

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

LEGISLATIVE REPORT | January 31, 2019 | VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

20/20 Vision
posters

pgs. 4-5



Support
in our
schools



Reaching our 20/20 Vision with **#RedForEd**



We have big goals as an association because there are big needs for our students and classrooms. To achieve our 20/20 Vision, we need educators across the state engaged more than ever before.

TEA has been successful in recent years persuading the Tennessee General Assembly to reduce the impact of state testing and include significant increases in public education funding in the state budget, but there is still much work to be done.

To continue this good work and get across the 2020 finish line, we must increase our visibility, educate allies on the issues impacting our classrooms and engage in meaningful conversations with elected officials.

Page 3 has a list of easy and fun actions you can take to join the fight to achieve our 20/20 Vision.

Join the fight
see list on page 3

TEA's 20/20 Vision:

- Eliminate high-stakes decisions based on state tests
- Increase state's investment per student to the Southeastern average

20/20
VISION

Big changes in the Capitol

*House Ed now one of
largest committees*

With dozens of freshman legislators, new House and Senate leadership, a new governor, and a new commissioner of education, it may take some time to understand the approach of the new General Assembly and the administration toward public schools, though it's clear education will be front and center.



Rep. Mark White

Leadership changes
cont. page 7

Arming teachers or SROs, school safety will be a key issue

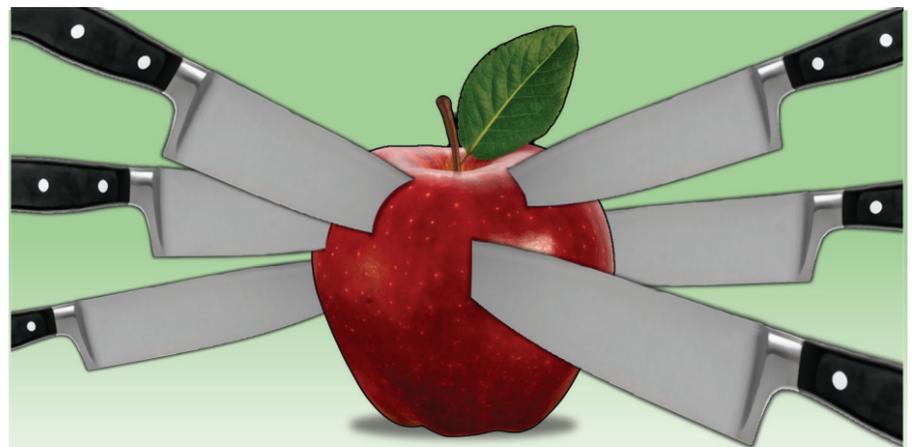
Keeping students and educators safe is a priority all can agree on, but there is still a lot of debate around the best way to do so.

A proposal backed by TEA and a growing number of legislators would increase funding to provide for a school resource officer in every school. A school safety task force formed by former Gov. Bill Haslam reported in 2018 that more than half of Tennessee's schools do not have an SRO, and some rural counties have no law enforcement coverage for any school.

TEA has maintained SROs, other law enforcement, or well-trained professional security personnel are the best solutions for school safety. TEA opposes other ideas such as arming teachers as a means to defend against school shootings.

New Governor Bill Lee has indicated during his campaign and in recent interviews that he would support

School safety
cont. page 8



AN EVEN WORSE VOUCHER IDEA

*Unaccountable "education savings accounts" is the latest
twist to carve out public funding for private schools*

As the 111th General Assembly gets underway, there is intense speculation about what the privatization push will look like this year. It is unclear whether or not the Lee administration will introduce its own voucher bill, as former Governor Haslam did in 2013, or whether he will leave the matter to the legislature to debate on their own.

It is clear that privatizers are favoring Education Savings Accounts as a new means to try to change the conversation after five years of stinging defeats when peddling more traditional voucher legislation. While ESAs are referred to by some as "vouchers light," nothing could be further

ESA proposal
cont. page 8



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Vouchers hurt our students, even in rural districts

By TEA President Beth Brown



Growing up in the mountains, I often heard the expression “You can put lipstick on a pig, but it’s still a pig.” The recent rebranding of vouchers as education savings accounts is just that: lipstick on a pig. Polling indicates that Tennesseans oppose vouchers two-to-one, so I’m not surprised that privatizers have attempted to fool the public with a new label for their voucher schemes. The concept, however, is still the same: siphoning money from public schools to pay for private school tuition.

