

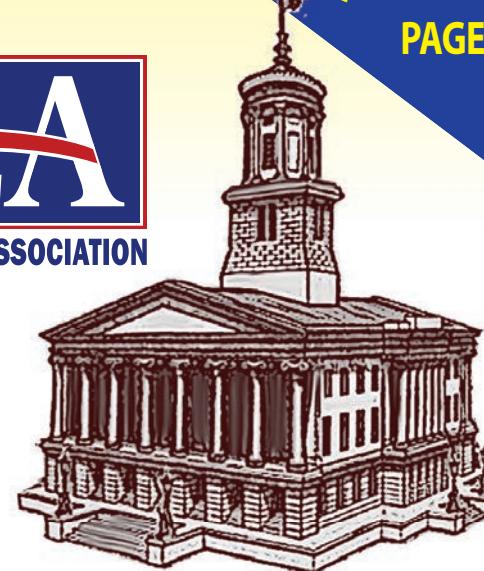
TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATE

LEGISLATIVE REPORT | JANUARY 16, 2017 | VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

ASK TEA HAS ANSWERS
TO MANY OF YOUR
QUESTIONS,
PAGE 3



TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS

Privatization industry targets public schools, active in Tennessee

Have you ever wondered where all the anti-public school legislation, propaganda and hubris comes from? It's called the PIE network.

The entire multi-billion dollar school privatization industry is organized through the PIE Network, connecting 70 education reform organizations in 34 states, including several in Tennessee, which has long been considered the battleground for the most outrageous money-grubbing schemes. Since 2007, the PIE Network has quintupled, and their efforts have produced exponential growth in charter schools and voucher programs

PIE Network
cont. page 4

Set up to ~~F~~ail?

We have a problem when ACT scores are good and TNReady is bad

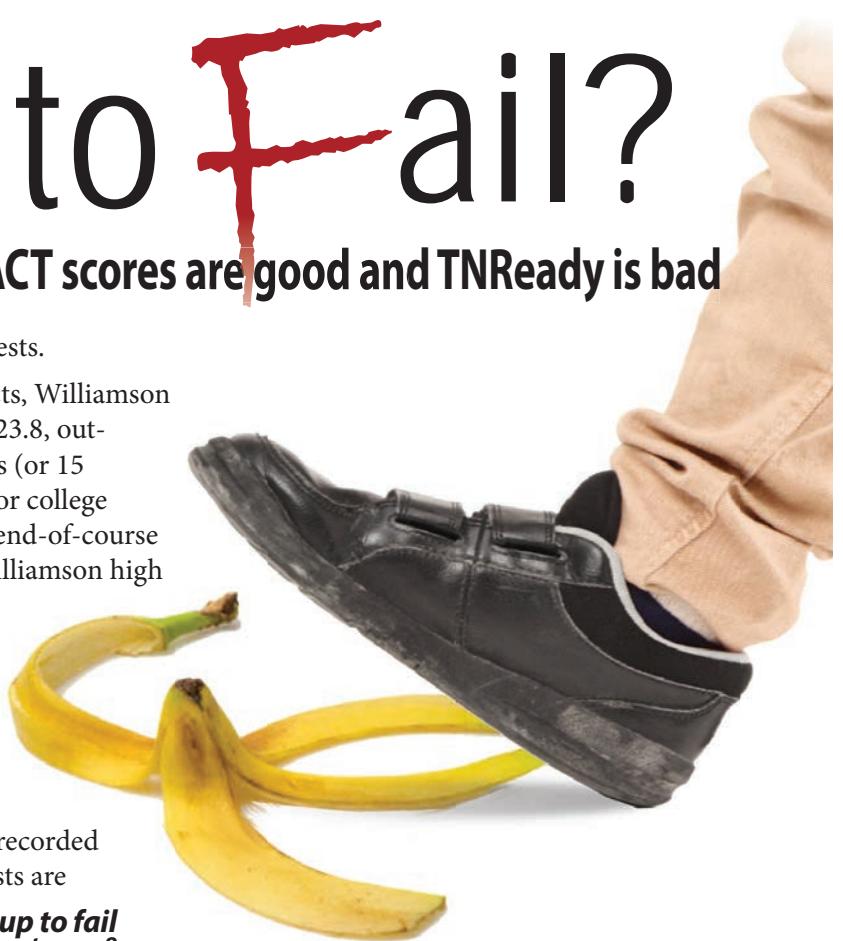
There is growing concern about the state tests.

