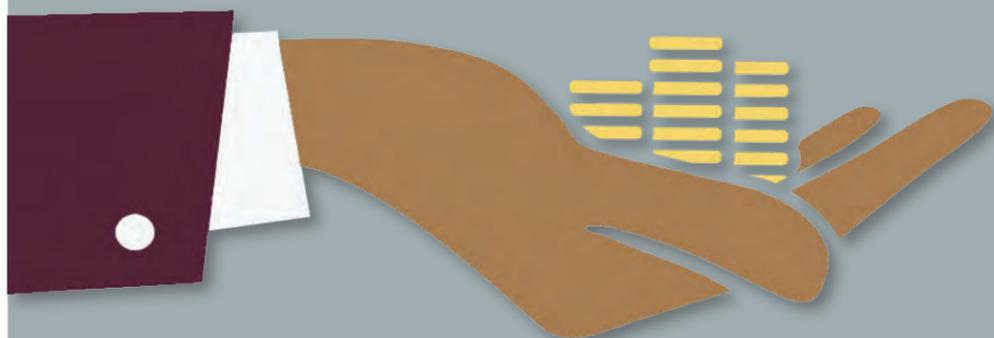
2021 TEA Legis

BONUS & A RAISE FOR EDUCATORS

Tennessee educators stepped up and have gone above and beyond during the pandemic. Teachers have earned a bonus and a raise.

TEA is advocating for the following:

- \$3,000 raise for all certified personnel,
- \$2,000 raise for all classified personnel, and
- 10% teacher raise in BEP funding.



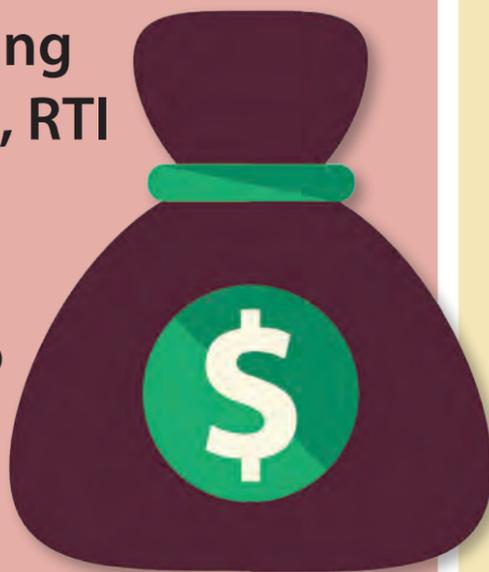
Educators have done our part. It is time for state leaders to do theirs.

INCREASE FUNDING

Our public schools need the state to step up and provide the resources needed to support students.

This includes increased funding for school nurses, counselors, RTI specialists and more.

Under no circumstances should funding be cut due to fluctuations in enrollment during the pandemic.



CHANGE EV

The flaws of our decar system are apparent to administrators. It's time a system that improve provides valuable fee

TEA advocates for classroom-experie committee to crea for new and effect laws.



TEAteachers.org/JOIN

Relative Priorities

SUSPEND TESTING & EVALUATION

Students and educators are facing unprecedented disruption in learning this year. It is irresponsible to move forward with state testing and teacher evaluations.

TEA is advocating for the following:

- Suspension of TNReady and end-of-course testing,
- Suspension of evaluation system, including any remaining observations,
- Tenure offered by districts to eligible fifth year teachers, and
- Suspension of LOE scores for 2020-2021.



