

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

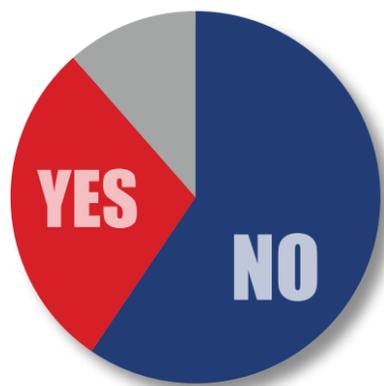


HOTEL ROOMS ARE
GOING FAST FOR
CIVICATION!
Page 8

LEGISLATIVE REPORT | February 20, 2017 | VOLUME 3, ISSUE 3

Tennesseans oppose vouchers

Robust statewide poll shows the majority of Tennesseans want their tax dollars invested in their local public schools



STATEWIDE (6,510 respondents)

NO 59.5%

YES 29%

Tennesseans strongly reject private school vouchers, according to the largest and most comprehensive polling data on the subject. TEA extensively surveyed rural, urban and suburban voters in all three grand divisions of the state.

Of the 6,510 respondents, 59.5 percent rejected private school vouchers, 29 percent approved, verifying what educators have known for years – private school vouchers are unwanted and unneeded in Tennessee.

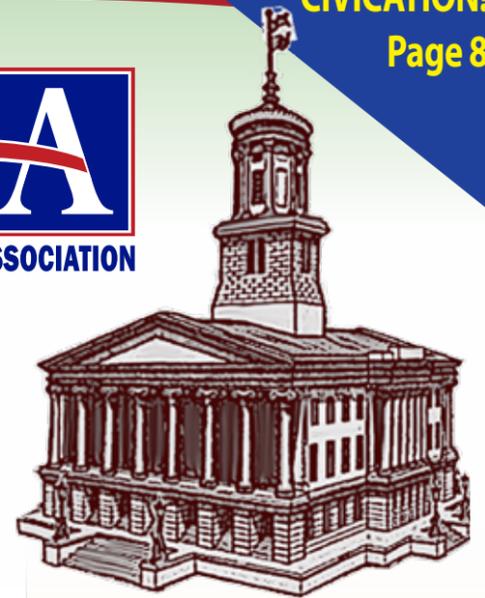
The two-to-one negative opinion was

consistent across geographic and demographic groups.

“I’ve rarely seen such a strong negative opinion. It is clear Tennesseans do not like or want school vouchers,” said Jim Wrye, TEA Government Relations manager. “We are a conservative state that values our local traditions and institutions. Vouchers are a radical idea which attacks and weakens the foundation of our communities — our public schools.”

During the 2016 primary and general elections, TEA conducted numerous polls in districts to help defend legislators from attacks by pro-voucher groups and determine where new

Vouchers
cont. page 4



TN’s highest ranking woman talks education

Harwell
page 7



Bill increases funds and rights of charter operators

Sold as help for cities, charters now move to be everywhere

Many of Tennessee’s rural schools lack essential technology infrastructure – a problem made abundantly clear in the TNReady testing debacle. A number of districts also would benefit from facilities upgrades and improvements. Rather than invest needed funds into improving infrastructure in our rural schools, Gov. Bill Haslam’s budget this year includes \$6 million in funds for charter school facilities. Facilities that will be owned by private charter operators.

The new charter funding is the tip of the iceberg in HB 310, a rewrite of the state’s charter school law. The bill creates a dedicated state fund for charter school facilities. While schools across the state have clear needs for infrastructure and capital improvements, Gov. Haslam and some legislators are trying to direct additional state tax dollars to privately held charter schools.

The proposal is worth some attention for more than the charter school

FAIRNESS

ACCOUNTABILITY

Charters
cont. page 6

Legislators tell state to prove TVAAS is valid

Are Tennessee’s teacher evaluations a fair and valid indicator of teacher performance? That’s the question Rep. Bryan Terry is trying to answer. HB 795 asks the state Department of Education to produce an annual report on the validity of teacher evaluations. The bill also asks the state to recommend ways to improve teacher evaluations.

This legislation is an outstanding opportunity for teachers to tell their stories about the current Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM). While teachers welcome a fair, consistent evaluation system, Tennessee’s current model falls short. Specifically, the model relies on the junk science of value-added estimates to rate teachers. The TVAAS system produces a lot of data, but it’s not very useful when it comes to assessing teacher performance.