One of Tennessee's best performing districts, Williamson County, had a 2016 average ACT score of 23.8, out-pacing the national average by three points (or 15 percent higher), exceeding the threshold for college readiness. Scores from the new TNReady end-of-course tests, however, show only 44 percent of Williamson high school students are at grade level in math.

Maryville has a 23.2 ACT average, but the state test shows only 33 percent are at grade level. So who should we believe - the leading college admissions test or the new TNReady?

Problems with very low EOC scores were recorded across Tennessee. As the new TNReady tests are

Set up to fail
cont. page 8



TN should learn from other states' mistakes on vouchers

Tennessee gets more value for every education dollar than almost any other state, as we are 45th in funding per student and 9th in on-time graduation rate. In fact, both our graduation rate and our average ACT score keeps going up. Money invested in public schools gets results.

These facts haven't stopped privatizers from spending millions of dollars to push risky, unproven voucher schemes on Tennessee. For the past four years, TEA has been the number one opponent of vouchers at the General Assembly, and thanks to members, we've won every fight.

With untold millions backing them, voucher proponents are back again. This time, they are pushing a so-called "limited" voucher scheme

or pilot program that would be limited to just Shelby County. They're saying they will start small, see if it works, and only grow when necessary.

Don't believe the hype!

Any voucher scheme is a risk to millions in public education dollars. Any voucher scheme, no matter how small at the start, will take public money and send it to private schools. That's a sure way to damage one of our state's best investments: our public schools.

Vouchers
cont. page 5

Surplus opens door for school investment

Our schools are clearly underfunded. Tennessee just received an "F" for school funding in the national Education Week Quality Counts report. We rank 45th in the nation on funding per student. Tennessee is below every neighboring state, except Mississippi. The state spends 25 percent below the national average for K-12. Yet the state has had a \$2 billion surplus over the past two years while average teacher salaries have barely kept up with inflation. We have the opportunity and need for record school investment.

TEA has laid out several budget priorities for 2017.

Budget priorities
cont. page 8



THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Step outside your comfort zone and advocate for your students

By TEA President Barbara Gray



Conflict resolution is a pretty important skill for a teacher to possess. Managing a classroom full of students requires a certain affinity for keeping the peace. I think this might be what makes political advocacy feel so far outside of many teachers' comfort zones.

Making that first call to an elected official or attending your first TEA Civication can feel pretty intimidating, but I can tell you from personal experience that you will quickly become hooked on the empowering feeling that comes with being a public education advocate.

As educators, we have this incredible and unique passion for children. It is important that we not keep that passion bottled up inside our classrooms and school buildings. We can increase our students' potential for success by being loud, visible, even obnoxious advocates for public education.

There are 65,000 teachers in Tennessee. Do you realize what 65,000 people can accomplish when

they organize, unite and advocate for the same thing? Add the thousands of education support professionals, administrators, parents and other public education supporters in the state, and we would be unstoppable.

The thousands of phone calls, emails and visits

educators made in 2016 secured an increase in salary and insurance funds, put test transparency into state law, protected students from the greedy hands of privatizers and more. The 2017 legislative session is shaping up to have a full slate of public education issues, including reducing the role of standardized testing, teacher evaluations, school improvement plans, privatization schemes and more attacks on our profession.

If your voice was not part of the 2016 effort to protect and improve public education – what are you waiting for? Make 2017 the year you take your passion for your students and your profession outside the walls of your classroom. Join the thousands of educators statewide who are already standing united to advocate for the best learning conditions for our children and the best working conditions for our friends and colleagues.

This is important work. If Tennessee's educators don't lead the effort to ensure every student receives a quality public education, who will? If we don't lead the effort to ensure the teaching profession remains attractive to bright, talented young people, who will?

