Tennessee schools get top 10 results with bottom 10 funding. We lead the South in graduation rates and statewide ACT scores, yet are behind all neighboring states in funding per student save for Mississippi. What would it take to get off of the bottom of the list and provide the funding Tennessee schools deserve?

Give state tax revenue to schools instead of stuffing it in reserves.

For the past five years Tennessee has been running huge revenue surpluses as education needs go unmet. Over this five-year span the state collected nearly $3 billion more in general fund revenue than it anticipated. Last year alone the state general fund had a $580 million surplus. These are millions that could have gone to classrooms.

While surpluses contribute to important outcomes like having the country’s healthiest teacher retirement system, the size of surpluses must be weighed with the critical needs of students and teachers.

An example is RTI, where the state budgets $13 million, yet it is estimated to cost $160 million to have enough RTI specialists for every school and student in need. Not fully funding RTI while stashing surplus revenue in reserve accounts is a choice, and one that is not in the best interest of the state.

“A child only has one chance at third grade. Withholding funds that could benefit that student when it clearly is within our means is simply wrong,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “Educators do our part every day, and with revenue available, it is time the administration and legislature do their part.”

Kindergarten Portfolio

cont. page 7

Pearson

cont. page 7

State funding

cont. page 4

Despite pressure from TEA and legislators, the state slow-walks changes to portfolio system

Kindergarten teachers spoke and the Tennessee General Assembly listened. It appears it will take longer than expected for the state department of education to act.

As a result of powerful TEA member testimony demanding relief from the troubled early learning portfolio system in April, the Tennessee legislature unanimously passed a bill allowing school districts to use alternate measures of student growth have been approved by the State Board of Education.

Signed into law by Gov. Bill Lee before the legislature adjourned for the summer, HR 91/SB 442 ensured that teachers are held harmless for the 2018-19 school year and called

Kindergarten Portfolio

cont. page 7

Department faces questions about TNReady, announces online portal

Officials from the state department of education testified before the House Education committee earlier this month about the details of the new agreement with testing vendor Pearson. They also responded to a litany of questions from lawmakers concerning the new vendor’s ability to repair confidence in the state assessment that has been damaged in recent years by various administration and reporting problems.

The state’s new contract with Pearson, which will pay the company about $19 million per year, is for administration of the 3-8 math and language arts tests, high school EOCs, alternate assessments for science and social studies, and the optional second grade assessment. Testing vendor ETS will still retain the contract for item writing for the assessment.

TNReady will be administered only in paper form in the coming year, as lawmakers were dubious of an online rollout with a new vendor after technical problems plagued previous companies. To that end TDOE officials announced an online readiness event to be held on March 3, 2020.
As you may have heard, TEA has announced plans for a Rally for Our Schools on March 16, 2020. The purpose of the rally is to be both celebrate all that is good about our strong public schools, and to demand that the state step up to provide the increased funding our students, teachers, and schools deserve.

As we enter the final year of TEA’s 20/20 Vision campaign, the TEA Board of Directors and TEA RA delegates wanted a statewide rally held in Nashville to keep educators, parents and other public education advocates focused on our 20/20 Vision. We also know that our state legislators are well aware that Tennessee has made progress in increasing funding and reducing the testing burden on students, there is still a lot of improvement needed.

In case you need more convincing on why you should make plans to join us on March 16, I plan to use this space for the next few publications to give you my Top 5 reasons why you should participate in the Rally for Our Schools.

In no particular order, my first reason you should attend is the importance of our state legislators that while Tennessee has made progress in increasing funding and reducing the testing burden on students, there is still a lot of improvement needed.

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We recognize that the issues you identify in your school likely differ from those experienced by another educator in a different part of the state - or even just a different part of your own district.

This is your chance to identify the unique challenges educators and students face in your school or district. The questions cover topics like well-rounded curriculum, student health, educator support, school climate and educator salary needs.

Your answers will be kept confidential and used only to guide the work of the association.

Please don’t pass up this opportunity. Please make sure your voice is heard by completing the checklist and, if at all possible, by standing up at the rally. Your voice is important as we work to accomplish TEA’s 20/20 Vision and ensure all Tennessee students have access to a high-quality public education.

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### American Education Week 2019  
**November 18-22**  
Reach. Educate. Inspire.