EVALUATION SYSTEM

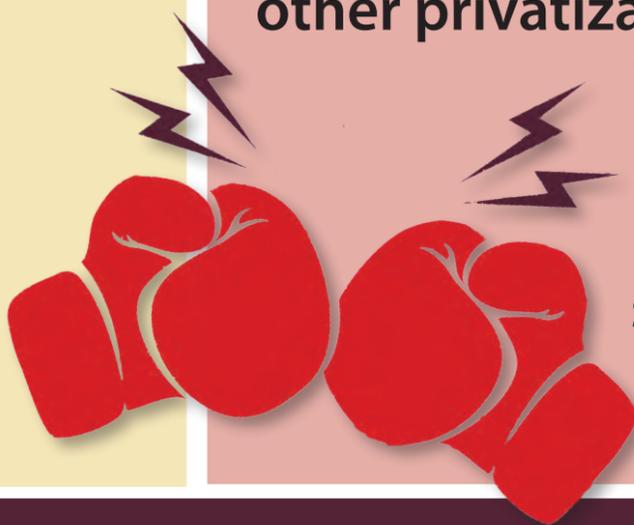
Outdated evaluation system for teachers and administrators. Time to redesign the system to support teaching and learning. Feedback.

Conduct a diverse and independent review to create a framework for a fair and objective evaluation system.

FIGHT PRIVATIZATION

Tennessee public schools need strong financial support from the state now more than ever. Diverting any amount of money to fund private schools or other privatization schemes would be

irresponsible as our public schools work to educate and protect all Tennessee students.



[/TennesseeEA](#)

[@TEA_teachers](#)

[/TEA_teachers](#)



2021 Virtual Civication



The pandemic has disrupted or put an end to many annual traditions, but there is still a critical need for educators to advocate for our schools and our profession.

Join educators from across the state in participating in TEA's 2021 Virtual Civication.

Hearing directly from educators in their districts can make the difference in how legislators vote on important issues impacting our classrooms and our profession.

Stay tuned for more details on how you can participate!



NEW CONTENT

Online Professional Development At Your Fingertips

1. Engaging Content

Our engaging online courses and webinars help to make earning PDPs a more rewarding experience for you.

2. Education Tracker

The tracker tool automatically records and monitors your PDPs learning progress, as well as storing all your course completion certificates.

3. Works Around You

Having constant online access to the content gives you the flexibility and convenience of being able to fit learning around your busy schedule.

Access TEA Education Portal Now!

<http://www.teateachers.org/user/login>

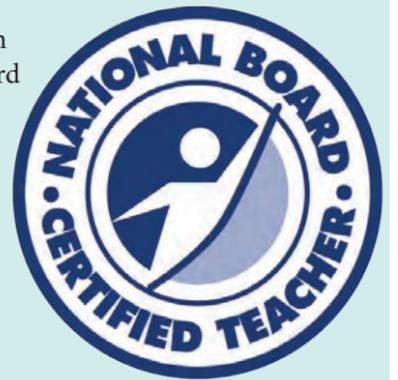
Log in as a TEA member. Use "tea-member" as log-in name and your membership ID as password. You can find your 10-digit member number on your TEA membership card or the address label of TEACH or the TEA PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE. Go to RESOURCES > PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS, and click on the EDUCATION PORTAL link.

Virtual NBPTS Jump Start seminars offered for TEA members

Get a jump start on your National Board certification with a series of virtual seminars offered exclusively to TEA members.

Virtual Saturday sessions will be held Jan. 16, 23 and 30. The sessions will cover Component 2, exploring differentiation in instruction; Component 3, understanding teaching practice and learning environment; and Component 4, understanding effective and reflective practitioner.

Sign up online at TEAteachers.org/NBPTS-jump-start-seminar.



Contact TEA

Tennessee Education Association
801 Second Avenue N., Nashville, TN 37201-1099
(615) 242-8392, (800) 342-8367
FAX (615) 259-4581

UniServ Coordinators

District 1 — Harry Farthing, P.O. Box 298, Elizabethton, TN 37644; phone: (423)262-8035, fax: (866)379-0949; Assns: Bristol, Carter Co., East Tennessee State University, Elizabethton, Johnson City, Johnson Co., Kingsport, Northeast State Community College, Sullivan Co., Washington Co. **District 2 — Jennifer Gaby**, P.O. Box 70, Afton, TN 37616; (423)234-0700, fax: (855)299-0723; Assns: Cocke Co., Greene Co., Greeneville, Hamblen Co., Hancock Co., Hawkins Co., Jefferson Co., Newport, Rogersville, Unicoi Co. **District 3 — Tina Parlier**, P.O. Box 70288, Knoxville, TN 37938-0288, (865)688-1175, fax: (866)518-3104; Assns: Campbell Co., Claiborne Co., Grainger Co., Oneida, Scott Co., Sevier

