DeVos crowd tells who we fight

First she tried to defund Special Olympics, and now she is working to defund Tennessee public schools.

On April 1, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos came to Nashville to lend her support to the voucher push in the General Assembly.

“Without question, the American Federation of Children is an organization that is based in the state of Tennessee. The original bill was a statewide hunting license for pro-charter groups.”

State privatization bill threatens urban, rural and suburban districts

An administration bill to create a state charter commission capable of placing a charter school in any school system continues to generate controversy, and a strong fight from TEA.

The bill has narrowly passed several committees. Republicans and Democrats have voted against the bill and strong bipartisan opposition continues to alter the legislation.

“We want charter schools to benefit students and not destabilize to school budgets and finances, and there is little data to show that charter schools do better than public schools,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “The original bill was a statewide hunting license for pro-charter groups.”

 escolar

“School safety is on my mind every day. I don’t believe that allowing people with no additional training in school safety to carry guns would make our schools safer,” said Jordan Randolph, a teacher in Murfreesboro.

In the name of “school safety,” legislators are again pushing legislation to arm educators.

Sponsored by Rep. Ryan Williams (R-Cookeville) and Sen. Mike Bell (R-Riceville), HB1380/SB1399 advanced last week in the K-12 subcommittee, in spite of several teachers and law enforcement officers speaking against it.

“A safety is on my mind every day. I don’t believe that allowing people with no additional training in school safety to carry guns would make our schools safer,” said Jordan Randolph, a teacher in Murfreesboro.

“Schools are already high-stress environments, and allowing teachers to carry guns would further endanger students and school personnel. TEA has instead backed Gov. Bill Lee’s efforts to fund more school resource officers. HB1380 is similar to a controversial measure passed in 2016 that allows full-time faculty and other employees of public colleges and universities in Tennessee to carry guns.”

Rewrite of portfolio law moving forward

Teachers demand relief from the fundamentally flawed early learning portfolio. Legislation is moving in the House and Senate after powerful advocacy from TEA members.

The proposed amendment allows school systems to choose to keep the portfolio, opt out altogether or adopt an alternate growth measure.

TEA is the leading organization highlighting problems and demanding action on the botched pre-K and kindergarten portfolio implementation. Those efforts and the state’s inaction were on full display.
We need you! Fuel up and help us finish the session strong!

By TEA President Beth Brown

Between antsy students eager for summer break and the days lost to state testing, the post-Spring Break slog to the finish line can be pretty rough on educators, students and parents. Unfortunately, it is also the time the General Assembly is considering some of the most consequential legislation of the entire session.

I know you are stretched thin, but it is critical that we stay engaged in the fights happening every day in Nashville. Many legislators are under intense pressure to toe the line and go along with priorities set by the administration and party leadership, instead of voting in the best interest of their constituents back home. These divides are evident as committees take up bills on everything from testing to privatizing public education.

A number of bills are moving through committees to address TNReady issues, including test transparency and reducing the high-stakes impact of test scores. Despite years of testing failures, the administration and the department want to ‘stay the course’ and not make any changes. With their opposition to proposed testing bills, legislators need to hear from you on why these bills are so important.

The only way we protect our students and public education is to be loud and unrelenting until the session adjourns.

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder

When the state shifted to evaluating teachers based on students’ standardized test scores, one of our deepest concerns was that this would unfairly force some of our most talented teachers to leave the schools and students who need them most. By trying something as unreliable as standardized test scores to a teacher’s job security and ability to get a raise, the state has created a situation where teachers are having to choose between their professional livelihood and the students they love. Our students and teachers deserve better than to be put in that predicament.

Research has shown that students in lower income communities are more likely to score poorly on state standardized tests. A combination of bias in test questions and external factors, like coming to school hungry or distracted by issues outside the four walls of the school building, make it more difficult for students in these communities to perform well on tests like TNReady.

TEA has been working for years to chip away at high-stakes testing system the state has created. We blocked an attempt to tie teacher licensure to TVAAS data, we worked to lower the weight of TVAAS in the overall evaluation and have pushed bold harmless legislation in the years (and there have been A LOT of them) the state tested experienced a serious failure.

As part of TEA’s 20/20 Vision to increase public education funding and end high-stakes decisions tied to state test scores, we are attacking these issues from every angle. HB632/SB565 is an important step toward mitigating some of the damage already done. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Bryan Terry and Sen. Janice Bowling, essentially grants teachers who have scored a 4 or 5 on their overall evaluation for three straight years a waiver from student growth data for the next three years if the data would bring their evaluation score to a 3 or lower.