**MONDAY**  
**18** Kickoff Day  
Encourage students, staff and parents to celebrate great public schools.

**TUESDAY**  
**19** Parents Day  
Invite parents and family members to school for a first-hand look at a typical school day.

**WEDNESDAY**  
**20** Education Support Professionals Day  
Celebrate ESPs and their contributions.

**THURSDAY**  
**21** Educator for a Day  
Encourage elected officials and community leaders to serve as “educator for a day”.

**FRIDAY**  
**22** Substitute Educators Day  
Honor and celebrate educators who substitute in the absence of regular classroom teachers.

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**#aew2019 | www.nea.org/aew**

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**NEA announces new Read Across America branding, TEA’s Ruffy the Reading Dog remains part of Read Across Tennessee**

Our student populations are ever-changing and evolving and every year there are new children's books that reflect that diversity. That's why NEA's Read Across America is re-branding with a new logo to appeal to students of all ages and backgrounds and a continued mission of "Celebrating a Nation of Diverse Readers."

Of course, children still love Dr. Seuss, and his birthday on March 2, also Read Across America Day, is still an ideal time for a school-wide reading event when you can serve green eggs and ham, but with the broadened scope of NEA's Read Across America, there are activities, resources, and ideas to keep students reading all year long.

NEA’s licensing agreement with Dr. Seuss ended in August, which means NEA, TEA and members must no longer use the previous Read Across America logo featuring The Cat in the Hat. As you make plans for Read Across America activities, please be sure to update your materials with the new logo pictured below. TEA's Ruffy the Reading Dog will still be part of Read Across Tennessee and TEA materials.

The logo and other resources are available online at readacrossamerica.org.

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**Investing in leaders of color through the NEA Pathways Project - Don’t miss this opportunity to apply!**

Are you passionate about racial and social justice? NEA's Pathways Project has a perfect opportunity for you.

The new initiative is seeking Hispanic, Latinx, Chicano, Native, Indigenous, American Indian, Black, Asian, Pacific/Islander, Native Alaskan and/or Native Hawaiian members to develop, test, and model leadership training skills.

As part of the initiative, veteran leaders from those communities will benefit from access to additional opportunities to grow their leadership while serving as peer coaches for members of the cohort.

This is a one-year research and development project. The project would initiate with the 2019-2020 fiscal year and conclude with the 2020 Conference on Racial and Social Justice.

Educators are invited to apply online by Friday, November 1 at nea.org/pathways.

**EXPECTATIONS FOR COHORT MEMBERS AND PEER COACHES**

- NEA Conference on Racial & Social Justice—Monday, June 29-Wednesday, July 1, 2020 in Atlanta, Ga.

There will also be virtual conferences between face-to-face meetings, as well as micro-learning activities for the cohort and peer coaches. Dates are TBD based on the development of the program content and the needs of the participants and mentors.

Selected peer coaches will be required to submit a signed Memorandum of Agreement.

Deadline to apply is this Friday, Nov. 1! Apply online at nea.org/pathways.
According to the most recent state financial report, Tennessee has $5.5 billion in reserves and is the only state east of the Mississippi with more cash than debt, not having borrowed money through bonds since 1976 and meeting every pension obligation since 1973. This remarkable record of fiscal responsibility provides more of an opportunity to get Tennessee out of the education funding basement. Missed opportunities to make investments have real impacts on educators. Tennessee ranks in the middle of Southern states for teacher salaries (we finally “beat Bama” last year) but still is in the bottom third nationally. Had Gov. Haslam’s last budget provided $255 million instead of $55 million for teacher pay, the state would still have had a $380 million surplus while providing a 5% across the board raise, important in a time when attracting and retaining teachers is increasingly difficult.

It will be a battle to change minds and processes of state decisionmakers. Surprises occur because the budget process chronically—and some say intentionally—underestimates revenue growth. The state forecasts future revenues that form the basis of the state budget, forecasts that have been consistently short of actual collections. From 2014-2015 through 2018-2019, the state predicted overall general fund revenue growth between 9% and 11%. The actual growth over the same period was more than double the estimates—roughly 25%—leading to the $3 billion surplus. Tennesseans deserve realistic revenue forecasts that don’t shortchange schools. Missing growth estimates by double digits is not good governance nor is it responsible to students and teachers, not while Tennessee is near the bottom in education funding.

