

TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE



**Ripping out
TVAAS
poster
pg. 6-7**



LEGISLATIVE REPORT | April 23, 2018 | VOLUME 4, ISSUE 6

Legislature steps in again to protect teachers and students after another TNReady failure

The General Assembly passed strong hold-harmless legislation for test data as TEA and parents across the state pushed for relief as TNReady continued to experience problems for another year.

“The legislature made sure students, teachers and schools were protected against the failures of TNReady,” said TEA lobbyist Jim Wrye. “They heard from their districts and they saw the problems, and in the waning days of the session took decisive action.”

In an extraordinary fight on Thursday, April 18, the House held the state budget hostage to demand concessions on the hold harmless effort. House and Senate leaders worked out an amendment, which was attached to an unrelated piece of legislation

passing the needed safeguards.

The measure prohibits the use of TNReady data in any employment decision for a Tennessee educator, including compensation and tenure. It also allows school boards to eliminate TNReady data from student grades, prevents the use of data in the flawed school grading system, and prevents new schools from being added to the priority list, while allowing others to come off if data if it is helpful.

“This measure nullifies any bad outcomes from data this year for those who have had to suffer through the problems,” Wrye said. “It may be up to the next governor and legislature to decide what we do about testing

moving forward. This will be an issue at the ballot box in the August primaries and the November general election.”

Technical difficulties this year led to thousands of students

**Testing
cont. page 8**



State begins to address unfunded RTI mandate

The state has taken concrete steps to address what has long been a significant unfunded mandate for local school systems: response to intervention and instruction (RTI). The governor’s budget includes funding and resolutions have passed both chambers of the General Assembly to add RTI positions to the Basic Education Program (BEP).

The BEP is the state’s public school funding formula, with categories that cover everything from teacher salaries to transportation. It will now have a component that generates RTI specialist positions.

“We are thrilled to see this addition to the funding formula, as this is an issue we’ve been raising for a number of years,” said TEA chief lobbyist Jim Wrye. “The concept

**RTI funding
cont. page 6**

Legislators vote down bill to arm teachers

A bill that would widely expand the ability of school systems to arm teachers for security was voted down in a House Education committee. The bill was opposed by TEA.

Just prior to the vote, another bill (HB2129) allowing off-duty police officers to act as armed security passed the same House committee, and is now part of budget negotiations. The bill has strong backing of TEA.

“Since the tragedy in Florida, school security and preventing active shooters has been front and center of discussions during the legislative session,” said TEA lobbyist Jim Wrye. “We wanted to make sure in response we didn’t trade one tragedy for another. Teachers carrying weapons could lead to an accident or worse. We worked to have law officers who are highly trained to act as security where local government couldn’t afford or wouldn’t fund School Resource Officers.”

Wrye testified in committee

**School safety
cont. page 6**

TEA members’ advocacy efforts keep state on track, avoid walk-outs on funding

As we stand in support of teachers taking job actions in Oklahoma, West Virginia, Kentucky, and other states, Tennessee media outlets and legislators have asked whether there is movement for a teacher strike in Tennessee.

The short answer is no: there hasn’t been widespread discussion among members for a walk-out that preceded actions in other states. Groups need a specific threat in order to strike, such as the pay cut faced by West

Virginia teachers. Tennessee teachers have many reasons to be displeased and there is plenty to demand for improvement, just not the dire financial and funding situations causing mass action elsewhere.

Take Kentucky for example, where dozens of systems have closed intermittently with mass “sick-outs” of teachers protesting a back-room assault on their pension plan. Passed by a legislative sleight of hand, lawmakers took a bill dealing with sewage and tacked on legislation designed to gut pensions. The bill eliminates a contractual obligation that prohibited lawmakers from changing pension plans or reducing retirement benefits for current teachers, and switches all new teachers to nothing more than a glorified 401(k). Up next may be an assault on pre-Medicare retiree health benefits.

The excuse for such terrible changes is that Kentucky’s teacher pension plan is one of the worst in terms of

**Teacher strikes
cont. page 7**



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

TNReady problems are the symptom, the problem is TVAAS

By TEA President Barbara Gray



The troubles with TNReady have dominated nearly every news outlet across the state for the past week. Educators, parents and students are frustrated and stressed out.

Student morale is a key component of how well a student does on a test. Losing work, being disrupted mid-exam, and constant delays affect students negatively. We are concerned this will impact scores to the detriment of students, teachers and schools. We are approaching a point where the entire testing system is becoming questionable.

Students who start and stop exams may suffer emotionally or become distrustful, which may hurt concentration.

TVAAS is the mythical formula no one can explain and no one trusts, but is still tied to numerous high-stakes decisions.

Test scores suffering as a result of the state's problems last week are so concerning because we all understand what is at stake. TNReady issues go well beyond the mis-scored tests, glitches, and lateness in data. There are

fundamental problems in the test data, and what it says about our students, teachers, and schools. The failures and frustrations of TNReady are just a symptom of the real problem - TVAAS.

