Most members pay their dues through payroll deduction, a convenience offered by the school system for decades. Two bills have been introduced this year to eliminate an educator’s ability to pay association dues through payroll deduction, and to hurt the association in the process.

The private school voucher fight consumed the first weeks of the legislative session, with both sides going all-in to influence lawmakers. Fortunately for our students and our public schools, our side prevailed.

The consequence of winning such a hotly contested battle is that TEA now has a target on its back.

“We are the largest and strongest advocate standing in the way of out-of-state privatizers who seek to take funds from public schools,” said TEA Chief Lobbyist Jim Wrye. “These groups now see we are the only force that can stand up to them and stop their anti-school agenda. So now they have set their sights on trying to undermine TEA by attacking dues.”

Sen. Todd Gardenhire’s (R-Chattanooga) bill, one he rewrote from regulating bicycle helmets into one that targets the ability of teachers to pay their membership dues, has already been defeated. That bill (SB 151/HB 294) was taken off notice in a House committee when the House sponsor, Rep. Bill Spivey (R-Lewisburg), was unable to get enough votes to pass it.

“There’s no doubt teachers were targeted because of our pushback on vouchers, and our ability to support pro-public school legislators,” said Wrye. “If we weren’t considered a force to be reckoned with, they wouldn’t have even brought this up.”

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Governor Bill Haslam's budget has some bright spots for schools and educators this year. $104 million for teacher compensation. Another $156 million for additional improvements, including funding a 12th month of teacher insurance. But, in the face of this good news, there are also some areas of concern.

Haslam is proposing significant changes to the BEP – the state’s funding formula for schools. These are the first proposed formula changes since 2007 when Gov. Phil Bredesen signed into law the Act of 2007 that established the Bredesen Commission to study ways to improve the state’s school funding formula.

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In spite of spending millions of dollars to push unproven and dangerous vouchers into Tennessee schools, privatizers didn’t have the 50 votes needed to pass the voucher bill.

Thanks to the hundreds of TEA members who came to the Capitol in recent weeks, and thousands that called and emailed their legislator from across the state, we were able to beat vouchers — for now.

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I have been hearing from educators statewide as materials start to come in for the new pencils and paper TNReady. The biggest concern we are hearing from our teachers is that students in grades 3-5 must now sit for 150 minutes of testing in one day, with only a 20 minute break for lunch. For students in grades 6 and up that time lengthens to 180 minutes. The paper test also has a new set of expectations for school faculty members. The new standards and other bills pulled away from their regular responsibilities to meet test administration, security, counting, distribution, coding and packing to return to the at state. I have been hearing from students, a new testing manual with different guidelines and directions. Test administrators are administering additional stress and frustrations for administrators and teachers.

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My question is this – if the state will not have scores in time for students' final grades and has now announced plans to waive its inclusion in teacher evaluations, but these scores still impact hiring and firing decisions and the state's priority list. What will be the point of having students and teachers through this at all?

After spending more than half of the school year preparing and focusing on our students for an online assessment, we must now help our students and teachers focus on how to excel on a paper-based assessment. But to what end? Scores won't be in student grades or teacher evaluations. At this point, is the state merely putting students and teachers through the motions?

TEA protects teachers’ rights to run for local offices

A bill that would have prohibited teachers from serving on county commission has been defeated this week, and there will be no longer be bills to prevent teachers from serving as county commissioners, TEA President Barbara Gray says. The bill was defeated under threat of a gubernatorial veto.

“We feel this amendment shows good faith in working toward a compromise,” said TEA President Barbara Gray. “We saw the dozens of TEA members serving on county commissions in Tennessee can still be an important voice for education, and a strong voice on critical issues like revenue.”

TEA will continue to defend the rights of teachers to serve on county commissions on behalf of their students and advocate for their constituent districts.

The 2013 TEA Representative Assembly unanimously passed a new education-funding bill directed toward TEA members.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Dale Carr (R-Sevierville), told TEA members that vouchers were against voters in Tipton County. “I’m hearing from teachers, administrators and retired teachers,” Carr said. “All the teachers are against it. It will not be for teachers. If I support my people, I cannot vote for vouchers.”

Gray said it was the kind of impact that the vast majority of local schools, state legislators, and local communities could achieve.

“Look around at a great danger, we’re perpetuating millions of dollars of state education instead of putting them back where they come from.” Still, Gray said our fight is far from over.

“Rep. Dunn promised to return with vouchers next year,” she said. “As long as there is a Democratic governor, there will be vouchers. Those power- and money-hungry insiders are the ones who are being public schools, and only we can stop this.”

When Dunn realized he lacked support in the House, he asked for the bill to lie on the calendar, meaning it can be scheduled for a vote. The state’s entire school bill, including HB985/SB466, is still in the works.

“Tabling the bill is a defeat,” she said. “It’s a procedural move that makes it difficult for teachers and lawmakers to reconsider the measure this session, but TEA is watching the bill to make sure it doesn’t have the same outcome this year.”

Leading up to the latest blow to the TEA, state legislators were critical in educating their elected officials in a single-sentence bill that would have opened up vouchers to all low-income students in any district with a single teacher in the bottom 5 percent.