Here’s what vouchers would mean for a school like mine.

According to the 2017-2018 state report card, my school district spent \$9,921.60 per pupil. The state contributed 69.3%, or \$6,876, of that funding. Also pertinent is the fact that the average teacher salary in my district is just under \$40,000. Now, I’m an English teacher, not a math teacher, but according to my calculations, this means that it will take six students leaving with vouchers to cost the district funding for a teaching position.

*Here’s the bottom line:
vouchers hurt our kids.
And there is no band-aid
big enough to fix that hurt.*

Let’s imagine that those six students come from different grades in my school: one ninth grader, two tenth graders, two eleventh graders, and one twelfth grader. The county has lost the funds for an entire teaching position,

but there is absolutely no way that the school can operate with one less English teacher, as my typical class load is 175 students. Even if all six were in the same grade, my school couldn’t cut an English position. In fact, if there were six from each grade leaving the school with vouchers, my school couldn’t cut an English position, though they would have lost \$165,024 in funding.

So how will the district compensate for the lost funds? It probably won’t be from cutting an English position (like mine) or a math or science position. Instead, students’ access to art, drama, and music classes could be lost, as could students’ access to career and technical education. In fact, any course not designated as a graduation requirement could be eliminated. As a result, class sizes will increase as students have fewer course options. Even more frightening to consider are the non-teaching positions that could be lost. Can you imagine sending your child to a school without a school nurse or a school counselor? Can you imagine how our struggling students will fare when the educational assistants that provide much-needed one-on-one instruction are no longer available? That’s certainly not the educational environment I want for my students.

Even if vouchers (under the lipsticked guise of education savings accounts) are available, the majority of the students currently enrolled in Tennessee’s public schools will remain in our public schools. Also, \$6,876 will not cover private school tuition, and students who attend public schools in more affluent districts will be eligible for even less in voucher funds, because the state portion of their funding is less. The result is obvious: students who can already afford to attend private school will have their education subsidized by students and families who cannot afford private school tuition. Moreover, critical funding will have been diverted from public schools, leaving our most vulnerable students with fewer resources.

Here’s the bottom line: vouchers hurt our kids. And there is no band-aid big enough to fix that hurt. Instead of taking valuable resources away from our students, we should be investing more so that all students can have a great public education regardless of where they live.

United, organized strength protects public education

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder

Every year at the start of a new legislative session, it feels a bit like I am doing a remake of the Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day*. We face a lot of the same fights and advocate for many of the same issues year after year.

Since my first legislative session as TEA executive director in 2014, we have faced private school vouchers, attacks on the association, unaccountable charter school expansion and other legislation threatening to undermine the good work happening in our public school classrooms all across the state.

Fortunately, the usual attacks are not the only familiar thing that we seem to be living over and over again. We also get to experience the power of our united force standing together to fight for our students, our association and the profession we love.

With our repeated success on the same fights year after year, it is easy to wonder why some legislators insist on coming back with the same attacks and threats to our great public schools. The simple answer is because we are the ones standing in their way. TEA, the strongest force advocating for public education, is the one preventing some legislators from passing privatization bills, weakening the association through eliminating payroll dues deduction and other proposals seeking to turn our public schools into a private business model.

When faced with similar privatization legislation and attacks on teachers, no other state has been successful in defeating these dangerous proposals year after year. It is a testament to the strength of our association, the passion and willingness of our educators to fight in the best interest of their students and public education, and a turning tide of elected officials who understand that TEA is not an obstruction to change - we are tireless advocates who will never stop fighting for what is right for our students and our profession.

I know you have heard this before, but I want to remind you again as we march into another tough legislative battle: the strength of TEA does not live in a building in Nashville. The force that protects our students, our schools and our colleagues is the collective action of the tens of thousands of TEA members spread across every district in this state. We are strong and effective when we stand together.

The force that protects our students, our schools and our colleagues is the collective action of the tens of thousands of TEA members spread across every district in this state.

Don’t be discouraged when you read about the same bad legislation being proposed again this year. Don’t be discouraged when you see elected leaders attacking TEA. Bill Murray’s character did not give up until he got it right. We cannot afford to give up showing the legislators how to get it right. And the good news is that we’ve seen how this movie ends. (Spoiler alert. We win.) When we stand arm-in-arm with each other and with other public education advocates, we can win this fight again this year.