The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System is the mythical formula no one can explain and no one trusts, but it's still tied to numerous high-stakes decisions. Some districts base teacher pay and/or bonuses on TVAAS. A teacher's ability to earn tenure rights is tied to evaluation scores, which are tied to TVAAS. Schools are rated based on TVAAS data and become at risk for a state takeover if test scores drop.

Policymakers' obsession with data-driven accountability has led us to a place where students, teachers and schools are punished based on a deeply flawed system.

Teachers have always been held accountable by parents, administrators and district leaders. Teachers want to be evaluated, too. We want to know where we are excelling and in what areas we need to improve. We just want fair accountability and evaluation that accurately reflects our teaching effectiveness.

Fixing technical issues of a flawed test designed to produce flawed data to plug into a flawed evaluation system misses the root of the problem. We don't have a technology problem, we have a problem with teachers not being treated as professionals and students missing out on the joy of learning. Until we correct these things, no amount of software problems is going to make this right.

The center spread of this issue of The Advocate is a pull-out poster on the history of TNReady troubles and the implications of high-stakes decision tied to TVAAS. Be sure to hang this poster in your break room to educate colleagues and encourage them to join us in the fight to correct the problem.

I know we have been pushing back on this issue for years, but it is on each of us to keep fighting until we are successful in removing high-stakes decisions from state tests.

Tennessee is ahead of the curve in education activism

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder



I recently attended the MLK50 March in Memphis honoring the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. It was an emotional and inspiring day. It served as a great reminder of the power of collective action and the power of our voices when we stand united.

We are seeing demonstrations of united voices and collective action all across the country right now in the form of teacher strikes and walk-outs from West Virginia to my home state of Oklahoma, and even with our neighbors to the north in Kentucky. This awakening of the activist spirit happening nationwide isn't unique to educators. People are finding their voices, finding the causes worth fighting for, and they are uniting in collective action to create the change they seek.

Here in Tennessee, though, educators experienced that awakening several years ago when the legislature pulled the rug out from under us, ending collective bargaining, changing tenure rights and other attacks aimed at weakening TEA. It was a rude awakening, for sure, but it was also an awakening of our activist spirit as public school advocates.

We had to quickly learn how to stand together with a united voice to advocate for our profession, for our students and for our public schools - and we were effective. Our collective action has resulted in six straight years of defeating voucher schemes, unprecedented state investment in public education including teacher salary increases (though we know much more is still needed), reducing the role of TVAAS in teacher evaluation and eliminating TVAAS from licensure decisions altogether.

This doesn't mean there isn't more work to be done. Lord knows all educators need more money showing up in paychecks and more resources for student

Organizing and advocacy are most successful when done consistently.

learning. Our consistent advocacy has resulted in a bill being passed this session aimed at identifying why the full amount of salary increases passed by the legislature over the past 4 years has not been showing up in many of our teachers paychecks across the state. Finding the cause of the problem will just be the first step. The other hard work will be for us to continue doing what we do best and work together to take advantage of a huge election year in Tennessee.

We need to demonstrate once again that the Tennessee Education Association is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to supporting those who have proven to be our friends and identifying new friends to take advantage of an unprecedented amount of open seats. Organizing and advocacy are most successful when done consistently. We have come a long way so far - now all we have to do is stick together and build on what works!



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

Postmaster: Send address changes to **TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE**, 801 Second Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37201-1099.

MANAGING EDITOR: Amanda Chaney
achaney@tea.org
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Jim Wrye
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & PUBLISHER:
Carolyn Crowder

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
PRESIDENT: Barbara Gray* (800) 342-8367
VICE PRESIDENT: Beth Brown* (931) 779-8016
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(615) 242-8392
DISTRICT 1 LaDawn Hudgins* (423) 384-3585

DISTRICT 2 Michele Bowman (865) 679-6523
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ADMINISTRATOR WEST Dennis Kimbrough
(901) 494-0105
HIGHER EDUCATION Josephine McQuail
(931) 520-0449

BLACK CLASSROOM TEACHER EAST Diamond Kelley
(423) 510-1400
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Brenda Munusamy (931) 433-0918
BLACK CLASSROOM TEACHER WEST Tiffany Reed
(901) 412-2759
STATE SPECIAL SCHOOLS Ginger Henderson
(865) 548-4615
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ESP Sandra McDurmon (901) 237-2866
TN NEA DIRECTOR Tanya Coats (865) 308-2787
TN NEA DIRECTOR Karen Anderson (423) 741-9682
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TN RETIRED Linda McCrary (615) 888-7026
* Executive Committee
AT LARGE RETIRED DIRECTOR ON NEA BOARD
JoAnn Smith-Mashburn (423) 914-2818

TEA HEADQUARTERS STAFF
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS: Terrance Gibson;

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UniServ Staff contact information can be found on page 6.

Where have all the teachers gone?

By Beth Brown, TEA Vice President



In 1955, Pete Seeger penned the iconic folk song “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” In 2018, a more fitting lyric would read “Where have

all the teachers gone?”

*Where have all the teachers gone,
long time passing?*

*Where have all the teachers gone,
long time ago?*

*Where have all the teachers gone?
Fled their classrooms everyone.*

When will they ever learn?