Next month a select group of state officials will meet to decide the range of state revenue growth estimates for the 2020-2021. If the past is any guide, it will be far too low, causing far too little education investment.

Adjusting growth predictions upward by less than one percent can generate hundreds of millions for classrooms and still leave the state with a healthy surplus. Look for TEA to make citizens and members aware of this critical aspect of state budgeting, working to ensure revenue that is collected is invested in our public schools. It is financially responsible for both Tennessee schoolchildren and the state.

“It is time our schools get the funding they deserve—funding we’ve earned with our hard work and results—by budgeting the taxpayer funds Tennessee pays for our schools,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “We are stuffing reserve accounts with cash while teachers dig into their pockets for classroom supplies. We are trying to make our own family budgets work while the state doesn’t do what it clearly can afford for the education budget. We can be fiscally responsible and responsible to our children. It just takes political will and leadership.”

If we need any more proof the state can do more, in just the first two months of the current fiscal year, the state collected $154 million more than it anticipated.

## Tennessee stuffs millions while education needs are unmet

### COMPARING OUTCOMES AND FUNDING SHOW TENNESSEE SCHOOLS DESERVE MORE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Funding Needed to Get Tennessee to the Southeast Average</th>
<th>Per Student Funding in Southeastern States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>$1.2 Billion</td>
<td>$12,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>$13,077</td>
<td>$11,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>$13,018</td>
<td>$10,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>$11,446</td>
<td>$10,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>$11,410</td>
<td>$10,443</td>
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<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>$11,829</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>$13,077</td>
<td>$10,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>$13,018</td>
<td>$10,490</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** NEA Rankings of the States 2018 and Estimates of School Statistics 2019
Thank God for Mississippi?

TENNESSEE
NAT’L RANKINGS
AVERAGE ACT
SCORE
8th
GRADUATION
RATE
7th
STUDENT
FUNDING PER
43rd

STATE CASH RESERVES
$5.5 billion

Education salary funds increased at a record pace, but nowhere near what the state could afford.

Revenue Surplus
Year
14-15
$2.952 billion
15-16
$153 million
16-17
$852 million
17-18
$663 million
18-19
$580 million

General Fund only, does not include all surplus revenues.

Ed Salary Funds
Year
18-19
$558 million
17-18
$304 million
16-17
$105 million
15-16
$98 million
14-15
$0

Total Revenue Surplus (FY15-19)
$3.558 million

Total Ed Salary Funds (FY15-19)
$2.952 billion

Fiscal year July 1 - June 30.

States that require all students to take the assessment.

Source: ACT, of the 20 states that require all students to take the assessment.

Source: USDE Digest of Education Statistics 2018. TN is 5th for on time black graduation.

Source: Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Revenue Surplus Ed Salary Funds

Increases in the BEP Instructional Component by year Fiscal year July 1 - June 30.

Source: NEA Rankings of the States 2018.

Funding Per Student
43rd
Do More, Spend Less, Live Better.

Explore a variety of budget-friendly solutions made to give Retired Educators peace of mind.

Take advantage of member-only benefits made for Education Support Professionals.

Choose from practical home and career ideas designed for Higher Education Professionals.

Make the most of proven strategies to help launch the careers of Future Educators.

Get tips on stretching your paycheck, member discounts, travel ideas and more for every type of member. Download your now.

Tap into a world of resources.
In the fall of 2018, Cheatham County teachers voted to engage in collaborative conferencing under the state PECCA law. Teachers also overwhelmingly voted to have TEA represent them at the table.

The process moved along smoothly, with the Cheatham County Board of Education team working cooperatively with the teachers’ team, until another organization stepped in and unfairly interfered with the PECCA process. After receiving what the school board perceived as a threat from the Professional Educators of Tennessee, the board stopped conferencing.

TEA Legal stepped in and filed a legal complaint detailing the unlawful acts of both PET and the Cheatham County Board of Education.

“Three other organizations have never demonstrated a serious interest in collaborative conferencing, as evidenced by the fact that PET has not initiated a single PECCA petition in any district in the state,” said TEA Assistant Executive Director Steve McCrady. “Instead of being an ally for those they claim to represent, the organization chose instead to interfere with teachers’ rights by urging the cessation of collaborative conferencing in Cheatham County.”