Rep. Terry’s bill will give us a chance to share what we know about TVAAS: It wasn’t designed to evaluate teachers.

“Teachers deserve an evaluation system that uses valid measures to assess their performance,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “We know TVAAS isn’t valid. We know it doesn’t work. It was never intended for teacher evaluations.”

Rep. Bryan Terry is asking the right question: Are Tennessee’s teacher evaluations valid? Right now, the answer is simply “NO.”

Validity
cont. page 6



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Its time for four to actually mean four, teachers need a real raise

By TEA President Barbara Gray



This year, Governor Bill Haslam has proposed a budget that includes \$100 million in new money for teacher compensation. That's a four percent increase over last year's allocation. TEA appreciates this gesture and we believe firmly that a four percent increase in state funds for teacher pay should mean teachers see a four percent raise in their paychecks. It's simple: Four means four.

Over the past two years, however, a four percent increase in state funds has not translated into a four percent raise for

teachers. That's not acceptable.

When the Governor and General Assembly come up with additional funds for teacher pay, that money should make its way into teacher paychecks. We're working to make that happen.

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One way to get money into teacher paychecks is to reinstate the state minimum salary schedule. The minimum salary schedule helped the state leverage local dollars. Essentially, the state forced locals to use state teacher

salary money to raise teacher salaries. A director of schools would tell the County Commission: Yes, we have more money for schools, but this money MUST be spent on teacher pay. The state minimum salary schedule meant school boards and county commissions had no choice – local dollars were leveraged to boost pay and teachers saw the benefit.

Now, the state pay scale is only four steps. The Department of Education, along with the State Board of Education, created "flexibility" in how teacher compensation funds are spent. All of these changes mean some teacher's salaries in Tennessee went down last year. The average teacher in Tennessee now makes less than \$44,000 a year.

The best way to reverse this trend is to restore the state minimum salary schedule. Requiring regular, predictable increases in teacher pay over the life of a teacher's career ensures that salaries increase for all teachers every year. A true minimum salary schedule would be adjusted at every step when the state provides funds for a raise. This would mean money going directly into a teacher's wallet.

I am grateful for the governor's 4 percent increase and \$100 million commitment to salaries. Now, it's time to ensure that four means four. It's time to return to a system that was like a rising tide lifting all boats. A system that was fair, equitable, and moved teacher pay forward. We simply can't be the fastest improving state in teacher pay if we're not willing to leverage every dollar possible for salaries. A minimum salary schedule with more steps and annual increases is a sure bet to make four means four a reality.

As you talk to your legislators, tell them you appreciate all they've done to boost the money available for teacher pay over the past two years. Then tell them you want them to do all they can to ensure that any new money for teacher pay makes its way into paychecks.

Honesty is still the best policy, even in politics

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder

As educators, we expect our students to always be honest with us. It is important that we hold ourselves and our elected officials to that same standard.

You can't hardly turn on your TV, look at social media or even go to the grocery store without hearing or seeing a new report of misinformation, "fake news" or other half-truths. We are bombarded with information - true or otherwise - around the clock, it is important that we are the standard bearers of spreading accurate information.

As you make plans to attend TEA Civication (see pg. 8 for more details), or begin to make phone calls to your legislators about the public education issues being considered during the legislative session, arm yourself with facts to support your position.

There are literally hundreds of education bills filed in the legislature this year, but don't let that overwhelm you. The pages of *The Advocate* are filled with details on many important bills, including a "Bill Tracker" that is included in every issue that highlights the best and worst bills out there.

I encourage you to spend time with each issue of *The Advocate*, decide which bills are most important to you and your students, and then ask questions - and not just to TEA staff and leaders.

You will be most effective and persuasive with your legislators when you are well-informed and are able to combine facts with your personal classroom experience.

So, its pretty easy to hold yourself accountable to always being honest, but how can we hold our elected officials accountable?

The first step is to pay attention. Read news stories about your legislators, follow them on social media, check their voting records on issues that matter to you. You can't hold someone accountable if you don't know what they are doing and saying.

We are bombarded with information - true or otherwise - around the clock, it is important that we are the standard bearers of spreading accurate information.

The next step is to talk to your legislators - often. You likely won't have time or the opportunity to meet in person with your legislators more than once or twice during the session, but it only takes a minute to send a quick email or leave a phone message.