When will they ever learn?

During the last decade, the number of educators eligible for retirement has steadily increased; abandoning the profession at nearly the same rate are educators who have become discouraged, disenfranchised, and, often, utterly disgusted with the direction of public education in Tennessee. Concurrently, the number of students entering teacher preparation programs continues to decline. The result? An alarming number of school districts across the state are not fully staffed with certified educators. My school happens to be one of them. It has been three years since my school was wholly staffed, and when my colleague next door mentioned retirement, my administrators begged her to stay at least one more year.

Seeger’s updated lyric poses two fundamental questions. First, why have teachers fled their classrooms? More important, though, is the question, “When will they ever learn?”

When I ask colleagues across the state whether they have considered leaving the profession and, if so, why they might have considered such an action, many cite a lack of respect for their professionalism. Gone are the days when education was considered the noblest profession, when educators were revered in their communities. Educators are not trusted to do what is best for our students. Instead, every aspect of education revolves around some form of standardized assessment, which leads to less time for actual teaching. The focus on testing forces teachers’ focus from students, our reason for choosing the profession. Ironically and tragically,

the coronation of numerical data—the current obsession with high-stakes standardized testing—has relegated students’ needs to an afterthought status in educational decision-making.

When I recently filed my taxes, I listed my occupation as a teacher because mentor-curator-reviewer-designer-administrator-coordinator-problem solver-technical support-evaluator-lifelong learner-content creator-moderator-collaborator-facilitator-coach-critic-lecturer-theorizer-trainer-motivator just wouldn’t fit in the available space. The role of a teacher—the expectations and demands placed upon us—continues to expand via often-unfunded mandates; more is required of teachers, generally without resources or additional compensation. Quite frankly, teachers cannot meet every student’s every need all by ourselves and with our limited resources; we must have assistance from all educational stakeholders, including parents, community members, policymakers, and legislators. The frustration that stems from unrealistic expectations being placed on teachers is driving away many educators after only a few years in the profession and discouraging prospective educators from entering the field.

All hope is not lost, however; the alarming trend of understaffed schools can be reversed. Educators must be empowered to do what we know is best for our students: ending high-stakes testing and creating time for real teaching and learning; providing relevant curriculum and social and health care services; and engaging parents and community members as our partners in decision making. Additionally, education policies should be crafted by educators, not by lawyers, dentists, small business owners, and other non-educators, as is the current practice in Tennessee.

If teachers believe that the work we are doing is in the best interest of our students and if teachers believe that educational decision making is being made by people who actually understand what is best for students, we won’t have to ask “Where have all the teachers gone?” We will be in our classrooms, doing what we do best: making the world a better place, one student at a time.

ASK TEA

ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

Q: I logged into my TNCompass account and found a “hold” on my educator’s license. What does this mean and what can I do about it?

A: Any time a school system suspends or dismisses a teacher or when a teacher resigns, the director of schools must file a report with the Office of Educator Licensing. Once filed, an educator’s license goes from “Active” to “SBE Review.” This creates a “hold” on the license. The State Board of Education generally sends educators an e-mail notice telling them about the hold and that they may contact the State Board with any questions. This hold remains until the State Board decides whether it will take any action against the license. Since you have discovered the “hold” on your license, it is recommended that you contact your local association representative or UniServ Coordinator immediately. The contact information for UniServ Coordinators and the school districts they serve can be found either on TEA’s website, or on page six of the Advocate.

Q: I am a 20-year basketball coach and I have never experienced this before so I do not know what steps I should take. One of my players has shared with me some questionable and inappropriate touching by the student’s legal guardian. The player is very anxious and afraid to go home. What is my responsibility to this student?

A: Tennessee law requires that any person, including a school teacher, who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been sexually abused must report that knowledge or suspicion. Child sexual abuse is defined quite broadly and includes the intentional touching of the genitals or intimate parts, or the clothing covering them, of either the child or the perpetrator. Failure to report is a crime. Since you do appear to have a reasonable cause to suspect that your player has been sexually abused, you should begin by reporting your suspicion to the Department of Children’s Services (DCS), to the Sheriff’s department, or by calling the Child Protective Services (CPS) statewide abuse hotline 877-237-0004. You should also report your suspicion to your immediate supervisor, since individual school systems may have specific policies regarding how such reports are made. For further assistance, contact your local Association representative or your TEA UniServ Coordinator.

Q: The discipline at my school is terrible. There were two fights in the hall outside my classroom just this week. If a fight starts between students, and I am present, do I have an obligation to step in and stop it?

A: It will depend on the expectations of your principal. If you’re not sure what’s expected, you should discuss this with your principal as soon as possible. It’s possible that your principal will expect you to refrain from intervening in a student fight. This is due to the risk that you will be injured by the students or the risk that you will injure a student when you try to intervene.

If teachers are expected to stop a student fight, the Teacher Bill of Rights, Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-5-209(a)(5), clearly states that an educator has the right to “defend themselves and their students from physical violence or physical harm.” However, educators also have an ethical duty under Section 49-5-1003(b)(4) to “make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.” A discussion with your supervisor is critical to clarify this issue.