This is not the year to be passive or expect any easy wins. There is a lot of uncertainty with new leadership in place and there is much at stake. See page 2 for a list of actions you can take right now.

Stay engaged. Stay informed. Read The Advocate. Know the fight. Join the fight.



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UniServ Staff contact information
can be found on page 6.

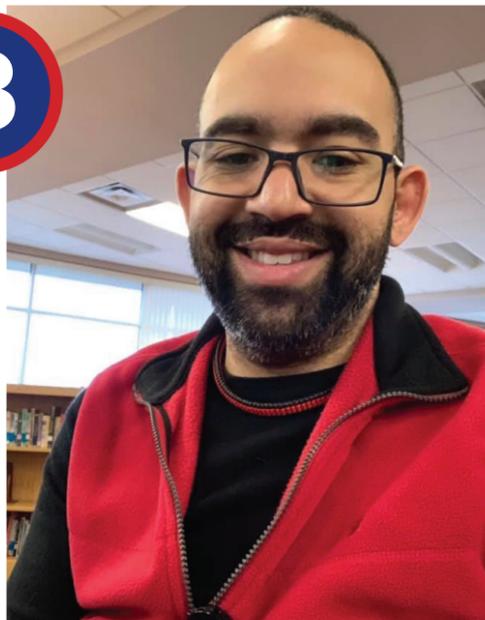
There are lots of ways to participate in the 20/20 Vision campaign. Pick at least one below and get started today!



1 Wear **RED** every Wednesday and on TEA's #RedforEd challenge days (Next one: Monday, March 4). Take a selfie or group picture with colleagues, and post it to your social media profiles with the hashtags **#RedforEd**, **#TN2020Vision** and your local's hashtag.

2 Make plans now to attend **TEA Civication** on the Tuesday of your Spring Break. TEA will reimburse you for mileage and provide a hotel room for those traveling more than 50 miles from Nashville. Civication is the perfect opportunity for face-to-face time with the elected leaders who make decisions that directly impact your classroom.

3 Complete the "I'm in!" form online to let TEA you are all in and indicate the actions you are willing to participate in. Click the "Take action" link located at TEAteachers.org/2020Vision to complete the form. Be sure to share the form with your colleagues, friends, family and other supporters of public education. This is not just for members of TEA!



4 Make regular contact with your legislators a priority. Phone calls and emails from educators back home can make the difference in how legislators vote on crucial issues like private school vouchers, testing, association attacks and increasing funding. Remember to start each contact with something positive!

In addition to legislators, it is important to also prioritize regular communication with your colleagues in your building. Make sure everyone is informed on what is happening in the legislature and hold each other accountable for staying engaged in the fight!



5 Submit a "Member Voices" column about why you are all in for the 20/20 Vision campaign. Columns will appear in this space in future issues of The Advocate. Please email achaney@tnea.org for more information on how to submit a column.

ASK TEA

ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

Q: As a band director, I have gotten to know a student very well this year as she frequently hangs out in my room during lunch and even calls me her "School Dad." I really don't mind the company, but I do worry what others might think. What should I do?

A: Interactions of that nature simply are not worth the risk to your job or your teaching license. Recent revisions to the Tennessee Teacher Code of Ethics caution educators to ensure interactions with students occur in transparent and appropriate settings, and state board rules similarly caution against engaging in "non-explicit" inappropriate communications with students, which is defined as "[a]ny communication . . . that is beyond the scope of the educator's professional responsibilities," and includes topics like romantic relationships and profane language. In light of the code and rule, it would seem imprudent to continue engaging with this student, or any other, in a manner beyond your professional responsibilities.

To avoid the appearance of impropriety, the safest course would be to prohibit any student from loitering in isolated areas where you typically work alone. Even if you keep the doors open and know others are nearby, it's not worth the risk! If a student loiters over your objection, consider relocating yourself to a more populated area before further addressing the student's insubordination. And, finally, if a student seeks advice about a personal matter, simply refer the student to the guidance counselor as such personal matters are within the scope of professional responsibilities for a school counselor.

Q: I want to tutor students after school, and plan to charge parents \$20 an hour for my tutoring services. Is that OK?