Co., TSD, Union Co., Walters State Community College. **District 4 — Jason White**, KCEA, 2411 Magnolia Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37917; (865)522-9793, fax: (865)522-9866; Assns: Knox, Pellissippi State Comm. College, UT-Knoxville. **District 5 — Tom Hopkins**, P.O. Box 5502, Oak Ridge, TN 37831; (423)416-7330, fax: (855)301-8366; Assns: Alcoa, Anderson Co., Blount Co., Clinton, Maryville, Monroe Co., Oak Ridge, Polk Co., Sweetwater. **District 6 — Terra Osborn**, tosborn@tnea.org; Assns: Cannon Co., Cumberland Co., Cumberland University, DeKalb Co., Lebanon, Putnam Co., Van Buren Co., Warren Co., White Co., Wilson Co., TTU. **District 7 — Rhonda Jett**, HCEA 4655 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga, TN 37411; (423)485-9535, fax: (423)485-9512; Assns: Bradley Co., Chattanooga State Community College, Cleveland, Hamilton Co., UT-Chattanooga. **District 8 — Gloria Johnson**, (615) 478-1097; Assns: Athens City, Etowah, Fentress Co., Lenior City, Loudon Co., McMinn Co., Meigs Co., Morgan Co., Overton Co., Rhea-Dayton Co., Roane Co., York Institute.

District 9 — Jackie Pope, 2326 Valley Grove Dr., Murfreesboro, TN 37128; phone: (615)898-1060, fax: (855) 301-8214, Assns: Bedford Co., Bledsoe Co., Coffee Co., Fayetteville City, Franklin Co., Grundy Co., Lincoln Co., Manchester, Marion Co., Moore Co., Motlow State Community College, Sequatchie Co., Tullahoma. **District 10 — Jeff Garrett**, P.O. Box 1326, Lebanon, TN 37088-1326; (615)630-2605, fax (855)320-8755; Assns: Clay Co., Jackson Co., Macon Co., Pickett Co., Robertson Co., Smith Co., Sumner Co., Trousdale Co. **District 11 — Antoinette Lee**, P.O. Box 1412, Antioch, TN 37013; (615)308-5293, fax: (888)519-7331; Assns: FSSD, Marshall Co., Williamson, TN Dept. of Ed. **District 12 — Sue Ogg**; P.O. Box 210486, Nashville, TN 37211-0486; (615)856-0503, fax: (855)427-6660 — Assns: Cheatham Co., Dickson Co., Giles Co., Hickman Co., Humphreys Co., Maury Co. **District 13 — Shannon Bain**, Metro Nashville, 531 Fairground Court, Nashville, TN 37211; (615) 242-8392, (615) 906-2565; Assns: Dept. of Higher Ed., Metropolitan Nashville, TN School For The Blind; **Shante Telfer**, (615)354-

3305; Assns: 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., UT-Martin. **District 15 — Tom Marchand**, PO Box 42218 Memphis, TN 38174; (901)569-8063, fax: (866)483-2514; Assns: Fayette Co., Hardeman Co., Hardin Co., Lawrence Co., Lewis Co., McNairy Co., Perry Co., Wayne Co. **District 16 — Lorrie Butler**, P.O. Box 387, Henderson, TN 38340; (731)989-4860, fax: (855)299-4591; Assns: Benton Co., Central, Chester Co., Clarksburg, Decatur Co., Henderson Co., Huntingdon, Jackson-Madison Co., Jackson State Community College, Lexington, McKenzie, Weakley Co., West Carroll, West Tennessee School for the Deaf. **District 17 — Terri Jones**, P.O. Box 2140, Cordova, TN 38088; (901)258-3902, fax: (844)270-8083; Assns: Bradford, Crockett Co., Dyer Co., Dyersburg, Dyersburg State Community College, Gibson Co., Haywood Co., Humboldt, Lake Co., Lauderdale