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.

TVAAS is the root of

It is time to rip the pro

2016: Server crashes, state scrambles to switch to paper test, vendor fired

The state's first attempt at a statewide online assessment ended in dramatic fashion with the server crashing and the state canceling all online tests. The state scrambled to get paper tests out to meet the testing window. The mishap ended with then-vendor Measurement Inc. being fired. The General Assembly passed hold-harmless legislation to ensure teachers were not affected by the failure.

2017: State misses deadline, scores delivered late and incomplete

The testing season ran past the end of 2017, but the problem was not solved. Scores were due. In its first attempt, the state missed its own deadline. Preliminary scores to schools were delayed. When the state released scores, their entirety later in the year. That thousands of tests were

Unreliable, inaccurate Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System data is wrapped around high-stakes decisions that greatly impact teachers, students and schools. This is not just a teacher evaluation issue.



www.TEAteachers.org

of TNReady troubles

Problem out by the roots

As its own deadline,
inaccurate test scores
pretty smoothly in Spring
ms came later when the
first year with Questar,
a deadline to return
schools for student report
leased TNReady scores in
e year, it was discovered
were mis-scored.

2018: Online login and submission issues plague the system, Questar hacked

Students statewide had trouble logging into the system and also reported issues with submitting their answers once they completed the test. Testing vendor, Questar, reportedly experienced an attack on its server the second day of testing. The General Assembly took quick action last week and passed hold-harmless legislation to again protect teachers, students and schools from the state's failure.

High-stakes decisions based on TVAAS:

- Teacher evaluation
- Teacher salaries and/or bonuses
- State takeovers of neighborhood schools
- A-F school rankings
- Job security and tenure rights



/TennesseeEA

@TEA_teachers

/TEA_teachers

Safety debate now focused on funding SROs

School safety from page 1

that there are other issues in arming teachers that go beyond safety and accidents.

The teaching and learning dynamics in schools would change as some teachers bore weapons and others did not. The bill also did not require a psychological evaluation for teachers who volunteered to be armed, something all law enforcement officers must undergo.

“We recognize that there are security threats, and everyone on this committee recognizes SROs are the best solution to school security. There are over a thousand Tennessee schools without SROs, and this is a long term problem that the state must help,” said Wrye in committee. “But arming teachers may be seen as an inexpensive solution, and in fact may limit or reduce SRO coverage in Tennessee schools.”

The push to expand the ability to arm teachers had an important side benefit, it caused the Haslam administration to call for a school security task force and at the end, offer \$25 million in one-time security funds and to double recurring safety funds to an annual \$10 million.

“I was first and foremost concerned about my home of Wayne County, where we have no SROs in any of our schools,” said the bill sponsor Rep. David Byrd (R-Waynesboro). “I asked three years ago for some help to hire officers and only moved to allow armed teachers as a last resort. I’m pleased to have participated in the recent task force, and glad to see the state step up and help counties having a hard time affording officers to provide safety in our schools.”

Byrd added a recommendation adopted by the task force that the state provide an app for students to use when they feel the need to report threats or concerns to authorities directly. It is based on a successful program in Utah.

HB2129/SB2059, by Rep. Micah Van Huss (R-Gray) and Sen. Mark Green (R-Clarksville), is seen as a vehicle to help counties draw down \$25 million in one-time security funds placed in the budget. Since they are nonrecurring, the funds could not be used for hiring permanent SROs, but could pay for off-duty officers to guard campuses. Systems often hire additional off-duty officers for extra security for sporting events and other large gatherings, setting the precedent for the off-duty officer use.

“Using these dollars provide immediate security relief for non-protected schools. It is a stop gap, but the funds could cover most unprotected schools for several years,” said Wrye. “The question is how to distribute the funds fairly and to meet the biggest gaps in safety.”

The bill is limited to four years as a stopgap measure, until a more permanent solution of expanding SROs or other professional security is found. The administration did double recurring safety funds, but the \$10 million it provides is far short the estimated costs of putting an SRO or its equivalent in every school.

“With all the needs in our schools, such as increased funding for RTI specialists or technology, it is unfortunate that we need to think about paying for security as well. It must not come out of the BEP or affect needed funding for teaching and learning. But this is the day and age we live in to think about stopping the unthinkable,” said Wrye. “We are making good strides in making sure a Sandy Hook or Columbine doesn’t happen in a Tennessee school. One tragedy like that is one too much.”

TEA, TRTA defeat proposal to reduce tuition discount

A bill that would have curtailed the 25 percent college tuition discount for children of teachers and retired teachers was quietly shelved in a House committee. Opposed by TEA and TRTA, the bill would have limited the discount to 120 credit hours for most students, and required entering freshman to declare a major on enrollment.

A concern was incoming freshmen often don’t know what will be their major, and shifting degree programs in later years would have left many students without the discount. It is common for students to go beyond 120 credit hours to finish a degree program. The state estimated 1,400 students would have lost the tuition discount had it become law, costing families millions more in tuition.