When legislators know you are paying attention and they get to know you as a resource for accurate information, you can truly influence the way they vote.

TEA is fortunate to have one of the best lobbying teams in the state, but your voice carries a tremendous amount of weight with your legislators, too. Our team heard more than once last year from legislators that frequent contact from teachers back home changed their position on private school vouchers, TVAAS and other issues.

Arm yourself with the facts, connect your personal experience, and then go forth and advocate for your students and your profession!



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can be found on page 6.

Community Schools: How to really love our students

By Beth Brown, TEA Vice President and Grundy Co. educator



In the back of my classroom hangs a canvas titled “How to Really Love a Student,” a colorful daily reminder for me to show my students “an abundance of understanding,

patience, and grace”; to “encourage their abilities, talents, and gifts”; and to “love them as they are today...and also for who they will become.”

That last phrase is significant: “Love them as they are today...and also for who they will become.” Any experienced educator will tell you that every class is unique; though I teach six sections of English III this year, no lesson is exactly the same on any given day...nor should it be. Simply put, each of my six classes is unique because it is comprised of a unique combination of unique individuals.

I am blessed to live and teach in Grundy County, which is known across the state for its beautiful parks, for the eclectic Beersheba Springs Arts and Crafts Fair, and for the historic Highlander Folk School. What is lesser known—at least to those living outside of the county borders—is that Grundy County is made up of multiple distinctive communities, and though we have but one high school, each community has its own PreK-8 elementary school.

During difficult financial times, the question invariably arises whether it would be prudent to close one or two of the elementary schools or even to build a middle school. The response is always the same: a swift and resounding NO. Citizens make it very clear that their communities are defined by the schools in them and that to close a school would be a death knell to a community.

So here in Grundy County we have communities whose identities are defined by their schools and whose schools are prime locations for transformational community schools.

Educators understand that our job each day is to meet students where they are and to help guide them toward their educational goals. Transformational community schools are the perfect

opportunity for schools in Grundy County—and across the state—to do just that.

Can you imagine meeting students where they are by providing the health care, mental-health counseling, and other needed support services necessary to improve their ability to learn?

I can.

Can you imagine meeting students where they are by providing relevant and challenging coursework to prepare them for post-secondary opportunities in the work place, in technical school, or in college?

I can.

Can you imagine meeting students where they are by allowing professional educators—and not high-stakes standardized testing—to determine the curriculum?

I can.

Can you imagine meeting students where they are by implementing restorative discipline practices that teach students to identify, understand, and correct their behaviors rather than removing them from classes for minor infractions?

I can.

Can you imagine meeting students where they are by regularly involving parents and community members in planning and decision-making in their schools?

I can.

Such is the design of transformational community schools. I can easily imagine this model working successfully in rural communities like mine, creating schools that are uniquely designed for the students they serve.

Therein lies the beauty and genius of community schools.

Transformational community schools are designed to meet the specific and unique needs of the unique students they serve, and no community school will look or operate exactly the same way as another. Talk about true differentiation in education!

I will forever appreciate the guidance offered by my “How to Really Love a Student” painting. However, if I could improve it, I would add one more piece of advice: Create community schools in which students can thrive.

ASK TEA

ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

Q: My church is sponsoring a week-long mission trip to Costa Rica, which unfortunately does not fall within our spring break. I would like to go on the trip. Can I use my accumulated sick leave to cover my absences?

A: No, State Board of Education Rules limit the use of sick leave to illness of the teacher or illness of a specified close relatives of the teacher. Specifically, the rule provides:

“Sick leave” shall mean leave of absence because of illness of a teacher from natural causes or accident, quarantine, or illness or death of a member of the immediate family of a teacher, including the teacher’s wife or husband, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law. Upon written request of the teacher accompanied by a statement from her physician verifying pregnancy, any teacher who goes on maternity leave shall be allowed to use all or a portion of her accumulated sick leave for maternity leave purposes during the period of her physical disability only, as determined by a physician.

If you have questions about the use of sick leave, check with your association representative (AR) or TEA UniServ Coordinator.

Q: Does the BEP still provide funding for teachers to buy classroom materials? Is the amount still \$200?

A: Yes, BEP funding continues to provide \$200 per teacher for instructional supplies. Specifically, state law provides:

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. One hundred dollars (\$100) 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. The second one hundred dollars (\$100) shall be pooled with all such teachers in a school and spent as determined by a committee of the teachers for such purpose.