A: It depends. Asking parents to pay for additional services for students attending school in the district where you work is arguably a violation of the Teacher Code of Ethics because the code provides that educators cannot use their professional relationships with students for private advantage. Because you are employed as a teacher by the district, it's impossible to say how your status as a teacher influences the decision of a parent to engage you for tutoring services instead of another individual not affiliated with the district. As such, arguably, you would gain a private advantage as a result of that presumed influence were you to receive pay from both your employer and district parents to perform essentially the same service for the same group of students. It is possible that your school district has a board policy that allows teachers to receive private pay for tutoring, but in the absence of such a policy, charging parents for those activities could be construed as a breach of the code of ethics. So, before you charge for any additional services, verify that the activity is permitted by your employer.

Q: I heard a teacher colleague call a student a "complete moron" in front of other students. What should I do?

A: While the Teacher Code of Ethics has long provided that educators should not intentionally expose a student to embarrassment or disparagement, a new reporting provision was recently added requiring educators with personal knowledge of such a breach of the code by another educator to report that breach to the educator's immediate supervisor, the director of schools, or the local board of education within 30 days. Further, failure to make a timely report is itself considered a breach. As such, if you truly believe your colleague's comment intentionally exposed a student to embarrassment or disparagement, then your failure to report could be considered a breach itself.



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.

1

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CHANGE
2015

2

TEST

FAIL
2016

3

IS NOT

PROBLEMS
2017

4

A FAIR MEASURE

FAIL
2018

5

OF ACHIEVEMENT

?
2019

**STOP USING STATE TESTS
FOR PUNISHMENT**

We know standardized tests are not a valid measure of student or teacher performance, yet these scores seem to be the only thing that matters. Tests should be used to diagnose and teach. Join TEA's fight to end Tennessee's test-and-punish system. Visit the link below to say "I'm in!"



TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

TEAteachers.org/2020vision #TN2020Vision

INVESTMENT
PER STUDENT

WE ALL NEED

20/20

VISION

MISSOURI
\$11,283

T N

1

KENTUCKY
\$11,209

N E E D S

2

ARKANSAS
\$10,513

P R O P E R

3

GEORGIA
\$10,478

E D U C A T I O N

4

TENNESSEE
\$9,880

I N V E S T M E N T

5

IT TAKES ALL OF US
TO INCREASE K-12 FUNDING

As you can see, Tennessee is behind most of our neighbors in education funding, but well ahead in graduation rates and ACT scores. Join TEA's fight to increase state K-12 funding to get to the Southeast average by 2020. We've shown it's the best investment Tennessee can make. Visit the link below to say "I'm in!"



TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

TEAteachers.org/2020vision #TN2020Vision

20/20
VISION

SAVE the DATE

TEA Civication

Tuesday of Spring Break

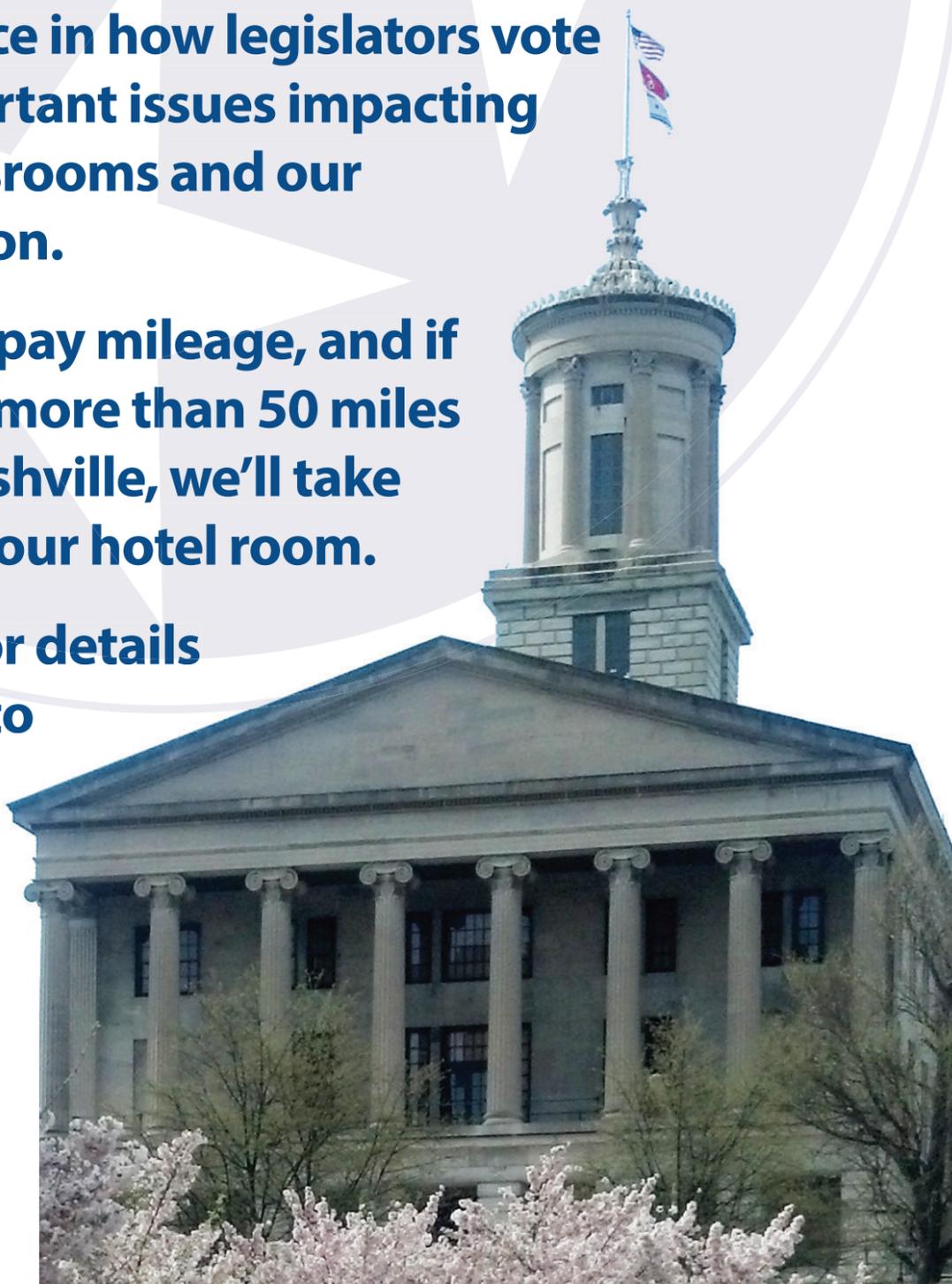
Stand up for public education!

Join educators from across the state in participating in TEA's Civication on the Tuesday of your Spring Break.

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

TEA will pay mileage, and if you live more than 50 miles from Nashville, we'll take care of your hotel room.

Watch for details on how to register soon!



Contact TEA

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www.teateachers.org
www.nea.org



MEMBER ADVOCACY WORKS - Members of the Williamson County and Franklin SSD Education Associations sat down with Williamson County lawmakers House Speaker Glen Casada, Senate Majority leader Jack Johnson, and Rep. Sam Whitson in Franklin on January 24. Member-Legislator meetings like this are occurring in communities across the state and are critical to making educator concerns a priority for lawmakers.

Leadership changes
from page 1

General Assembly

House Speaker Glen Casada (R-Franklin) reorganized the education committees, creating four subcommittees and a giant, 23-member full committee, the House's largest.

The chair of the full committee is Rep. Mark White (R-Memphis). White, who chaired a House education subcommittee for the past several years, is well-versed in the issues facing Tennessee public schools.

Vice-chair of the full committee is public school teacher and TEA member Kirk Haston (R-Lobelville). Haston is also a former NBA player.

"It is exciting to have an active public school teacher on the education committee and serving in the Legislature," said TEA President Beth Brown. "The last active teacher was TEA's good friend Rep. Jim Coley (R-Bartlett), who retired from teaching several years ago. Kirk will bring a lot of school experience and common sense to the debates on education. I hope other legislators will look to him in these meetings."

Brown notes that being a rural teacher from Perry County is also an important aspect of Haston's background, and will be helpful when discussing issues such as funding and technology resources.

The Senate Education committee also has some significant changes. Sen. Mike Bell (R-Riceville), who fought to protect teacher licenses from revocation based on test scores in 2014, is a new committee member. He is joined by Sen. Raumes Akbari (D-Memphis) who replaces Reginald Tate (defeated in last year's primary due to his pro-voucher and anti-teacher stances) as the committee's lone Democrat. Sen. Delores Gresham (R-Somerville) continues to serve as chair, and Sen. Brian Kelsey (R-Memphis) as vice-chair.



Gov. Bill Lee

Senate leadership has also had some significant changes. Sen. Ken Yager (R-Kington) was elected to the third leadership post, Republican caucus chair. Yager has received TEA's endorsement and has a strong pro-teachers and pro-public school record. The number two post, Majority Leader, went to Sen. Jack Johnson (R-Brentwood).