“The tuition discount for the children of Tennessee’s public school teachers is an important benefit for our hard working educators and retirees,” said TEA president Barbara Gray. “I know that teachers worry about whether they can send their sons and daughters to college on the salaries we make as educators, and the discount makes in-state tuition that much more affordable.”

Long a target of some state universities, the value of the tuition discount each year runs into the tens of millions, and the state does not reimburse postsecondary institutions near enough the overall cost. As a cost saving measure, some universities attempt to limit or eliminate the discount through the



legislative process, and each year TEA pushes back.

“In order to maintain a strong professional college-educated teaching force, it is important we are able to send our own children to college. We will always be vigilant to maintain this benefit in state law,” said Gray.

More options are now available to all students in Tennessee that make college more affordable, and can help the bottom line of teacher family budgets. The Tennessee Promise allows two years—sixty-four credit hours—of tuition free community college, helping defray the ever growing costs of a four-year degree. Adding the Hope Scholarship and other grant programs, Tennessee teachers have many more options to make sure their own children can afford and finish college.

“We all worry about the future of our children and their access to higher education,” said Gray. “The good news is we have more options to keep college affordable.”

RTI funding to ease burden on teachers, districts

RTI funding from page 1

is sound, but without dedicated funding the policy has produced a number of unintended consequences.”

For years, TEA has discussed with lawmakers and the administration about RTI and the struggles many classroom teachers have in implementing its academic interventions. It was a case of well-intended policy, but an unfunded mandate in practice. For many teachers it became a real burden, as they had to forgo direct instruction to the rest of the class while working with those who were behind. Another frequent issue has been teachers in untested subjects like art and music coming into classes to do RTI pullouts, leaving those teachers with less time for their own instruction.

In better-resourced counties, systems hire Math and Language Arts specialist to work with RTI students, providing researched-based methods to help students move toward grade level work. Several years ago, TEA placed a figure of \$160 million in the BEP Review Committee report to have a specialist for every twenty RTI students from K-8. Since that time, there has been an increasing drumbeat to include funding for dedicated positions to handle RTI

interventions, allowing systems that lack the funding to hire these positions locally to enjoy the same benefits as those that can afford to do it on their own.

Changes to the BEP require approval by resolution of both the House and the Senate, as well as funding in the budget itself. The formula will now provide funding for one RTI interventionist position for every 2,750 students, with a minimum of one per system. The governor’s budget this year included \$13.3 million for the new RTI component.

The state department of education released a comprehensive report on RTI implementation in January highlighting its achievements and outlining challenges going forward. While there has been an overall decrease in learning disability diagnoses since its introduction, the state notes RTI implementation has been uneven throughout the state, especially in high school.

“This is a great start toward addressing this good work, which has produced real results for our students,” continued Wrye. “We look forward to continuing to push for additional investment so schools see greater equity in that progress.”

Contact TEA

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

UniServ Coordinators

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

State Community College. **District 4 — Jason White**, KCEA, 2411 Magnolia Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37917; (865)522-9793, fax: (865)522-9866; Assns: Knox, Pellissippi State Comm. College, UT-Knoxville, TSD. **District 5 — Tom Hopkins**, P.O. Box 5502, Oak Ridge, TN 37831; (423)416-7330, fax: (855)301-8366; Assns: Alcoa, Anderson Co., Blount Co., Clinton, Etowah, Maryville, McMinn Co. (except Athens City - see District 7), Monroe Co., Oak Ridge, Polk Co., Sweetwater. **District 6 — Shannon Bain**, P.O. Box 3452, Lebanon, TN 37088, phone: (615)547-7769, fax: (844)274-0765; Assns: Cannon Co., Cumberland Co., Cumberland University, DeKalb Co., Lebanon, Putnam Co., Van Buren Co., Warren Co., Wilson Co., White Co., TTU. **District 7 — Theresa Turner**, HCEA 4655 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga, TN 37411; (423)485-9535, fax: (423)485-9512; Assns: Athens City, Bradley Co., Chattanooga State Community College, Cleveland, Hamilton Co., UT-Chattanooga. **District 8 — Josh Trent**, P.O. Box 451, Livingston, TN 38570, (931)279-9530, fax: (855)299-5674; Assns: Fentress Co., Lenior

City, Loudon Co., Meigs Co., Morgan Co., Oneida, Overton Co., Rhea-Dayton Co., Roane Co., Scott Co., York Institute. **District 9 — Jackie Pope**, 2326 Valley Grove Dr., Murfreesboro, TN 37128; phone: (615)898-1060, fax: (855) 301-8214, Assns: Bedford Co., Bledsoe Co., Coffee Co., Franklin Co., Grundy Co., Manchester, Marion Co., Moore Co., Motlow State Community College, Sequatchie Co., Tullahoma. **District 10 — Jeff Garrett**, P.O. Box 1326, Lebanon, TN 37088-1326; (615)630-2605, fax (855)320-8755; Assns: Clay Co., Jackson Co., Macon Co., Pickett Co., Robertson Co., Smith Co., Sumner Co., Trousdale Co. **District 11/13 — Antoinette Lee**, P.O. Box 1412, Antioch, TN 37013; (615)308-5293, fax: (888)519-7331; Assns: FSSD, Williamson, TN Dept. of Ed. **District 12 — Sue Ogg**, P.O. Box 210486, Nashville, TN 37211-0486; (615)856-0503, fax: (855)427-6660 — Assns: Fayetteville City, Giles Co., Lawrence Co., Lincoln Co., Marshall Co., Maury Co., Wayne Co. **District 11/13 — Mary Campbell, Susan Dalton**, Metro Nashville, 531 Fairground Court, Nashville, TN 37211; (615)347-6578 (Campbell),