Sen. Mark Green has proposed legislation, “The Teacher Bill of Rights,” that could increase the required amount. The bill states that no teacher shall be “required to spend the educator’s personal money to appropriately equip a classroom.” Contact your legislators today to ask for their support of SB14/HB174.

Learn more about transformational community schools in Tennessee:

www.TennAROS.org



Tennessee Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools



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.

TENNESSEANS OPPOSE PR

Poll of 6,510 voters proves vouchers are unwanted in Tennessee



Vouchers from page 1

attacks could happen.

Polling was conducted by a respected Republican firm used by Tennessee GOP entities and candidates.

“It was important to keep the question simple, and to stay away from leading or flowery language seen in other polling and surveys,” Wrye said. “Vouchers use public school funding for private school tuition. It was important to ask voters in the most simple and accurate way whether they support such a thing. Overwhelmingly, they do not.”

Rejection of vouchers was remarkably consistent across the state.

Rural voters tended to be more against vouchers (64.17 percent no, 24.54 percent yes; 2,995 voters) than urban and suburban (54.01 percent no, 34.43 percent yes; 3,536 voters). No area or legislative district saw vouchers receive more support than opposition.

TEA and public school advocates statewide have been fighting back against well-funded voucher attacks for five years now.

Despite evidence in other states that vouchers drain public education budgets without returning any real improvement in student achievement, some Tennessee lawmakers are dead-set on bringing vouchers to our state.

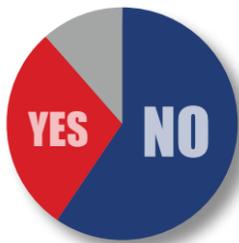
The new strategy this year is to make it a targeted “pilot” program that would only affect Shelby County Schools.

Voucher proposals have flown through the Senate in recent years. The Memphis pilot bill, SB 161, was rolled for three weeks in the Senate Education committee last week, possibly indicating waning interest in implementing vouchers in any form.

“I strongly encourage any legislator to vote their district and listen to folks back home. There are a lot of special interest lobbyists and money floating around the capitol, pushing things that are not of Tennessee’s great traditions and values,” Wrye said. “No matter the special interest threats or demands, you can be sure voting with your folks back home is always good politics.”

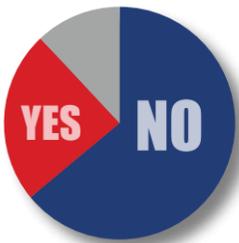
When it comes to vouchers, it is not what voters want in any district.

“State-funded vouchers, no matter the scope, allow parents to use taxpayer money to send their children to private schools. Do you support the use of taxpayer dollars to fund attendance to private schools?”



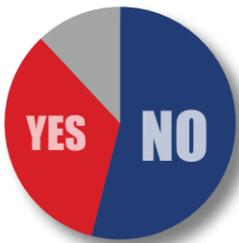
STATEWIDE (6,510 respondents)

NO 59.5% YES 29%



RURAL (2,995 respondents)

NO 64% YES 24.5%



URBAN - SUBURBAN (3,515 respondents)

NO 54% YES 34.5%



State’s flawed graduation data “failing schools” narrative fo

Flawed information damaging to schools is the last thing that should come from the state Department of Education. Yet there was a damning report released by the SDE on Tennessee’s graduation rate that turned out to be false.

The state report claimed that approximately one-third of Tennessee high school graduates received a diploma without meeting the state’s requirements. The harmful report made headlines statewide and was even picked up in national news outlets.

“Our strong graduation rate is something our state really hangs its hat on,” said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder. “For the department to tell our graduates that one-third didn’t properly earn their diplomas was a real blow to the reputation of our schools and the confidence of our educators who work so hard to help students graduate.”

Weeks after the state’s initial report was published, superintendents began questioning the statistics from their own districts. The state is now changing its story.

“We’re so small,” Chad Moorehead, superintendent of Moore County Schools, told *Chalkbeat*. “We usually have a pretty good handle on what our kids are doing. If we’re missing something in our one high school, I want to know what it is and how to fix it.”

As it turns out, Moore County wasn’t missing anything. The state’s report indicated 38 percent of Moore County’s graduates did not meet state graduation requirements, but after thorough review by Moorehead those

numbers were proven wrong.

The state is attributing its inaccuracies to the state’s initial report that was so flawed. “Our state is ground zero for this,” said Moorehead. “Our state is ground zero for this. Tennesseeans and our elected officials need to know this. This inaccurate report played right into the hands of those who want to destroy public education.”