The future of public education in the state we call home depends on the work we put in today. If the people who truly know what our students need to succeed don't take the lead, someone else will.



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Winning the big games requires a strong offense and a strong defense

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder

The most successful football teams have both strong defenses and strong offenses. In recent years, TEA has gotten really good at playing defense. Together, we have defeated dangerous legislation on vouchers (for four straight years!), tying licensure to test scores, constitutional amendments threatening public school funding, direct attacks on TEA (three times in one session!) and more.

For the past few years, Tennessee has been replacing low performing schools with the ASD (Achievement School District). This basically means, the school principal is usually replaced, the teachers all have to reapply for their jobs and the school is turned over to a charter.

We have been pushing back on the ASD because it does not have a track record of success. Many of the schools that have been taken over by the ASD are performing worse than the schools they were supposed to "transform".

Instead of just saying "NO" to ASD – we now have an opportunity to play offense and push an alternative to state takeovers: Transformational Community Schools.

The community schools model gives me so much hope and inspiration for Tennessee schools. More than 5 million students across 44 states are already thriving in community schools – we even have a few here in Tennessee. It is time to expand this model in Tennessee and push our children to reach their full potential while putting a moratorium on the failed ASD model.

When properly implemented and funded, community schools embody the principle of caring for the whole child. The design and implementation of the schools does not include "giving our students away" to a charter company. It includes direct involvement from existing school personnel, parents and other community members.

As a result, these community schools address all of these things and more to make sure students are set up to succeed in school and in life.

Now, you may be questioning, "Is this even possible in a state like ours where standardized tests rule everything?"

The new federal education law – the Every Student Succeeds Act – provides our greatest opportunity at the state level. ESSA encourages states to look for new and better ways to turn around struggling schools. The Tennessee Department of Education has actually included community schools in its draft ESSA implementation plan. It is important that we seize this political advocacy opportunity to implement more community schools statewide.

But there is also no need to sit and wait for the state to take action. Most community schools have started organically at the local level, not as a result of a state mandate. The TEA Organizing Summit on February 3 and 4 in Cool Springs will include an in-depth look at the community schools model and empower educators like you with the tools needed to get the ball moving in your own district.

We have an opportunity to fundamentally change the way we educate our students and improve struggling schools. I hope you will join the TEA offense in advocating for the expansion of community schools in Tennessee.



We have an opportunity to fundamentally change the way we educate our students and improve struggling schools.

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can be found on page 6.

Member Voices

Lies, Darn Lies, and Statistics

By Lauren Hopson, Knox Co. EA President



Research shows that teachers don't improve in their effectiveness after their fourth year. That's right. You heard it. At least that is what Mitchell Zais, the former

South Carolina State Superintendent of Education, stated at a SCORE (State Collaborative on Reforming Education) event in Nashville last week.

In this era of "fake news" it is vitally important that decisions affecting our children should be made based on facts and a preponderance of ALL the research, not just cherry-picked data supporting a particular agenda. Although SCORE is a "think tank" that should be up on the most recent data concerning education, not one person in the room challenged that statement.

While there are a few studies linking teacher effectiveness to test score data, which back up Mr. Zais' claim, there are many more that do not. In a June 2016 review of 30 different studies, the Learning Policy Institute concluded that, "Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career." They noted that gains continue for teachers in the second and often third decades of their careers and didn't just affect test scores, but the absenteeism and discipline rates of students as well.

We know this to be true, however, even without the statistics. I certainly hope I am a better teacher now than I was in the fourth year of my career. I have learned an abundance of things since then. In fact, the entire system on which I run my classroom, I did not learn until my eighth year of teaching.

When is the last time you thought, "Boy, I sure do hope my kid gets a rookie teacher this year?" I have, in fact, talked several parents off the ledge in recent years who were upset that their child was not placed in the classroom of an

experienced educator. I reminded them that we were all new teachers once, and the experienced ones would be there to guide and mentor when needed. Their children did quite well thanks to quality teacher education programs, but teaching is no different than any other profession in that respect.