Co., Milan, Obion Co., Tipton Co., Trenton, Union City. **District 18 — Keyth Harrison**, Memphis, TN; (901)305-2467, fax: (855)320-8737;—Assns: Bartlett, Collierville, Germantown-Arlington-Lakeland, Millington, Southwest State Community College, University of Memphis. **District 19 — Reginald Fentress**, (901)229-6102, fax: (855)320.8737; United Education Association of Shelby County.

www.teateachers.org
www.nea.org

Revenue is soaring. The fight will be to get it into schools.

cont. from page 1

State budgets are based on revenue estimates set by the funding board, a committee of the constitutional officers and administration officials, using forecasts from economists. Back in June, the board set revenue at negative 2.8% for 2020-2021, a loss of \$351 million, with a similar retraction for the next year.

On November 24, the funding board quietly reset 2020-2021 revenue

projections to plus 1.5–1.75% and 2021-2022 revenue growth between 2.7–3.2%. TEA believes both are likely significantly underestimated.

“Going from a \$351 million loss to \$225 million growth is substantial,” said Wrye. “We’re already \$557 million ahead while Congress passed billions in COVID relief for Tennessee families, a boost for the state economy. It is difficult to see how we don’t surpass the new

growth estimate.”

Prior to the pandemic, the funding board greatly underestimated revenue growth over a five-year period, generating three times more general fund surplus (\$3 billion) than increases in state K-12 funding (\$750 million). Low-balling revenue put state government on a strong financial footing but at the cost of Tennessee’s students, ranking 46th in education funding. The pandemic

has exposed costs of withholding needed and available funding.

“In any given legislative session, revenue trends can alter a state budget, as we saw in June. If revenue continues to be strong, it will be up to us to push for the largest K-12 funding increases possible, using the facts and hard figures of our own state government,” said Wrye. “We’ve done our job; now it’s time for them to do theirs.”