Though we know evaluations based on TVAAS don’t identify our most effective teachers any better than they identify the lowest performing, the intent of this proposal is to give teachers an opportunity to teach our most vulnerable students without the threat of TVAAS hanging over their heads.

Of course, what this bill also does is acknowledge the harm that the high-stakes testing system is causing in lower income and ethnic minority communities. The fact that this bill is necessary, that teachers need a safety net to take teaching positions in these schools, demonstrates that with its data-obsessed mindset the state is hurting the very students it claims to be saving. A misguided attempt to label teachers based on test scores has driven qualified, committed teachers away from the students who need them most.

The root of all of this is the deeply flawed system of using test scores in high-stakes decisions. Numerous studies have shown that state standardized test scores are not an effective measure of student achievement, teacher effectiveness or school performance.

I am hopeful that as TEA continues our advocacy efforts around our 20/20 Vision that more legislators will be lining up to sponsor bills to finally put an end to the test-and-punish system that is dragging down our great public schools.
Q: I was arrested at Bonnaroo last summer, but because no charges were filed, it never occurred to me that I might have had an obligation to report arrests. Did I have an obligation to report, and if so, what should I do?

A: Not pursuant to any federal or state law, some districts do have policies that require employees to report arrests. Check your local board policies and MOU, if applicable, to determine whether your district requires reporting. It is a duty to report, a teacher who fails to do so could be considered insubordinate either for failing to report, or for failing to do so in a timely manner. For support in working through this issue, contact your local association rep or UniServ coordinator. A directory of UniServ staff is located on page 6 of this publication and online at teateachers.org.

Q: I was on maternity leave earlier this year, and now I am being asked to claim students for the upcoming TN Ready tests. What should I do?

A: Provided a student is present the requisite number of days, state law requires that student’s results to be attributed to a specific teacher based on concepts known as “instructional time” and “instructional availability.” Due to your leave, however, in addition to considering your students’ attendance, you will need specific guidance from your district because the handling of a teacher’s leave of absence is a matter of local discretion. If you need claiming assistance, or if you find an error in your claiming after the fact, contact your association rep or UniServ coordinator. And don’t forget, claiming-related issues can be grievable under the evaluation policy, so don’t hesitate to ask for help immediately if you detect an error or other concerns.
Who decided THAT?! Making sense of the decision makers influencing your classroom

**Tennessee General Assembly**
The state legislature passes laws that guide one or more of the rule-making bodies below in setting education policy. Legislators are our go-to source for correcting implementation problems, like with the kindergarten portfolio mess.

**EXAMPLE:**
The General Assembly passes a 4% raise for teachers. Funds are allocated in the budget. This acts as a directive to the other bodies listed below that the legislative intent is for all teachers to receive a 4% raise.

**State Board of Education**
The State Board of Education makes rules - not laws - and directs the implementation of laws passed by the legislative body. The board is appointed by the governor and is therefore unaccountable to voters.

**EXAMPLE:**
This is where things can start to go wrong. The state board can forgo applying the 4% raise to the salary schedule and instead allow discretion at the local level for how new salary funds are used.

**TN Department of Education**
The department implements the policies set by the legislature and state board, and makes the day-to-day decisions that impact all schools (like when to bail on TNReady when systems crash). It can also have a strong hand in swaying legislation.

**EXAMPLE:**
The department acts as an extension of the commissioner, providing guidance to districts reflecting the governor’s preferences, which included an emphasis on pay-for-test scores with the previous administration.

**Local Board of Education**
Local boards of education set budgets, determine pay scales, add locally mandated tests and more. This body works closest with individual schools and is the most in-tune with the unique needs of local communities.

**EXAMPLE:**
A local board can take any flexibility granted by the State Board and determine how to use the 4% increase: apply it across the board, use it for one-time bonuses, apply it to increased benefit costs, etc.
Advocates needed!
Important fights ahead in final stretch of 2019 legislative session

THE FIGHT

ESA VOUCHERS

HB939/SB795
The administration's proposal to direct more than $125 million in taxpayer dollars to fund private schools would harm students and public schools statewide. Education savings account vouchers are proven to lower student achievement and cripple public school budgets. Legislators voting in support of any form of vouchers are turning their backs on students, educators and schools back home in favor of Nashville politics.