That fifth year heart surgeon may be brilliant, but I would bet on the experience of a twenty year veteran should an unexpected situation arise on the operating table. I am at a loss trying to name a profession in which workers top out on their expertise after just four years.

So when you hear that Knox County Schools ranks in the 79th percentile among districts in the state for high school math and 75th percentile in reading, you also need to know that the rate of students that were advanced or proficient was 20.8 percent and 30.3 percent respectively.

When you hear that only 43.5 percent of our high school freshmen are proficient in English, remember that the new test cut that percentage in half from last year.

When you hear that Tennessee is the fastest improving state in the nation in education, you also need to know that we didn't really improve that much, most other states incurred flat or lower test scores.

When you hear that educators can be held accountable by having test score data included as a part of their evaluation, you need to know that the vast majority of teachers don't teach tested subjects.

That means they are judged on the performance of other teachers and even students they don't teach or who may not even be in their school.

When you hear that India and China have three times as many mathematicians and scientists as the United States does, you have to realize they should.

They have exponentially more people. When you hear that teachers don't improve after their fourth year, remember what they say about statistics.

ASK TEA

ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

Q: I was approved to take leave weeks ago. On the day of my leave, however, school was closed due to snow. Can I still be charged a leave day even though school was closed?

A: No, state law says a teacher shall not be charged leave if the teacher's school or school district is closed because of some unexpected event, such as snow. The same is true for sick leave.

Q: I was checking the status of my license on TNCompass and found it marked "SBE Review." What does this mean and what can I do about it?

A: We understand the state board of education may advise directors of schools to file a report with the state Office of Educator Licensing whenever a teacher resigns, is suspended, or dismissed, which is curious because that advice is not entirely consistent with the actual language of relevant rule. Once a director's report is filed, the license status goes from "Active" to "SBE Review." This means the teacher's license is "flagged," and it will remain so until the board decides whether to take any action against the license. Unfortunately, no notice is routinely provided to the teacher when his or her license is flagged. Only if the board decides to take an action does it provide notice, which may be several months later. If an event occurs that might lead to your license being flagged, contact your local association representative (AR) or TEA UniServ coordinator for assistance.

Practical tip: TEA members should regularly review their local personnel files along with the status of their teaching licenses. Also we recommend that members print and maintain dated hard copies for their own records.

Q: Does tenure still exist?

A: There seems to be a common misconception that teachers lost tenure when the General Assembly changed the law a few years ago. However, state law still says, "[n]o teacher who acquired tenure status prior to July 1, 2011, shall be returned to probationary status," which means teachers who obtained tenure prior to that date remain tenured as long as they are employed with the school system that granted tenure.

Teachers who did not gain tenure before July 1, 2011, are also eligible for tenure after five years of employment, though the eligibility requirements have changed. Teachers first tenured after the change to the law are required to maintain certain "performance effectiveness" scores, or they may be returned to probationary status. If you have tenure-related questions, contact your local association representative (AR) or TEA UniServ coordinator for more information. And look for more answers to your tenure questions in future editions of *The Advocate*.



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.

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nationwide.

Financed by billionaires and large corporations, such as the Walton Family Foundation, the PIE Network coordinates and funds think tanks that label public schools as failures. By supporting the so-called "reform" groups that push for more and harder testing, the PIE network and its affiliates strive to sway political entities to drive the legislative process toward privatization and attack the opposition – public school teachers, parents and community members who want to keep and improve public education. It is a massive and well-oiled machine.

Tennessee members of the PIE Network are SCORE, Stand for Children, Students First (now renamed as Tennessee CAN), Federation for Children, the Beacon Center, Memphis Lift, and Campaign for School Equity, among others. It is a formidable array of resources and propaganda.

And the only folks poised to stop it are us – teachers, parents and community members not willing to give up our rights or sell our schools for something worse.

"The reason why TEA is attacked every legislative session is because we are the only group standing in the way of vouchers, radical charter expansion, and other privatization schemes that will damage every public school in this state," said Jim Wrye, TEA chief lobbyist. "We are the only organized political force that can push back and win against these opponents, and protect our great public schools."