FROM DEFICIT TO SURPLUS, STATE REVENUE REBOUNDS

COVID HITS TENNESSEE

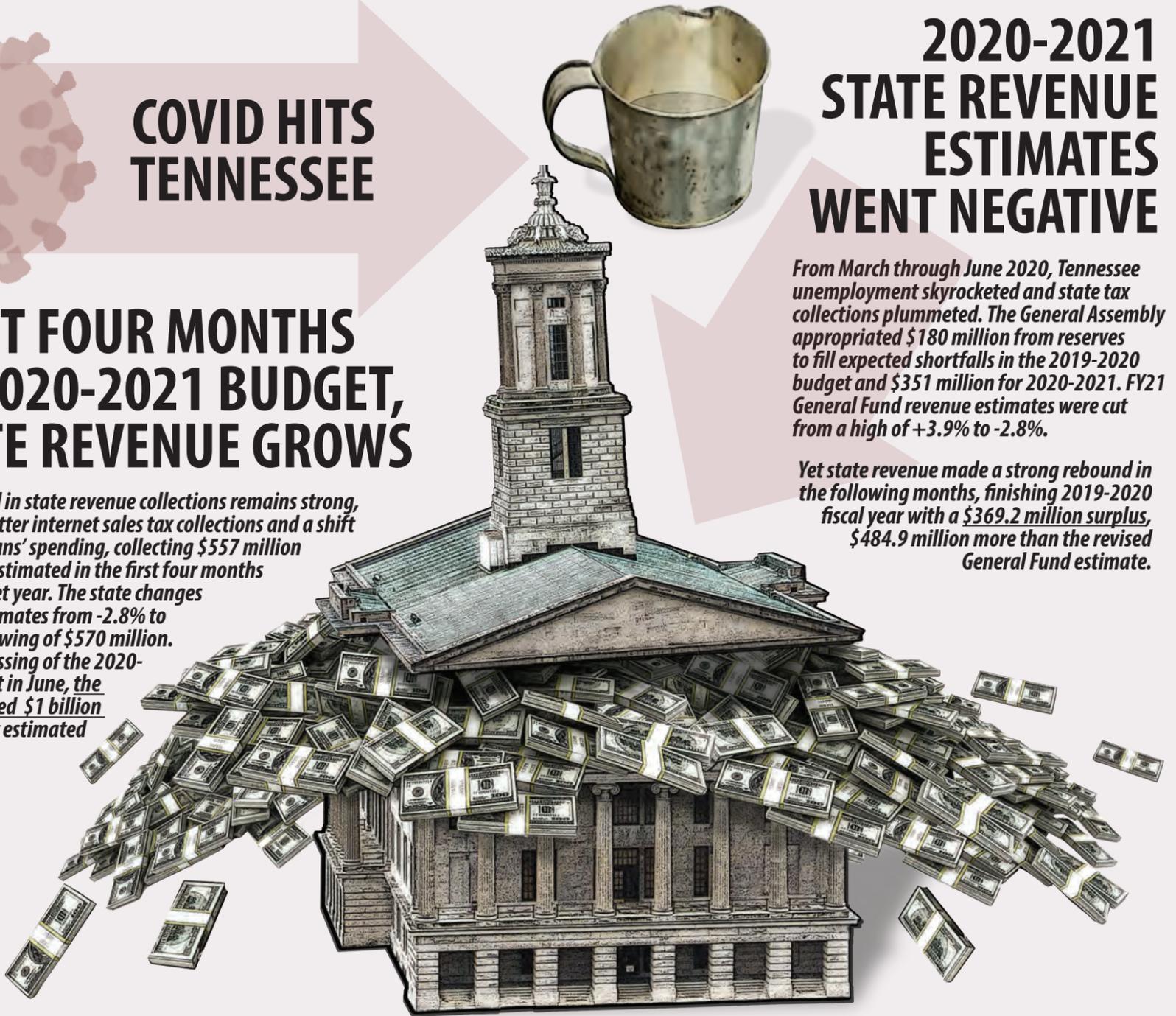
2020-2021 STATE REVENUE ESTIMATES WENT NEGATIVE

From March through June 2020, Tennessee unemployment skyrocketed and state tax collections plummeted. The General Assembly appropriated \$180 million from reserves to fill expected shortfalls in the 2019-2020 budget and \$351 million for 2020-2021. FY21 General Fund revenue estimates were cut from a high of +3.9% to -2.8%.

Yet state revenue made a strong rebound in the following months, finishing 2019-2020 fiscal year with a \$369.2 million surplus, \$484.9 million more than the revised General Fund estimate.

FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF 2020-2021 BUDGET, STATE REVENUE GROWS

The rebound in state revenue collections remains strong, fueled by better internet sales tax collections and a shift in Tennesseans’ spending, collecting \$557 million more than estimated in the first four months of the budget year. The state changes revenue estimates from -2.8% to +1.75%, a swing of \$570 million. Since the passing of the 2020-2021 budget in June, the state collected \$1 billion more than it estimated it would.



FOR THOSE WHO WANT THE MATH ON STATE REVENUE

When FY20 ended on July 31, 2020, the state collected 2.42% above the previous year, \$369.2 million above budget, and \$484.9 million more than the revised June general fund estimate for FY20.

Source: <https://www.tn.gov/finance/news/2020/8/13/july-revenues-.html>

The FY21 General Fund budget was built with a 2.8% drop (\$351 million) in revenue projections. The FY21 General Fund budget was balanced using non-recurring dollars and by eliminating planned increases, including \$117 million for pay raises for teachers.

Source: <https://www.sycamoreinstitute.org/lee-changes-to-2021-budget>

On November 24, 2020, the State Funding Board revised the FY21 General Fund revenue estimate from the previous reduction of -2.8% to a projected growth of 1.5% to 1.75%, a change of 4.3% to 4.55%.

Source: 11/24/20, State Funding Board meeting.