Organizations backing privatization and rapid charter expansion and high school closures are using that public schools are failing. Unchecked, this is an important step to build support for vouchers to destroy public education.

“As a state that consistently ranks in the top 10 for graduation rates, we are consistently in the top 10 for graduation rates. Our commitment of Tennessee education is to ensure that we often have the odds stacked against us. This is misinformation piling anything on top of anything else. If the state continues its obsession with the numbers right.

“The state department did this report. Chad Moorehead said to *Chalkbeat*. “Check the data and start to solve the world?”

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS



Limited “pilot” programs quickly spread like cancer throughout the state

Indiana’s cancer-like voucher program steals \$131 million of state’s education budget

Back in 2011, Indiana enacted a “limited” school voucher plan. Then-Governor Mitch Daniels said at the time, “It is not likely to be a very large phenomenon in Indiana. I think it will be exercised by a meaningful but not an enormous number of our students.”

Indeed, the program was initially limited to just 7,500 available vouchers, but a change in leadership led to the program spreading rapidly statewide. Now, approximately 33,000 students receive some kind of voucher at a cost of \$131 million a year. Costs to taxpayers went up and money for public schools went down.

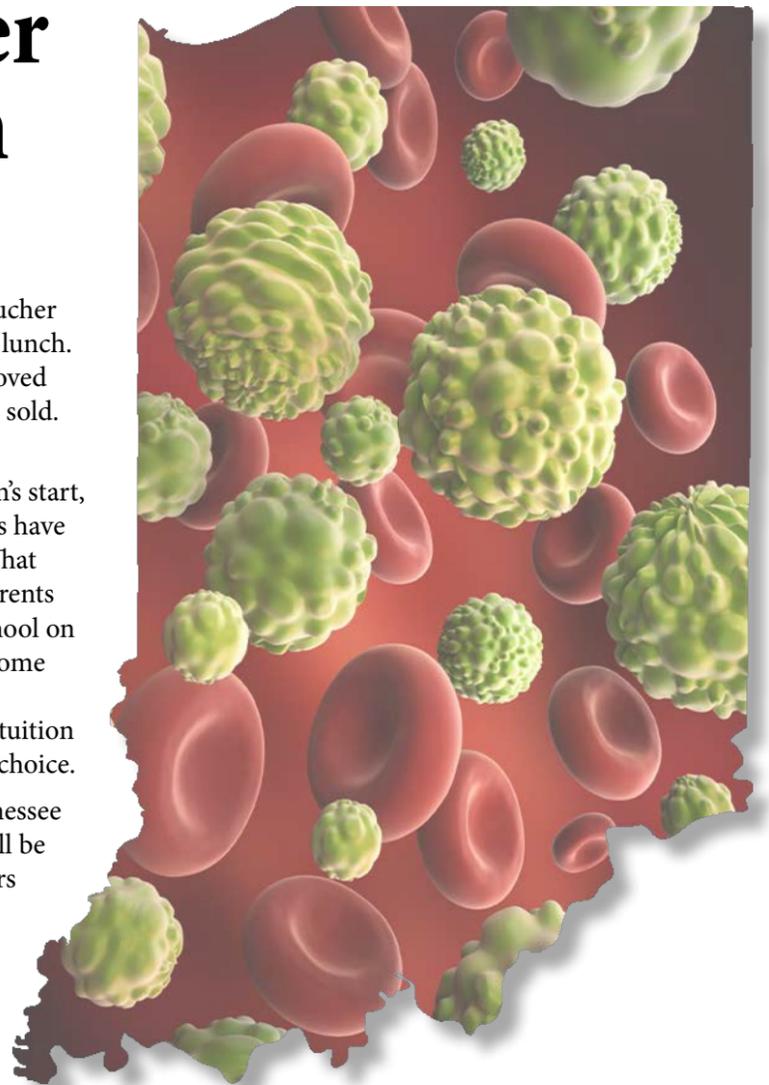
When the voucher program in Indiana started, it was sold as a program that would help low income students find a way out of “failing” schools – the same lie that’s being told by voucher advocates here in Tennessee.

In reality, only 3 percent of voucher recipients in 2015 qualified for them because they were zoned for schools that received an “F” rating on Indiana’s

school report card. Nearly one-third of voucher recipients don’t qualify for free or reduced lunch. The program has expanded rapidly and moved beyond the original vision on which it was sold.