The education industrial complex strategy is simple and sounds all too familiar to Tennessee teachers.

Privatizers push for new and harder tests, declare that schools are failing and demoralize teachers. They push for so-called "school choice" and sponsor legislation to open a limited number of charter schools in the "most troubled" districts. Once those charters are in place, campaigns are launched to further discredit public schools, calls are made to expand charters and more public schools get privatized.

Since 2008, 4,000 public schools were closed nationwide and more than \$33.6 billion of public school funds went to charters.

In Tennessee, privatizers targeted Nashville and Memphis schools through the Achievement School District. Started in 2012, ASD promised to turn the state's bottom 5 percent of schools to the top 25 in five years, but results are a disaster, with dropping graduation rates and enrollment, school closures and financial troubles.

The ASD troubles are just beginning. Their academic growth rate is the lowest in the state, which is the reason why almost all ASD schools are still in the bottom 5 percent after years of additional funding and charter operation.

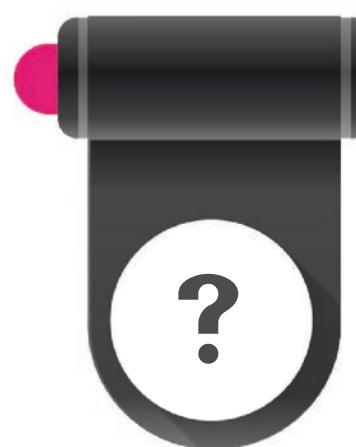
In spite of all data that proves them wrong, TEA fully expects privatizers to push vouchers and charter expansion again in the General Assembly this year.

"People get paid a lot of money to be a part of the privatization industrial complex, and just because the data and record shows they are flat wrong, I doubt any of them will quit," said Wrye.

THE PRIVATIZATION

A look at the inner workings of the multi-billion dollar privatization machine.

TEA is the ONLY organization standing in the way of the privatization machine.



DESTROY TRUST

Most Americans love their local public schools. For this privatization plan to work, Americans' trust in teachers and public education had to be undermined. A new teacher evaluation system based heavily on test scores allowed privatizers to paint teachers as "ineffective." Distrust is sown on issues like curriculum, painting schools as out-of-touch with the values of the communities they serve.



SAY SCHOOLS ARE FAILING

In addition to using flawed standardized tests to label teachers as ineffective, those same tests are used by privatizers to label our schools as "failing." Teachers know that a standardized test is not the best way to measure student achievement, but their voices went unheard as privatizers pushed the nation to evaluate schools based solely on test scores.



MAKE MONEY

As public schools are closed, privatizers lobby the state to hand its schools over to a number of different private school operators and/or implement private school voucher programs. This scheme diverts billions of dollars from public schools and into private pockets.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ATION MACHINE

illion dollar strategy to destroy public education

TARGETED BY BILLIONAIRES

Years ago, wealthy investors like the Walton Family Foundation, the Gates Foundation and the DeVos family, decided they wanted to turn our nation's system of public schools into a for-profit operation - prioritizing money over quality public education for all children.



WEAKEN THE OPPOSITION

Tennessee educators witnessed first-hand how privatizers try to silence the opposition. Six years ago when the legislature voted to repeal collective bargaining rights, privatizer fingerprints were all over the legislation. The plan backfired though. Teachers are more engaged than ever, and TEA is the largest and strongest hurdle standing in their way. Now they'll come after payroll dues deduction.



CLOSE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Once unreliable test scores provide the manufactured data privatizers needed, they go about the business of shutting down one "failing" school after another, firing its staff in the process.



Tennessee groups linked to the privatization industry

SCORE

[Stand for Children](#)

[TennesseeCAN \(formerly Students First\)](#)

[Federation for Children](#)

[Beacon Center](#)

[Memphis Lift](#)

[Campaign for School Equity](#)

Voucher mistakes from page 1

Florida and Indiana offer two examples of how small voucher plans ended up costing taxpayers big money.