(615)476-3161 (Dalton), fax: (855)299-4968 (Campbell), (855)299-5837 (Dalton); Assns: Dept. of Higher Ed., Metropolitan Nashville, TN School For The Blind, MTSU, Murfreesboro City, NSCC, Rutherford, TSU. **District 14 — Maria Uffelman**, P.O. Box 99, Cumberland City, TN 37050; phone: (931)827-3333, fax: (855)299-4925; Assns: Austin Peay State University, Clarksville-Montgomery Co., Henry Co., Houston Co., Paris, Stewart Co., Weakley Co., UT-Martin. **District 15 — Tim Greene**, P.O. Box 354, Goodlettsville, TN 37070; phone: (615)864-1984, fax: (888)519-4879; Assns: Benton Co., Central, Cheatham Co., Clarksburg, Decatur Co., Dickson Co., Hickman Co., Humphreys Co., Huntingdon, Lewis Co., McKenzie, Perry Co., West Carroll. **District 16 — Lorrie Butler**, P.O. Box 387, Henderson, TN 38340; (731)989-4860, fax: (855)299-4591; Assns: Chester Co., Jackson-Madison Co., Jackson State Community College, Hardin Co., Henderson Co., Lexington, McNairy Co., West Tennessee School for the Deaf. **District 17 — Terri Jones**, P.O. Box 2140, Cordova, TN 38088; (901)258-3902,

fax: (844)270-8083; Assns: Bradford, Crockett Co., Dyer Co., Dyersburg, Dyersburg State Community College, Gibson Co., Hardeman Co., Haywood Co., Humboldt, Lake Co., Lauderdale Co., Milan, Obion Co., Tipton Co., Trenton, Union City. **District 18/19 — Keyth Harrison**, Memphis, TN; (901)305-2467, fax: (855)320-8737; — Assns: Bartlett, Collierville, Fayette Co., Germantown-Arlington-Lakeland, Millington, Southwest State Community College, University of Memphis. **District 18/19 — Karla Carpenter, UniServ Field Manager; UniServ Directors: Reginald Fentress, Tom Marchand**, 6520 Stage Road, Bartlett, TN 38134; phone/fax (901)379-6939; United Education Association of Shelby County, www.unitedshelby.org.

www.teateachers.org
www.nea.org

Successful Kindergarten fight blazes trail for improving portfolio systems in other subject areas

The bill requiring Kindergarten and Pre-K teachers are held harmless for portfolio scores in the 2017-18 school year passed both chambers of the Tennessee General Assembly unanimously and was signed by Gov. Bill Haslam April 18.

“It is a clear victory for TEA and a testament to members organizing at the local and state levels to affect change once they saw the revised portfolio system was not working,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “From the moment teachers noticed clustered standards set by the state were developmentally inappropriate for Kindergarten and pre-K students, we worked tirelessly with our members and legislators to make meaningful and lasting changes are in place for the next school year.”

Sponsored by Knoxville Republicans Sen. Becky Duncan Massey and Rep. Eddie Smith, SB1854/HB1686 mandates the state gather feedback from Kindergarten and pre-K teachers to improve the portfolio system.

“The work of improving these and other standards is just beginning,” Gray said. “We are calling on teachers to engage with the state Department of Education to ensure teacher feedback drives the process of revising the portfolio system for Kindergarten and Pre-K standards going forward.”

TEA sounded the alarm after teachers in Knox County saw the standards rolled out for the 2017-18 school year had little in common with the portfolio

program piloted a year before, which was well received by teachers and deemed developmentally appropriate.

“We worked with legislators to draft a bill to address teachers’ concerns,” Gray said. “The unanimous passage of this bill is an excellent example of the power of teachers working together to improve teaching and learning in Tennessee. Now it is time to build on this success and address [problems with portfolio systems in other subject areas.]”

Gray said TEA has been hearing from teachers in other non-tested grades or subjects using similar portfolio systems plagued with problems.

“While we are encouraged by the result of our Kindergarten and Pre-K portfolio effort, we know there is work to be done in other subject areas,” Gray said.

If you are concerned about the standards and scoring rubric in your subject area, please contact TEA Assistant Executive Director of Instructional Advocacy Terrance Gibson at tgibson@tnea.org.

“This fight doesn’t end with the first battle. We want all Tennessee teachers to have fair and accurate model in place to evaluate their teaching effectiveness,” Gray said.

TEA extends winning streak over voucher advocates

“Defeating vouchers early and often will never get old,” said TEA lobbyist Jim Wrye.