According to the Indiana Department of Education, within five years of the program’s start, approximately a third of voucher recipients have never attended an Indiana public school. That means public money is helping support parents who were previously paying for private school on their own. Vouchers aren’t helping low income kids escape bad schools, as was advertised. Instead, they’re subsidizing private school tuition for parents who were already making that choice.

There’s no reason to believe that once Tennessee opens the voucher door, the experience will be any different than the explosion of vouchers seen in Indiana. Taxpayers stuck footing the bill for private schools, while public schools are left with fewer resources.



ata advances or privatizers

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at damage has already been done by the widely covered in the media?” Crowder for privatizers attempting to convince officials that our public schools are failing. ght into their narrative.”

ation schemes like private school vouchers, gh-stakes testing, need people to believe Undermining confidence in public schools pport for radical and dangerous proposals

ks at the bottom in student investment, 0 for graduation rate because of the ators. Our students and teachers already inst them, they don’t need damaging e else on,” Crowder said.

on with data, it is crucial that it at least get

research, they got this alarming statistic,” Why didn’t they reach out to districts to e the problem before announcing it to the

As first IEA vouchers distributed, bill filed to expand program

The day Individualized Education Account, the state’s first voucher program, passed on the final day of the 2015 legislative session, was very contentious. Sponsors were peppered with questions about the bill, the uses of funds, and the number of students it would affect. In the end, sponsors provided assurances that the amendments placed on the bill to substantially reduce the number of eligible students would make sure the program stayed small so that its effectiveness could be closely monitored before any talks about expansion occurred. The pledge to take a wait-and-see approach proved enough for the bill to pass by the barest of majorities, narrowly clearing the 50-vote majority needed.

It turns out the skeptics of this wait and see approach were proven correct, as the efforts to expand the program began immediately following its implementation, well before anyone knows whether or not it’s working. The first debit cards were issued for the 47 participating students this January, and the department has yet to even review expenditures, let alone performance data for students or participating vendors and schools.

The sponsors are back and appear to seek to expand eligibility to any child who has been diagnosed by a private doctor or psychiatrist with a larger group of disabilities, regardless whether or not they have an IEP or whether they’ve ever attended any school in the state.

“This is the classic example of the camel’s nose getting under the tent,” said Jim Wrye, TEA chief lobbyist. “We were asked to believe this program would be slow and steady, but the sponsors have proven they really just want to send public money to anyone who wants to bypass public school.”

The proposed expansion could dramatically increase the number of children who could receive an average of \$6,600 per year sent via debit card in exchange for surrendering their rights to a free public education under federal disability law. It could also potentially serve a large number of kids who’ve never attended a public school.

One need only look to Indiana to see the plan in action. Their state department of education estimates that last year \$53 million in funding meant for public schools was spent providing private school vouchers to students who had never attended a public school.

“This is exactly the same bargain they’re asking for with the Memphis voucher pilot,” continued Wrye. “We’re being asked to believe they will keep it small and focused, but voucher proponents have no interest in small. They want every child in Tennessee to have access to a voucher, which would endanger the very existence of public education as we have known it for over two hundred years.”

Charters from page 1

facilities slush fund it creates.

Back in 2002, when the first charter authorizing law in Tennessee passed, TEA warned that without accountability and oversight, charter schools would grow out of control. Charter schools are now working to spread to districts statewide, with applications coming in from some of the highest performing places, such as Alcoa, Bristol and Johnson City. The performance of charters is not better (and sometimes worse) than traditional public schools, and studies indicate they drain resources from public schools.

Now, HB 310 seeks to further strengthen charter operators' hand in dealing with local governments.

The bill gives operators a new right of first refusal to purchase or lease any underutilized or vacant property of a school system. The bill essentially creates a dedicated fund of taxpayer money for the purchase and development of public property, like school buildings, which is then owned and controlled by private operators.

It is well documented that some real estate developers have used charters as a means of increasing their portfolios and holdings. To be first in line to buy old school buildings in excellent locations at or below market value is a good law for them to have.

TEA is concerned this year's \$6 million deposit in the fund is just the beginning, and once the fund is established, it will be a direct pipeline from the state general fund to charter school coffers.