Indiana

Back in 2011, Indiana enacted a "limited" school voucher plan. Then-Governor Mitch Daniels said at the time, "It is not likely to be a very large phenomenon in Indiana. I think it will be exercised by a meaningful but not an enormous number of our students."

Indeed, the program was initially limited to just 7,500 available vouchers. Enter Mike Pence. Pence became Governor of Indiana in 2013 and rapidly pushed to expand the voucher program. Now, approximately 33,000 students receive a voucher at a cost of \$131 million a year. More than \$50 million of that is spent on students who never attended a public school.

Florida

In 2002, Florida Governor Jeb Bush began a push for a limited voucher scheme in his state. The program would start small, and only expand if successful. Now, Florida has three different school voucher programs enrolling more than 100,000 students costing hundreds of millions of dollars. Here's the most interesting part: There's little evidence vouchers are doing much good. Not only can the state not say vouchers have improved student achievement, in the case of the McKay scholarships for students with special needs, there's been rampant fraud and abuse. Parents of limited means have handed over state vouchers to unsavory private school operators out to make a quick dollar. When the operators get caught and schools close, kids get left behind.

Tennessee

Education reformers have been working to dismantle public education infrastructure in Tennessee, too. One good example is the Achievement School District (ASD). When it started, the ASD was designed to provide targeted intervention and additional resources to up to ten schools at a time. The goal was to provide assistance and hand the schools back to districts. Now, however, the ASD has more than 30 schools under its control and has farmed out the management to a wide range of charter operators. The data shows ASD schools simply aren't getting results, and yet the state has expanded the program into Nashville and has announced intentions to move to Chattanooga. This once small program costs millions to run and leaves hundreds of students behind.

Starting Small Means Big Problems

Florida and Indiana show us that a small privatization experiment can create big problems for a state budget. Our own experience with the ASD shows that a "limited" program can do significant damage. When legislators tell you they support a pilot program for vouchers and that it will only impact Shelby County, don't believe it. Tell them what happened in Florida and Indiana. Tell them you don't want hundreds of millions in public money sent to private schools. Above all, tell them our public schools are doing a great job – improving graduation rates, increasing ACT scores, and moving ahead on the NAEP. Let's keep supporting our state's best investment – our public schools.



School-grading bill criticized by superintendents, implementation delayed

Growing concern about a new school letter grade system has moved legislators to talk about delaying its use.

Opposed by TEA but passed by the General Assembly last year, the bill is criticized by educators as unfair and unworkable and is viewed as another effort by out-of-state privatizers to deflate the value of public schools.

"I've got to make sure they understand what I meant by delay," Rep. Glen Casada, the bill's sponsor, said last week as he addressed the Williamson County school board.

Starting in 2017, the bill was designed to assign letter grades to schools — A, B, C, D or F — based on student achievement, student growth data and other factors determined by the Tennessee State Board of Education.

"This is a disconnect between the legislative attempt and policy," Superintendent Mike Looney said. "The model that's being proposed is giving more weight to growth. What we see is our schools keep being penalized and we become C schools. But when you're in the 99 percentile, you're there. Give a letter grade for growth and achievement."

Other critics of the bill continue to point out that it would bring more confusion and distrust in the state's education system, further stigmatizing schools and communities with low-income populations.

TEA has maintained that letter-grading schools is a bad idea, no matter what metric is used — ACT scores, high school graduation rates, TNReady scores or attendance and truancy. Information on school demographics, proficiency on state tests and improvement on state tests is already available on the annual state report card.

"The letter-grading bill came to Tennessee courtesy of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, founded by former Republican presidential candidate and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush," said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder. "The foundation pushed to pass similar legislation in 16 other states. It's yet another example of out-of-state special interests meddling in Tennessee public education and we don't like it. Schools are far too complex to reduce them to a letter grade, instead of delay we should repeal."

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- Defeat privatization attacks

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Implications for educators as state attempts to increase outsourcing

A battle is brewing of Governor Bill Haslam's proposal to outsource thousands of state employees at public parks and universities. The plan is part of a larger trend of privatizing public services. The track record of outsourcing is mixed at best. It doesn't save taxpayers money in the long run, and the services are rarely any better. Sometimes they are dangerously worse.