Vouchers and special education vouchers died earlier in the 110th General Assembly than in previous years. “It proves TEA political strategy to defeat the privatization industry by being heavily involved in party primaries is working, and the education voice is becoming politically stronger in Tennessee,” said Wrye. “Our work isn’t done, we have a lot to do in this important election year to keep our pro-public education majority in the General Assembly.”

The Memphis-only voucher bill, which would have diverted tens of millions from Shelby County schools and been a stepping stone to statewide vouchers, was declared dead by its sponsors days into the legislative year. It was clear that it had an uphill climb and the political winds were against it.

It also helped that House Speaker Beth Harwell was opposed to the measure, noting vouchers had been debated and fought over for five years and the will of Tennessee voters was to stop the legislation.

An attempt to greatly expand the special education voucher program, known as IEA, was defeated in the first committee it was heard. Currently limited to

special needs diagnoses such as autism and major developmental delays, the bill would have added many more categories of IEP and 504 students with far lesser impactful issues, quadrupling the eligible students and setting a precedent for further expansion in the future. The bill was pushed by major privatization groups, including Americans for Prosperity.

Questions about the IEA accountability and efficacy were raised during the committee hearing. The state department told lawmakers there is no academic or therapeutic data on students, noting that students are required to take some form of norm-referenced test each year, but the results are sent to parents and not to the department. The program is a black hole with no accountability.

The program has also been shown to be unpopular. After two years of advertising and multiple communications, only 80 of the 14,000 eligible families are currently participating. After a push from TEA, the state must inform parents they are giving up their federal IDEA rights, and there can be a good faith effort to show how much in-school services families would be giving up for the state funds of \$6,700 a year.

“Special education teachers and teacher-assistants should be proud of the low use of the IEA,” said Wrye. “It is a clear indication of just how great a job they are doing and how much they care for their students.”

With room to improve, Tennessee still out-paces other states in funding, retirement

Teacher strikes from page 1

financial shape. It has a \$16.8 billion deficit and only 45 percent of the money needed to pay current and future benefits due to years of chronic state underfunding. What’s worse, Kentucky teachers are not eligible for Social Security, and any pension change threatens every aspect of retirement.

Can that kind of pension gutting happen in Tennessee? The short answer is no. TCRS for teachers is rated one of the healthiest in the country, more than 97 percent funded with \$24 billion in assets. Tennessee has always funded what the plan needed to be sound—we pay cash up front. Even the hybrid plan for younger teachers still has a guaranteed benefit, along with a portable retirement account. So too the funds set aside to meet retiree health obligations, a benefit TEA protects.

It is unlikely we will ever experience the same retirement renegeing here in Tennessee.

For Oklahoma, the strike was in

response to a funding crisis that has many schools on a four day week because they can’t afford to keep the lights on or pay support staff. West Virginia teachers, after years of no salary increases, were offered a pay cut through a huge hike in their insurance premiums.

Both Oklahoma and West Virginia are still well below pre-recession state funding levels. Each state provides far less, Oklahoma more than 29 percent less and West Virginia 24 percent less, than they did prior to the 2008 downturn. Even though the economies of both states have rebounded, like Tennessee, tax policies and lack of political will have kept huge losses in K-12 funding intact.

Tennessee has taken a very different road. The volunteer state ranks fourth in the nation in K-12 increases in state funding since 2008, almost 10 percent greater than before the Great Recession. Tennessee still is 39th in per pupil investment and there is much to improve on, however there has been a steady increase since the economic recovery.

“We are not where we should be in education funding, but the conditions here are different from Oklahoma,” said TEA Executive Director and native Oklahoman Carolyn Crowder. “They have no textbooks, can’t keep the lights on five days a week, and rank at the bottom in teacher salaries. It is important to note, Oklahoma offered teachers a raise this year, but they are taking action for their students. They

want to stop the starvation of public education in their state.”

In terms of weak or failing pension systems, Tennessee is the second strongest in the nation for teachers.

We can and should do more, but we are at least on the right track. Testing may be the place where statewide action could take place in the future as parents and teachers grow increasingly frustrates with testing failures.



Teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma (pictured above) and Kentucky spent days demanding adequate funding and other needs for students and teachers.

Testing
from page 1

being unable to access or complete TNReady online tests in the first two days of the testing window, April 16 and 17.

This is the third year of problems that have plagued the state assessment, leading some lawmakers to question whether or not to continue with TNReady. The topic is expected to be addressed before the legislature adjourns.

“We need to improve confidence in the state assessment, and the best way to do that is listen to the teachers, administrators and parents who have had to endure the problems and deal with the worry,” said House Speaker Beth Harwell. Harwell took the lead as TNReady broke down.

The Speaker called a joint House committee of Education and Government Operations to demand answers from the department and the test vendor, Questar. The April 18 hearing was not encouraging for most representatives on the expanded panel.

“The faith in the system is not there,” said Rep. Ron Lollar (R-Bartlett).

“I feel like we don’t offer very many excuses for teachers,” said Rep. Jeremy Faison (R-Cosby), who carried a hold-harmless amendment for test results. “But there are plenty of excuses for this side.”