The FY21 dollar value difference between -2.8% and 1.5% is \$560 million.

The FY21 dollar value difference between -2.8% and 1.75% is \$597 million.

FY21 will have \$209M surplus, if non-recurring funds (\$351M) are supplanted with 1.5% growth.

FY21 will have \$246M surplus if non-recurring funds (\$351M) are supplanted with 1.75% growth.

FY21 GF revenue is \$557 million above estimates after the first four months. If trend continues FY21 GF revenue surplus will be \$1.64 billion, a growth rate of 1%. If this rate slows by half, FY21 GF surplus will be \$866 million, or a growth rate of 6.9%. To meet the State Funding Board FY21 growth estimates of 1.5-1.75%, revenue collections for the rest of the fiscal year must remain flat or hit negative territory.

On November 24, 2020, the State Funding Board set FY22 General Fund revenue growth at 2.7% - 3.2% (above the revised FY21 General Fund growth rate of 1.5% - 1.75%).

Source: 11/24/20, State Funding Board meeting.

FY22 revenue available at 2.7% growth is \$347 million. FY22 revenue available at 3.2% growth is \$412 million.

If FY21 growth at 1.75%, FY22 growth at 3.2%, and non-recurring used as budgeted in FY21, then: \$351M + \$222M + \$412M = \$985M available for FY22 (this does not include \$369M FY20 surplus).

Glossary: M - million; FY20 (2019-2020); FY21 (2020-2021); FY22 (2021-2022); GF - general fund; non-recurring funds - dollars from reserves or other sources not part of estimated state tax collections.

BOTTOM LINE: FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THIS YEAR AND NEXT

A SHORT STATE BUDGETING PRIMER

cont. from page 1

“It is time to reset the expectations of what is possible when it comes to funding and professional pay,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “Our call for \$300 million in one-time funding for an educator bonus recognizes the state has the funds and educators have earned it. It is going to take a big push from educators and parents to make it happen.”

The administration reported a \$369 million surplus at the end of the 2020 fiscal year and collected \$1 billion more than anticipated in the past five months. During June’s pandemic budget hearings, the administration acknowledged a key TEA issue: the state has \$6 billion in cash reserves accumulated from years of state budget surpluses.

A bonus is a non-recurring appropriation, funded by reserves or surpluses that do not become part of the base budget in future years. In the 2000s, the Bredesen administration often budgeted teacher bonuses when recurring healthcare costs reduced future available revenue.

A raise is a recurring appropriation, added to the BEP Instructional Component, which then becomes an ongoing obligation. Tennessee’s budget process chronically underestimates future revenue (not good) and emphasizes paying all obligations such as pension and healthcare liabilities immediately (really good). This combination (especially the underestimation of revenue) makes increasing recurring items more difficult to add to budgets.

There is ample revenue for a raise in state coffers. TEA estimates that there will be more than \$1 billion in revenue available for budget

increases for this year and into 2021-2022. While there are great needs in other budget areas, it is time educators become the priority.

“The governor said he wanted Tennessee to be the best place to teach in the country. A key component must be professional, competitive salaries,” said Brown. “Moreover, when state salary monies are appropriated, there must also be safe guards to ensure those funds get into teacher paychecks.”

TEA has fought for years to reinstate the state minimum salary schedule and improve other state levers to drive state dollars into salaries. One problem has been the state simply does not do enough on state education funding while constantly creating new unfunded mandates.

Tennessee is in the bottom five states for funding per student, ranking 46th and well behind every neighboring state except for Mississippi. The difference is while most southern states provide a majority of K-12 funding, Tennessee is a minority funder, relying more on local revenue.

“Tennessee educators get top-ten results on graduation rates and rank well on many education benchmarks. There would be a huge cry from the administration and legislators if we were bottom five in any academic category. Yet they are at fault for our dismal funding ranking.

The revenue is there. Now is the time to invest, and step one is to invest in the teaching profession,” Brown said.

The only area TN schools rank in the bottom-five is funding.