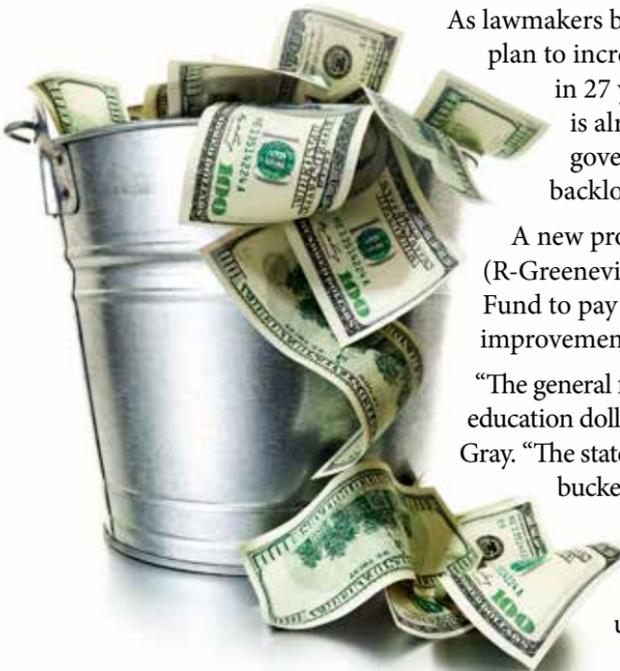


Validity from page 1

TVAAS isn't a valid input in the teacher evaluation process, because:

- TVAAS was designed to assess and predict student performance.** TVAAS uses statistical modeling to evaluate student performance and growth over time. The model is based on student performance on state tests. TVAAS was NEVER intended for teacher evaluation. The state even admitted in a recent court case that the tests used for TVAAS were not designed to provide evaluation information for teachers.
- Value-added modeling doesn't work for teacher evaluation.** The American Statistical Association says at best, value added models can explain between one and fourteen percent of teacher performance. TVAAS isn't a good tool for understanding what happens in a teacher's classroom.
- TVAAS is biased against middle school teachers.** Two different studies of Tennessee data have shown that middle school teachers, and especially middle school ELA teachers, receive a high percentage of low TVAAS scores. This system is inherently unfair to middle school teachers.
- Value-added models are arbitrary.** A judge in New York ruled that the use of value-added modeling is an "arbitrary and capricious" way to evaluate teachers. An arbitrary model is certainly not a valid one. In fact, Hawaii and Oklahoma have both moved away from using value-added models like TVAAS in their teacher evaluations.
- TNReady.** There is not test data from last year due to the TNReady debacle. That means absolutely no valid comparisons can be made from prior test years to this year. Any TVAAS number generated in 2017 that compares TNReady to the 2015 TCAP is simply not statistically valid.

Proposal would use education funds to fix pot holes



As lawmakers begin to battle over Gov. Bill Haslam's plan to increase the state's gas tax for the first time in 27 years, the desire to avoid a tax increase is already generating a few bad ideas. The governor's proposal would fund a \$10.5 billion backlog of road improvement projects.

A new proposal from Rep. David Hawk (R-Greeneville) would use the Tennessee General Fund to pay for the needed road and highway improvements.

"The general fund is the bucket of money that all education dollars come from," said TEA President Barbara Gray. "The state is intentional about designating different buckets of money for different needs. Starting down this road of taking money from the bucket used to fund public education sets a bad precedent that threatens our already under-funded schools."

Tennessee is 45th in the nation in investing in public education, and it's one of only five other states that has not increased its gas tax since the 1980s.

"I don't know what the answer is to funding necessary road repairs, but I can tell you taking money from our schools is not it," Gray said. "Proposals to use a portion of the state general fund to fund road projects jeopardize the only bucket of money funding schools."

While some lawmakers may feel inspired to tap into the general fund in light of the state's unprecedented \$1 billion one-time revenue surplus, along with \$850 million in recurring money, there is no guarantee the economy will continue to generate such gains in the future. And if transportation is added, it will mean classrooms will forever compete with highways and bridges.

TEA will monitor discussions around the governor's Improve Act to make sure public schools funds remain intact.

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Harwell credits teachers for student achievement gains

Speaker Beth Harwell is beginning her fourth term as the Tennessee House of Representatives highest office holder. She is also the highest ranking female office holder in the history of the state, something that is not lost on teachers, a profession traditionally held by women.