CHARTER EXPANSION

HB940/SB796
Gov. Bill Lee's charter school bill will create a new state commission with the authority to drop a charter school into any district in the state. Public school budgets in rural, suburban and urban districts would be up for grabs for charter school operators. Charter schools are not proven to increase student success. They are, however, proven to drain public school budgets of already scarce resources.

TESTING & EVALUATION

HB66/SB373 and HB0632/SB0565
This bill reduces the impact of TVAAS in evaluations, moving us closer to achieving TEA's 20/20 Vision of ending high-stakes decisions tied to TNReady.

HB1246/SB753
This bill strengthens test transparency laws requiring the department to release TNReady questions.

THE ASK

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

- Daily calls and emails are crucial as we enter the final weeks of the session. Legislators need to hear from their constituents!
- It's not all bad news! Say thank you to those who are standing with public education and encourage their continued support as tough votes approach.
- Explain how the legislation they are considering will impact the students and educators back home in their communities.

ENGAGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use your social media profiles to spread the word that we are in a fight for the future of public education in Tennessee.
- Just as you do with legislators, explain to your social networks how vouchers and radical charter expansion will hurt the students and schools in your community.
- Don't forget to tag your posts with: #TN2020Vision #FundTNschools #RedforEd #NOvouchers

ASK FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO JOIN THE FIGHT

- Fighting for public education is not just a TEA issue. Parents, local school boards and faith leaders statewide are standing united for public education.
- Personally ask your family members, friends and colleagues to contact their legislators in opposition to ESA vouchers and radical charter expansion that will impact all counties in the state.
Governor’s ESA voucher plan faces widespread opposition, fight on to protect students and public schools

Private school voucher plans are not the answer

Governor Bill Lee has introduced an education voucher plan that allows parents to use tax dollars to fund their children’s education at private schools. The plan has faced significant opposition from teacher unions, public school educators, and parents who believe that vouchers would divert funding away from public schools and increase inequality in education.

The voucher plan would provide families with a voucher that can be used at any private school, including those that are religious or operate under other sectarian affiliations. This has raised concerns about the potential for the voucher system to undermine public school education and exacerbate existing inequalities in access to quality education.

Supporters of the voucher plan argue that it would give families more choice and flexibility in their child’s education, while opponents argue that it would undermine the principle of public education and lead to increased inequality in the provision of educational services.

The voucher plan has been met with widespread opposition from teacher unions, who have launched a campaign to challenge the plan and protect public education. The Tennessee Education Association (TEA), the state union representing public school teachers, has been a key player in this campaign, and has been active in organizing protests and advocating for public education.

The voucher plan is part of a broader trend in education policy in the United States, with increasing emphasis on school choice and privatization. While some states have implemented voucher programs, others are looking to other forms of school choice, such as charter schools and school choice organizations.

Opponents of the voucher plan argue that it would divert funding away from public schools and reduce the quality of education available to students in those schools. They also point to concerns about the potential for the voucher system to undermine the principle of public education and exacerbate existing inequalities in access to quality education.

In Tennessee, the voucher plan has faced significant opposition, with the Tennessee Education Association (TEA) and other public education advocates launching a campaign to challenge the plan and protect public education. The campaign has included protests, rallies, and letters to the editor, as well as legal challenges to the plan.

The Tennessee Education Association (TEA) is a union representing public school teachers in the state. The organization is dedicated to ensuring that all students have access to high-quality public education, and is a key player in the opposition to the voucher plan.

The TEA has been active in organizing protests and advocating for public education, and has been a vocal opponent of the voucher plan. The organization has also been involved in legal challenges to the plan, seeking to stop its implementation.

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Bill could drop charters in any district, strip funds from local public schools

**Charter expansion ranges**

There have been major changes to the bill since its introduction. The current version has charter organizations first going before a local school board rather than directly to the state, and it reinstated the ability of school systems to cite negative fiscal impacts to public schools as a reason to deny a charter application, something that was intentionally omitted in the first draft. However, this new commission can still decide whether the local system was right to deny a charter due to financial or other concerns and authorize the charter. All decisions are final and without appeal.