New Commissioner

Gov. Lee's final cabinet appointment came just days prior to his inauguration with the announcement of Penny Schwinn as the new state commissioner of education.

"I look forward to working with Commissioner Schwinn in the best interest of Tennessee students, educators and our great public schools," said TEA President Beth Brown in a statement to media. "As a newcomer to our state, I hope she will take time to see firsthand the meaningful work happening in classrooms all across Tennessee, and also gain an understanding of the support and resources needed to ensure student success."



Tennessee Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn

Brown, Executive Director Carolyn Crowder and Chief Lobbyist Jim Wrye had an opportunity to sit down with the commissioner prior to the announcement.

While Schwinn's background has caused concern for many educators, TEA leaders were optimistic about the potential for a positive relationship between the new commissioner and teachers.

"Based on our first conversation, I am confident we have common ground on the importance of test transparency, including educators' voices in policy decisions and working to ensure all students have access to a quality public education," Brown said.

SENATE EDUCATION



Dolores Gresham
Chair



Brian Kelsey
1st Vice-Chair



Raumes Akbari
2nd Vice-Chair



Mike Bell



Rusty Crowe



Steven Dickerson



Ferrell Haile



Joey Hensley



Jon Lundberg

HOUSE EDUCATION



Mark White
Chair



Kirk Haston
Vice-Chair

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Education Administration
Chair: Rep. David Byrd
K-12 Chair: Rep. John Ragan
Curriculum, Testing, & Innovation
Chair: Rep. Debra Moody
Higher Education
Chair: Rep. Jim Coley



Charlie Baum



David Byrd



Scott Cepicky



Mark Cochran



Jim Coley



John DeBerry, Jr.



Vincent Dixie



Bill Dunn



Jason Hodges



Chris Hurt



Tom Leatherwood



Harold Love, Jr.



Debra Moody



Antonio Parkinson



John Ragan



Iris Rudder



Jerry Sexton



Kevin Vaughan



Terri Lynn Weaver



Ryan Williams



John Windle

Education Administration
Byrd, Cepicky, Hodges, Love, J. Sexton, White, Williams
K-12
Ragan, Haston, Rudder, Weaver, White, Windle
Curriculum, Testing, & Innovation
Moody, Baum, DeBerry, Dixie, Dunn, Leatherwood, White
Higher Education
Coley, Cochran, Hurt, Parkinson, Vaughan, White

Support shifts toward SROs to keep students, educators safe

School safety
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legislation allowing educators with “proper training” to carry firearms on school grounds as a safety measure. A proposal to arm teachers failed in the 2018 legislative session.

“Our students need to feel safe in the classroom in order to focus on their education,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “It is up to us as the adults to figure out how to give them that peace of mind. We are fortunate in Tennessee to be in a financial situation that allows us to invest more money in public education, including common-sense school safety measures.”

Freshman legislator Rep. Brandon Ogles (R-Franklin) is leading the push to file the SRO legislation.



TEA Bill Tracker

The ones to watch

This is the start of what will become a long list of the key education bills being considered this session. The deadline to file bills is Friday, Feb. 8. Be sure to check back in future issues for updates on important legislation to watch in 2019.

The Good:

HB66/SB373 (Moon/Swann)

Reduces weight of student achievement from 30% to 15% in teacher evaluations. Allows teacher to choose whether TVAAS growth or qualitative observation make up difference if in an untested subject.

HB20/SB337 (Reedy/Gresham)

Requires the LEA to pay for the cost of background check investigations for LEA employees in certain cases.

The Bad:

HB18/SB38 (Reedy/Gresham)

Expands eligibility for the special ed voucher program to include homeschool and private school students who've not attended a TN public school.

HB70/SB20 (Powers/Gresham)

Extends the repeal of the Tennessee Virtual Public Schools Act for an additional four years.

More updates:

If you are interested in receiving more frequent updates via email about action taken in the General Assembly, please email asmirnov@tnea.org. The frequency of the email updates varies depending on actions taken by the legislature.

Coalition strengthens push for community schools support, funding

A statewide coalition of community schools is working to file legislation in the state General Assembly to expand the reach of community schools, which have been proven to be a viable school improvement strategy.