After the repeal of bargaining rights in 2011, the PECCA law is the only thing guaranteeing teachers a right to have a voice in their working conditions.

“As we work to improve teaching conditions and make this profession more appealing to future generations, it is imperative that we protect and strengthen any law that gives teachers a voice,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “TEA Legal has done an outstanding job preparing teachers to engage in collaborative conferencing and monitoring the MOUs already in place to ensure teachers’ rights are protected.”

As a result of TEA’s efforts, the Cheatham County Board of Education agreed to return to the conferencing table. Cheatham County is just one example of the numerous legal complaints TEA has filed as a result of violations of the PECCA law.

### Why TEA?

**When it comes to negotiating and enforcing a MOU governing teachers’ working conditions, you need a strong and effective advocate by your side.**

**TEA’s record speaks for itself:**

- **100% of petitions to begin collaborative conferencing under the PECCA law have been initiated by TEA, which demonstrates TEA is the only professional association with a serious commitment to protecting and improving working conditions for teachers.**

**Meanwhile other organizations want to limit PECCA:**

> “...[I] would prefer working conditions to be written into the board policy rather than in a memorandum of understanding.”  
> - Professional Educators of TN executive director

### kindergarten Portfolio from page 1

For “a portfolio review committee” comprised of three pre-k or kindergarten teachers (one from each of the grand divisions of the state), four legislators, one representative of the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents, one representative of the Tennessee School Boards Association, as well as the state education commissioner or a designee.

The new law required the committee to review the pre-k-kindergarten growth portfolio model process, identify expectations for the model and areas of improvement, and make recommendations including “ways to streamline the growth portfolio model rubrics and processes” and “improve the functionality of the growth portfolio platform.”

The portfolio committee was assembled and met July 23, but it did not include any of the outspoken critics of the portfolio system. The meeting was not publicized, and no notice of the meeting was published in the General Assembly’s calendar of events — an unusual deviation from the legislature’s standard practice of publishing meeting calendars in advance.

The committee developed nine recommendations, which include ensuring that “the technology platform provides teachers an easy-to-use and error-free environment” to submit student work, reducing the peer reviewer pool, simplifying the scoring rubrics, ensuring there is a grievance process, and reducing the number of collections teachers are required to submit.

“This portfolio review committee recommended developing alternative growth options to be available by 2020-21,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “Based on the testimony we heard in the General Assembly in the spring and the overwhelming response to the TEA portfolio survey, Tennessee students and teachers cannot afford to wait this long.”

Brown recalled that when the portfolio system was rolled out, teachers immediately identified problems and inconsistencies.

When the State Department of Education did not offer a fix, it was teachers who made sure the legislature knew about the mounting issues — and passed a law to address them.

“We urge all kindergarten and pre-k teachers in Tennessee to notify us of the issues with the portfolio system during the current school year,” Brown said.

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**Pearson from page 1**

Pearson also announced they would be unveiling a new online portal this month. This portal will allow teachers, testing coordinators, and administrators to access support, create practice tests, order materials, and view student and classroom level reports. The portal will also enable parents to view similar materials, though it will not replace the paper score reports sent to parents.

State officials faced numerous questions from committee members as to whether the portal or reports made available to teachers and parents would include the test items themselves, as intended when a testing transparency law was passed in 2016. Legislators were informed that only 30% of test items were released in the previous year, as the majority of test questions are still either being field-tested or copyrighted by other states. The intent was expressed to increase the items released, but specific plans to enhance item writing sessions were not announced.

Other lawmakers expressed concerns about the total time students spend each year testing, and whether or not there was a plan to decrease testing time. Officials responded by pointing out testing reductions put in place last year, and noted that reviews were ongoing.

The timeline for the full assessment was also provided during the meeting. Paper materials are to be delivered to districts by November 14. Raw scores will be delivered by January 6, 2020, with full score reports expected by January 31, 2020. Scoring will be completed by both machine and hand, with constructed responses being graded by hand. Approximately one third of the scorers will possess an active teaching license.
ALL Tennesseans come to the Rally for our schools. The funding we deserve!

Monday ~ Noon
State Capitol
March 16, 2020
Nashville, TN

Rally organized by TN Education Assn.
For more information: TEATeachers.org