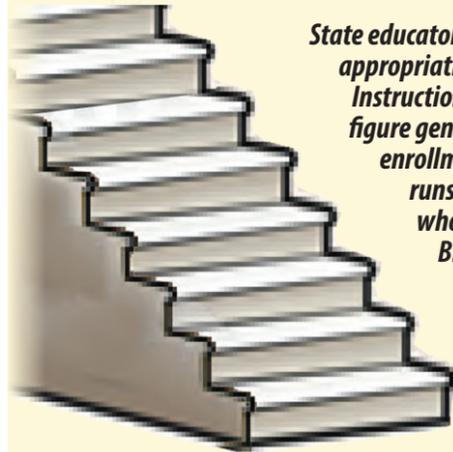
BONUS

The bonus is non-recurring and does not have an impact on future budget obligations.

It is a one-time appropriation from state cash reserves or prior year budget surpluses. However, bonuses are compensation and are factored into TCRS.

RAISE

State educator raises are a recurring appropriation passed via the BEP Instructional Component, a dollar figure generating state funds by enrollment. No school system runs on the BEP alone; it is wholly inadequate. These BEP funds must be used for compensation but often are spread thin, used for new hires or to pay for health insurance increases.



BONUS and a RAISE FOR ALL OUR EXTRA DAYS

TEA calls for a suspension of state tests and evaluations due to COVID

cont. from page 1

Gov. Lee has floated a hold-harmless idea that would eliminate TVAAS and testing data from teacher and school evaluations, as has been done when state testing was suspended or failed in three of the last five years. The pandemic has made the whole evaluation system invalid.

The same can be said of the state testing system. The fall EOCs had major discrepancies in testing conditions, student participation levels, and teaching conditions leading up to the testing portal. Each of these issues reduces the reliability and validity of the test data.

“A significant percentage of students didn’t take their EOCs. Others took the tests unsupervised at home. Still others had to take the exams in some very difficult circumstances. Each one of these discrepancies calls into question any data generated,” said Brown. “It is no surprise that school systems have been implementing their own EOC hold-harmless for students. Many of these same systems are asking the state to suspend TNReady. They recognize what we do: the time taken for TNReady could be used for teaching and help students overcome the disruptions of COVID.”

The federal government requires a minimum of 95% of students in each grade cohort take a state-mandated assessment, recognizing that going below that threshold skews data markedly and reduces its reliability.

It is why state and federal officials have always been concerned about any organized opt-out campaign by parents fed up with the testing system pushing participation below this level.

With a significant portion of Tennessee students taking classes remotely and others subject to the disruptions of the virus, it is highly unlikely the state will meet the 95% threshold. If only 75% of eligible students take TNReady, it will be impossible to make valid cut scores or norm results. The data will be



useless, and not just for statewide data. Individual student scores will not be valid because of the same norming problems.

“The push to administer TNReady is misguided and a lost opportunity. There has been a great deal of support voiced in the General Assembly for a testing suspension, and we will encourage legislation to be passed as soon as possible,” Brown said.

While current Education Secretary Betsy DeVos pushed to suspend the federal NAEP test for 2021 citing validity and reliability problems due to COVID, she has not granted waivers to states that have requested to opt out of state-mandated tests. It is expected the incoming administration will grant testing

waivers to states that request them.

Gov. Lee and Commissioner Schwinn are on record that they expect TNReady to be implemented by school systems. Any legislation enforcing a suspension would need to be passed before the testing window begins in April.

“As other states apply for and receive federal testing waivers, it may provide an impetus for the Lee administration to rethink if there is a better use of time than shutting down schools for the testing window,” Brown said. “They’ve already stated they don’t think the tests should count for students, teachers and schools. It will take a consistent push from educators and parents to have them request the waiver.”

DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO - Current Education Secretary Betsy DeVos moved to suspend federal NAEP testing scheduled for 2021, citing reliability and validity issues of data collected. DeVos rejected state waiver requests to suspend mandated testing. The incoming administration is expected to grant state requests.