“Transformational community schools are designed to meet the specific and unique needs of the students they serve, and no community school will look or operate exactly the same way as another because all communities are different,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “TEA is backing the bill to support community schools in Tennessee because they represent the true differentiation in education.”

Practitioners and advocates from across the state have been meeting during the past few months to work on the legislative proposal.

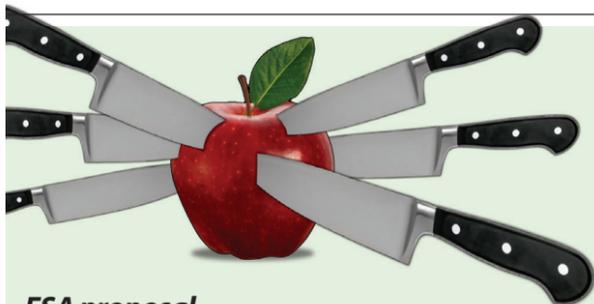
“Every community in Tennessee is unique,” said Lyn Hoyt, a parent and entrepreneur who leads the Tennessee Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools. “Parents, educators and community members are able to choose the

resources and services needed to maximize the potential of their neighborhood schools — and it's already working in so many communities in Tennessee. We hope to expand that to every school that needs this kind of support.”

Research shows that community schools can improve equity by improving student outcomes in both rural and urban areas.

During the last legislative session, TEA introduced legislation proposing the creation of a grant program to be overseen by the state that would provide state resources to support the establishment or expansion of community schools. With many legislators expressing support for the bill, it successfully cleared the education committees in the House and Senate, but ultimately stalled in the finance committees for lack of funding.

“TEA is proud to support educators, providers, parents, and community advocates in expanding the reach of transformational community schools,” Brown said.



ESA proposal
from page 1

from the truth. ESAs are vouchers on steroids, as recipients are sent money directly rather than applying it toward the cost of private school tuition. As such, parents can then spend the funds however they like, even if that means keeping their children home and not attending school at all.

This super voucher has been used in other states with disastrous results. Sending funds directly to parents has invited widespread fraud and abuse of voucher funds.

“The fact is, we have truant officers for a reason,” says TEA chief lobbyist Jim Wrye. “The state will be providing a monetary incentive for the misuse of funds and children will suffer as a result.”

Oversight has proven to be a tremendous challenge in ESA states, often with the government resorting to random audits rather than comprehensive reviews due to the sheer volume of purchases. Inappropriate purchases have been caught, but also parents that took the money and simply re-enrolled their child in a public school again.

There are also still all the same challenges that have always plagued voucher proposals. It became clear last year that many legislators understood the need to ensure real accountability by demanding that any recipient of public money took the same test required of public school students. This would be even more challenging if the state started to subsidize home school students with public funds.

The central problem for privatization advocates also remains: vouchers don't work. Study after study, even those commissioned by pro-privatization think tanks and foundations, come to the same conclusion when looking at voucher programs in other states. Student achievement does not improve for voucher students, and in most cases, it gets worse.

There are various ideas being floated about how a system of ESAs would be funded, but inevitably the cost will be borne by local governments. The static costs of running the public schools will remain even if enrollment declines, meaning the local taxpayers will have to foot the bill for a state-mandated voucher scheme.

“It is clear through elections and polling that Tennesseans do not want vouchers in our state,” says Wrye. “My hope is that we can focus on making our public schools the best they can be, and do away with efforts to hurt them.”

Efforts to fix portfolio problems continue

A statewide movement to change the poorly implemented Tennessee Pre-K and Kindergarten portfolio system was one of the best examples of the collective power of teachers during the last legislative session.

Teachers expressed disappointment when they saw a pilot program they largely supported was drastically changed when it was implemented statewide. Last year, legislation was passed to hold Kindergarten and Pre-K teachers harmless and the state Department of Education was directed to re-evaluate changes to the pilot program and determine the best way to move forward.

One proposal in the 111th General Assembly is to do away with the portfolio system and clustered standards altogether, allowing teachers to have the option of using their observation score toward their total evaluation score.

“TEA led the charge in highlighting problems with the portfolio system and helping legislators understand that it was designed to keep teachers from being forced to use schoolwide data,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “If the portfolio goes away, it needs to be replaced with something that doesn't punish teachers based on test results of students they never taught.”

The work of improving the portfolio system is part of TEA's larger goal to eliminate high-stakes decisions based on standardized test scores in Tennessee by 2020.

Please go to TEAteachers.org/2020Vision to see how you can help.