During a scathing rally, state legislators were critical of vouchers as a danger to the state and its programs.

The state’s priority list. Below is a partial list of bills of interest.

Tennessse educators deserve a reason to vote by Tennessee Education Association. A quote on the back of the book I hold in my hand today is very timely, but there are more reasons to vote for your candidates than could be listed. The voice of your candidates could be the difference between life and death. Those who vote for candidates that reflect your values can be the difference between life and death. Those who vote for candidates that reflect your values can be the difference between life and death. Those who vote for candidates that reflect your values can be the difference between life and death.

Vote for candidates that reflect your values can be the difference between life and death. Those who vote for candidates that reflect your values can be the difference between life and death.
Groups attempt to silence educators

TEA UNDER ATTACK
from page 1

TEA has been waging an attack on multiple fronts over the state’s use of unreliable, flawed TVAAS data in high-stakes decisions for years now.

“The worst that TVAAS is a marathon, not a sprint,” said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder. “To put an end to the state’s unfair and inappropriate use of TVAAS scores in high-stakes decisions, we have to take it step-by-step.”

TEA’s first battle victory was getting legislation passed to prohibit the use of TVAAS in teacher license decisions. Next came the ban hammer districts from forcing a correlation between a teacher’s observation scores and her TVAAS estimates. After that, our advocates led the governor to reduce the weight of TVAAS in evaluations for teachers in non-tested grades and subject areas.

“Our latest win is Gov. Haslam reversing course and introducing his own legislation to hold teachers harmless from TVAAS estimates as the state transitions to TVAAS,” Crowder said. “Each victory is significant, but the war is far from over.”

A federal court recently dismissed TEA’s lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of using TVAAS in high-stakes decisions for teachers. While the case was dismissed, it was not a loss for our fight.

This ruling marks the second time a federal court has indicated it has substantial concerns about the fairness and improbability of using value-added statistical estimates in high stakes decisions for teachers. It is exactly what national entities the American Statistical Association and the American Education Research Association recognized when they cautioned against using estimates like TVAAS in teacher evaluations.

The discovery process in this lawsuit with state and local officials, as well as the company that provides TVAAS score to the state (SAS), was exceptionally helpful in uncovering some basic truths and understanding of what TVAAS is for lawmakers and various audiences around the state, and the association will continue working to get information to lawmakers.

“National groups are right that we should not use value-added in high-stakes decisions. We know it is not right,” Gray said. “Now we need a true and fair understanding of what TVAAS is for lawmakers and the administration to change a flawed system.”

TEA lawyers are studying the ruling and will advise us about whether they believe an appeal is appropriate, but that decision has not yet been made.

As an example, during deposition TEA legal asked a senior SAS official why only six students provide enough student data to have a valid TVAAS score for a teacher, a seemingly low sample size. The answer TEA received was that it was “one more than five.”

TEA has gathered all of the information on TVAAS and put it into a presentation that we are now giving to various audiences around the state, and the association will continue working to get information to lawmakers.

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A House resolution seeks to change a fundamental part of the Tennessee State Constitution that has driven school funding for decades. Rep. Bill Dunn (R-Knoksville) has sponsored the resolution changing Article 11, Section 5 of the Tennessee Constitution which states: "The state shall provide for the maintenance, support and education of all able-bodied white male children between the ages of 5 and 21..." This resolution proposes to change the funding source for schools to a "system of free public schools" that is "superintended, supported, and regulated by the General Assembly and the State Department of Education." The resolution is being debated in the Tennessee General Assembly, with supporters and opponents on both sides.

The Tennessee General Assembly is considering a bill that would replace the current funding system for public schools with a new system that is "superintended, supported, and regulated by the General Assembly and the State Department of Education." This bill, sponsored by Rep. Bill Dunn (R-Knoksville), would change Article 11, Section 5 of the Tennessee Constitution, which currently states that the "state shall provide for the maintenance, support and education of all able-bodied white male children between the ages of 5 and 21..." The proposed bill would change this to a "system of free public schools" that is "superintended, supported, and regulated by the General Assembly and the State Department of Education." The bill is expected to be debated in the Tennessee General Assembly, with supporters and opponents on both sides.
Your voice makes a difference at the Capitol. If you haven’t already made plans to be in Nashville on Tuesday of your spring break, please register as soon as possible for Civication, a vacation combining vacation with civic pride in our profession. Your voice could be the pivotal point in protecting our payroll deduction and making sure vouchers stay out of Tennessee public schools.

Come to the Capitol to talk to your legislators and enjoy the great entertainment of Nashville! TEA pays mileage for any members who want to attend Civication during Spring Break. There is complimentary breakfast at TEA Headquarters in downtown Nashville, free parking, shuttle service to the Capitol, and House and Senate Education Committee meetings to see the Tennessee legislature in action!

If you live more than 100 miles outside of Nashville, TEA has a supply of pre-paid hotel rooms for members for Monday night (limited basis). Come to Music City, enjoy the city and have a successful and important Civication. Members who took part in Civication last year had a huge impact on the legislative success of TEA!

HURRY! SPACE IS LIMITED!

REGISTER ONLINE: WWW.TEATEACHERS.ORG/CIVICATION