The State Board of Education currently hears charter appeals, and has rarely overruled local boards. The State Board can only authorize charters over local objections in school systems with boards. The State Board can only reinstate the ability of school systems to cite negative fiscal impacts to public schools as a reason to deny a charter due to financial or other concerns and authorize the charter. All decisions are final and without appeal.

There have been major changes to the bill since its introduction. The current version has charter applications first going before a local school board, allowing school districts to appeal to the State Board of Education. The State Board can only reinstate the ability of school systems to cite negative fiscal impacts to public schools as a reason to deny a charter due to financial or other concerns and authorize the charter. All decisions are final and without appeal.

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**Portfolio changes from page 1**

Last week when three teachers and a superintendent showed legislators the depth of the crisis in Tennessee’s pre-k and kindergarten classrooms, and articulated a dire need to fix it.

Several bills are moving through the legislature at this time, including Rep. Antonia Parkinson (D-Memphis), whose district already has dozens of charter schools—mainly through the state’s failing Achievement School District—said he opposed the bill and warned his colleagues in committee. “You all are about to get a taste of the charter medicine.”

The bill now goes before the House and Senate finance committees. TEA continues to fight.

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**Powerful member testimony on portfolio issues builds momentum for significant changes**

With the Spring testing window just days away, legislators are considering a number of bills concerning TNReady and its many shortcoming.

“Educators and parents have been jumping up and down for years now trying to draw attention to the many problems we have with the state testing system,” said Beth Brown, TEA president. “The state’s test-and-punish system is essentially a black box that no one can see or fully explain and it has destroyed the trust of teachers and parents. We can’t see the test, but we know it is going to hurt us and our students.”

Through the consistent advocacy efforts of TEA members, legislators have moved the state in the right direction by reducing the impact of TNReady scores in teacher evaluations and bailing students, teachers and schools out of high-stakes decisions in years that the test completely failed. There is still a lot of ground to cover to reach the association’s 20/20 Vision goal to end all high-stakes decisions tied to TNReady.

One bill still moving through the legislature, HB1246/ SB753, addresses test transparency and pushes the state to follow through on releasing TNReady questions. Other testing bills include HB668/SB373, which would reduce the weight of TVAAS in evaluations, and HB636/ SB656, which would provide cover from negative consequences for teachers who work in schools with lower TNReady scores.

“When we get to a place where the General Assembly is constantly having to go back and pass new laws to protect students, teachers and schools from the state test, we have a serious problem,” Brown said. Contact your legislators and ask for their support of TEA’s 20/20 Vision to end high-stakes decisions tied to TNReady.

“TEA supports those efforts and is eager to see the problems addressed before the legislature adjourns for the year.

So far the only people who have reached out to kindergarten and pre-k teachers is the Tennessee Education Association,” said Natasha Patchen, a Knox Co. teacher who has been at the forefront of sounding the alarm about the portfolio roll-out and implementation. “TEA provided a survey to gather teacher ideas, concerns and input to the portfolio process. The state department of education has not asked for our input.”

Patchen pleaded with the legislators on the Curriculum, Testing and Innovation Subcommittee to “end this fiasco before we spend another tax dollar on this portfolio.”

Teachers across the state responded to the TEA survey in late 2017, providing detailed accounts of the failures of the portfolio system and offering solutions. TEA shared the survey results with legislators who have made an effort to address problems. A 2019 TEA survey on TNReady showed how far the portfolio crisis had spread, with 98% of pre-k and kindergarten teachers asking to eliminate the current portfolio system or make fundamental changes with better teacher input.

Teacher input was precisely what made the pilot so attractive before the state bureaucracy came in and changed the portfolio system, according to last week’s teacher testimony.

“There are many ways to measure children, but this is not it,” said Candy Arwood, a teacher from Sumner County. “Knox County piloted it with 24 standards and then it morphed to 48. There is no way to go back to the drawing board and fix this mess. You’re dealing with unreliable platforms. Eduopia failed and we were told this was going to be glitch-proof. This is not working statewide.”

Arwood said with so many other avenues to test student growth, “in my wildest imagination I do not understand why the state department of education supports this [portfolio system].”

TEA shared clips of the fiery testimony on social media, and it went viral in a matter of hours, reaching tens of thousands of viewers and generating another wave of comments and calls to end the portfolio mess.