“I have the utmost respect for teachers and the critical job they have for the future of our state. My goal has always been to elevate the teaching profession, trust teachers in their professional judgment, and to make sure they have the support needed to have a successful classroom,” Harwell said. “Over the past several years we have seen record increases in state K-12 funding, but I am concerned that not all that investment is getting to our teachers. It is important that everything we do in the House shows we support and are proud of what teachers across Tennessee do each day for our students.”

Harwell noted that because of the determined and focused work of our teachers and students, Tennessee is the fastest improving state in the nation in math, reading, and science. While other states have cut spending in education, Tennessee met its commitment to fully fund the Basic Education Program and increased total K-12 spending by more than \$1.3 billion over six years.

“I encourage all our members to listen to their teachers back home. They can tell first-hand what could be more helpful when it comes to state policy and laws affecting their classroom. Our state is certainly moving in the right direction when it comes to student outcomes, such

as the improving graduation rate or record number of students taking advantage of free community college through the Tennessee Promise. The credit goes to teachers, and it is important to listen and work with them on what needs to change to continue that progress,” Harwell said.

Harwell added when working as an academic or an elected official, having constructive feedback is key to improvement. If the system does not give that kind of feedback to teachers, then it should be addressed.

Most of the more problematic bills introduced in the General Assembly on education die in the House. TEA recognizes Harwell’s position on letting House members make decisions on issues based on constituent input and practical experience, which is crucial to effective public policy.

“The speaker is at her core interested in what people in communities across the state want for their children and their future,” said Jim Wrye, TEA Assistant Executive Director for government relations. “That’s why the House has a strong committee system where real debate and facts on bills come to the fore, and it is where members get the information they need to cast their vote. We may not agree on all issues, but she is pro-teacher and keeps things fair on the big education fights.”

Speaker Harwell is a trailblazer in Tennessee politics. She is in a key position to help educators blaze a trail to continue to grow Tennesseans’ support and admiration for the teaching profession and our schools.

TEA bills:

This year, as we negotiate with legislators and the administration on key issues such as teacher pay, community schools, insurance improvements, and evaluation reforms, among others, TEA did not file wholly drafted legislation as we have in the past. We asked friendly lawmakers to file a number of *caption bills*, placeholders that will be wholly rewritten with amendments when ready.

The Good:

HB263 (Butt)/SB204 (Bowling)- As introduced, the proposal states that the number of hours spent taking state-mandated tests cannot exceed the grade level of a student, up to a maximum of eight hours per school year.

HB174 (Reedy)/ SB14 (Green) - Nicknamed “The Teacher Bill of Rights,” this bill would create a list of rights and protections for educators, including the right to not be evaluated based on students not taught nor by someone who isn’t experienced in the same content area.

HB67 (Smith)/SB250 (Tracy) - This legislation would allow for the use of Alternative Growth (Portfolio) models for use by teachers in untested subjects. This bill is already on the calendar for the House Education Instruction & Programs subcommittee for Wednesday, Feb. 8.

HB795 (Terry)/SB774 (Beavers) - As introduced, this bill would require the state department to annually prove the validity of teacher evaluations, including the use of TVAAS.

The Bad:

HB460 (Kane)/SB395 (Gresham) - As introduced, the bill creates education savings accounts with no eligibility requirements, eventually opening the program up to all students statewide.

HB715 (Moody)/SB573 (Gresham) - This proposal would expand the special education voucher program that has just last month begun issuing the first vouchers.

HB126 (Brooks, H)/SB161 (Kelsey) - This voucher bill differs in that it focuses solely on a Shelby County voucher pilot program.

HB336 (Dunn)/SB380 (Gresham) - This is almost an exact copy of the statewide voucher bill TEA has defeated for the past four years.

HB310 (Hawk)/SB1197 (Norris) - This bill provides a facilities fund dedicated to privately held charter operators, and give right of first refusal to any vacant or underutilized building to purchase or lease at fair or below market value.

HB42 (Butt)/SB577 (Gresham) - This caption bill, known last year as the “Bicycle Helmet Bill,” was used to target TEA members’ ability to pay dues via payroll deduction. We expect this bill to be heavily amended to attack educators again this year.

HB357 (Dunn)/SB4 (Gresham) - This bill prohibits the state from adopting standards or instruction for social and emotional learning.

HB1136 (Casada)/SB762 (Stevens) - This proposal would allow a charter school in the Achievement School District to petition to be run by the State Board of Education, rather than be returned to its home LEA.

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