TEA outlined to lawmakers that the test failures make use in evaluations and student grades impossible. Delays, lost data, stops mid-exam, and the emotional and morale issues brought on by the breakdown in the system create different testing conditions for students—an un-level playing field that invalidates scores.

The thousands of exams that went offline in the middle of testing, forcing students to stop and resume either hours or even days later, were a focus of the committee.

Rep. Roger Kane (R-Knoxville) noted that a teacher who let students leave during a proctored exam and then return later to complete it would be in breach of state test rules—with possible suspension or firing as a result—because students could look up answers or other information during the break.

“Yet that is exactly what happened to students who had to stop because of the system failure,” Kane said.

State Education Commissioner Candice McQueen initially denied this occurred, but was contradicted by specifics given to lawmakers by teachers and administrators from across the state, and in testimony from the director of Lakeland schools, Ted Horrell.

For now, testing will continue, despite technical issues still being reported for both online and paper exams. There are ongoing concerns about student morale as well, but the state told lawmakers that federal law requires the test goes forward.

“We had a hard fight with the administration and department on this, as well as all the pro-testing groups,” Wrye said. “There was a lot of denial from the state about the depth of the problems, and how it undermines public confidence and overall validity of the data. We won because at the end of the day lawmakers voted their district, and TEA provides the political support from the membership.”

A number of lawmakers have made clear they still have unresolved concerns with TNReady, and there are still ways to continue the discussion.

Teachers sound-off online about TNReady disaster

Marshall Co. teacher: *My daughter made the following comment yesterday: “We don’t go to school to learn anymore. We go to school to test.” She’s 12.*

Franklin Co. teacher: *How much in possible teacher salary has been lost to this disaster? If a teacher were as unpredictable as TnReady her career would be ruined. #nationalteacherminimumwage*

Hamilton Co. teacher: *Why would students take this test seriously? And after several years of failed test roll-outs why are we still trying to use this data to grade anyone? I had no issues first thing this morning in Hamilton County but could not log into the test platform at 11:00. As a parent and teacher I have lost faith in this test.*

Robertson Co. teacher: *In RCS, it’s awful! Students sat for over four hours in one classroom “waiting” on the state. This is the second day in a row for this same group of students. Teachers and students are frustrated!*

Parent commenter: *I had to console my daughter last night after she broke down in tears about not being able to test yesterday! She’s in middle school and a small portion of her class was able to test yesterday. She said those that were able to test took 31 minutes to sign in!*



Join the conversation:
www.facebook.com/TennesseeEA

2018 Open Primary Elections

The Primary Election is the General Election in Tennessee

This is our best opportunity to keep a pro-public education majority in the legislature

There is a misconception that the election that really matters is in November, but in Tennessee, that could not be further from the truth.

“The winners of most state races are actually decided in the open August primary election,” said Jim Wrye, TEA assistant executive director of government relations. “It is crucial that educators pay attention to the primary and get out to vote for candidates who support public education.”

The Tennessee General Assembly is one of the few legislatures in the south with a pro-public education majority.

“When educators and other public education supporters vote as a block in the best interest of students and public schools, we are an unstoppable force,” Wrye said. “It is hard to see past party lines sometimes, but I can’t emphasize enough the importance of voting for the candidate who will stand with educators on the issues impacting our

profession and our classrooms.”

Tennessee students and teachers have benefited from the pro-public education majority in the state legislature through increased investment, a reduction in testing in teacher evaluations and repeated victories against privatization advocates.

Reference the checklist to the right to ensure you are ready for Election Day and secure another majority of pro-public education legislators.

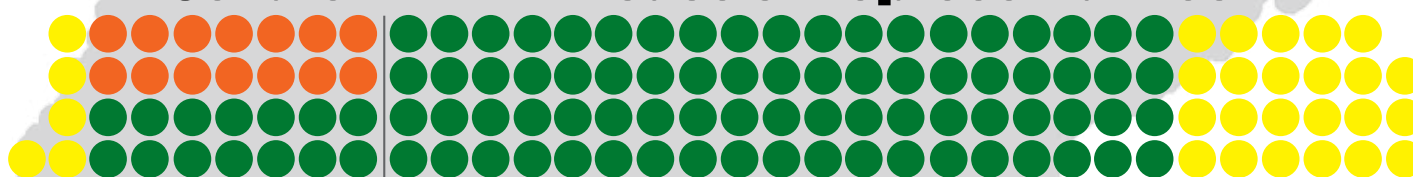
ELECTION TO-DO LIST:

- ✓ Register to vote online: <https://ovr.govote.tn.gov/>
- ✓ If you are already registered, double-check your information is correct: <https://tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup/>
- ✓ Visit your county website for a list of early voting locations or to look up your Election Day voting location.
- ✓ Research candidates! You can find a sample ballot on your county website. Do your research so you can vote with confidence on Election Day.

Tennessee General Assembly

Senate

House of Representatives



● Up for re-election

● Not on 2018 ballot

● Open seat

OPEN PRIMARY: August 2 EARLY VOTING BEGINS: July 13

DEADLINE TO REGISTER TO VOTE : July 3