“This does not drive my instruction,” Arwood said. “This is just something I have to check off the list. If you want to see the data that supports what I’m doing in the classroom, I’ll pull the data and we can sit down and look at it, and I can show you where children have gone from a pre-reader to a k-level in guided reading. I can tell you where children couldn’t perform a sentence at the beginning of the year, and now they are running full sentences with a strong phonics program. But this [portfolio] is a mandate and busy work for teachers, and there are other options out there, but you have the power to change this for the children.”

“This portfolio is so demanding that to get good scores we focus on portfolio skills instead of making sure our children have the basic, foundational skills our students need,” Patchen said.

“The demands of the portfolio have drained the joy for the love of learning in our students.”

“As the portfolio example has demonstrated time and again, TEA members have proven the power of collective advocacy is the only way to impact change in public education,” said TEA President Beth Brown.

TEA will continue monitoring the bills and will provide updates on social media and in future publications.

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**TNReady failures must be addressed**

As the portfolio example has demonstrated time and again, TEA members have proven the power of collective advocacy is the only way to impact change in public education, said TEA President Beth Brown.

TEA will continue monitoring the bills and will provide updates on social media and in future publications.
The application may also be completed online: teateachers.org/emerging-leaders-school.

The Good:

HB1330/SB1058 (Haston/Dickerson)
Aligns TN community schools law with current research and seeks to raise awareness of funding sources to support initiatives and share best practices in the future.

HB0632/SB0565 (Terry/Bowling)
Bill would provide additional PD credits to teachers who teach in a priority school under certain conditions.

HB946/SB802 (Lamberth/Johnson)
Administration bill requiring school systems to submit a report on how they used teacher raise money provided by the state to the department of education and the BEP review committee.

HB91/SB442 (Hicks/Bell)
Would provide school systems the ability to opt out of the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio, and use an alternative growth measure.

HB993/SB1139 (Moon/Swann)
Would eliminate the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio from teacher evaluations. The sponsors of both bills are working together to determine which bill presents the best path forward.

The Bad:

HB939/SB795 (Lamberth/Johnson)
Administration’s voucher bill. Would create tax-payer funded debit cards for parents to use on private school.

HB940/SB796 (Lamberth/Johnson)
Administration’s statewide voucher bill. Would create a new charter authorizing commission appointed by the governor who could open charters themselves in every school district in the state.

HB1276/SB1035 (Holt/Gardenhire)
Would prohibit the Tennessee School Boards Association from hiring staff to advocate for public schools in the legislature.

HB1380/SB1399 (Williams/Bell)
Would allow any school staff with a concealed carry permit to carry loaded guns into any public school with no additional training required.

A note on bill numbers:

Please do not let your uncertainty of a bill number deter you from contacting your legislators. It is still critically important to call and speak to your legislators about the concepts they are considering that will impact public education. Knowing a particular bill number is not as important as making sure he or she understands what the issue is and why it matters to students and educators back home.

Good ideas and efforts

√ Ensuring teacher raise money reaches paychecks
√ Reducing the emphasis on high-stakes tests
√ Good faith revisions ensuring the PECCA process is strengthened and improved
√ Providing due process to all ESPs
√ Changes to the evaluation of teachers, including the use of the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio

Bad ideas and efforts

X Any voucher, including ESAs
X Radical charter expansion absent local school board input or erosion of accountability standards for charter schools
X Attacks on the association

2019 EMERGING LEADERS SCHOOL APPLICATION

This application form should be received by the TEA by 4:30 p.m., Friday, April 26, 2019.

Dr. (  ) Mr. (  ) Mrs. (  ) Ms. (  )

Name:

Local Association – do not abbreviate:

(  ) Active (  ) ESP (  ) Higher Ed (  ) Administrator

Your Mailing Address:

City: __________________________ State: ______ ZIP: __________

Home phone: (  ) __________ Work phone: (  ) __________

Cell phone: (  ) __________ E-mail address: ______________________

Name of school/work site: ______________________

Work Position: ______________________

Specifically, for my Association this coming school year, I plan to: ______________________

I certify that I have been a TEA member for no more than 10 years and have not held a local, state, or national office (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, member of local executive committee, board of directors). If selected for this training, I definitely plan to attend the Emerging Leaders Training Program and will assume a leadership role upon returning to my local association.

Signature: ______________________ Date: ______________________

Return to: Leigh Phillips, UniServ Manager Tennessee Education Association 801 Second Avenue North Nashville, TN 37201-1099

The application may also be completed online: teateachers.org/emerging-leaders-school.