What does outsourcing mean to you?

While your job may not be outsourced, you may feel the impact in the costs of your benefits. If thousands of state employees leave the state's health insurance plan, that shrinks the pool for the remaining members. That may mean a premium hike.

While the state may shed the cost of benefits for those who become employed by private contractors, the cost of providing benefits for the smaller pool will likely go up.

Additionally, the move toward large-scale outsourcing of public jobs seems likely to expand into public education.

In fact, public education has seen its share of outsourcing, mainly impacting education support professionals like bus drivers and custodians.

Following the recent tragic bus accident in Chattanooga, analysis showed that outsourced bus services were more likely to be involved in accidents. School system leaders and educators also report difficulties with holding the employees of private contractors accountable. The savings always seems good on the front end, but inevitably savings disappear.

Recently, Wilson County Schools voted to outsource substitute teachers to a private contractor.

And then there's Teach for America, the ultimate outsourcing program. Nashville just extended a \$1 million contract to TFA to provide (and train) "teachers" for the district. The training consists of a 5-week boot camp for college graduates who typically stay in the system for two years or less.

Public sector outsourcing is here, and part of the larger privatization agenda. Even if your job isn't on track to be outsourced, the state's plan to outsource others may impact your wallet. As a taxpayer you'll likely spend more, and as a member of the state health insurance plan, you'll likely pay more.

When you hear legislators talking about the benefits of outsourcing, be aware of the very real dangers it poses. Let them know outsourcing is a raw deal for both employees and taxpayers.



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fax: (855) 299-5674; Assns: Fentress Co., Lenoir 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 — 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 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 — Cheryl Richardson**, P.O. Box 354, Goodlettsville, TN 37070; phone: (615) 630-2601; 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 — Zandra Foster**, 3897 Homewood Cove, Memphis, TN 38128; (901) 377-9472; fax: (855) 320-8737; Assns: Bartlett, Collierville, Fayette Co., Germantown-Arlington-Lakeland, Millington, Southwest State Community College, University of Memphis. **District 19 — Karla Carpenter, UniServ Field Manager**; **UniServ Director: Tom Marchand**, 6520 Stage Road, Bartlett, TN 38134; phone/fax (901) 379-6939; United Education Association of Shelby County, www.unitedshelby.org.

Cumberland Co. educators take action on teacher raises

Teachers in Cumberland County, like many other districts around the state, were tired of seeing the headlines about the legislature passing a raise for teachers, but never seeing anything show up in their paychecks.

During the 2016 legislative session, the state's Basic Education Program was increased by a historic \$220 million, resulting in an additional \$2 million to Cumberland County Schools.

Legislators indicated that a portion of the funds were to go towards teacher salaries, but only districts below a certain salary threshold were required to strictly use the salary funds to increase the number that shows up on paychecks. Districts above the threshold have flexibility to use the money for merit pay or other compensation.

"Teacher pay in Cumberland County has remained relatively stagnant over the past five years while other districts in the area have increased teacher pay," Julia Timson, President of the Cumberland County Education Association, told *The Crossville Chronicle*. "How many times will teachers in Cumberland County be expected to forgo an increase in compensation? The General Assembly meant well when they passed the 4 percent, but I saw an increase of 42 cents in my paycheck."

"Teaching is not a 9-5 job. All we ask is that Cumberland County teachers be compensated fairly and adequately to be able to support our

own families without having to take extra part-time jobs to make ends meet," Timson continued.

Cumberland teachers were one of those groups falling through the cracks because the district was above the threshold set by the state. When the school year started and still no raise showed up in paychecks, Timson and TEA UniServ Coordinator Shannon Bain went to work organizing teachers and advocating at the local level for the much-needed raise.

"Julia and I quickly realized the opportunity we had to educate and organize teachers on how BEP funds really work and the implications for teacher raises," said Bain. "As teachers increasingly pressured board members about where the BEP dollars were spent, the board began investigating the issue."

Timson's and Bain's efforts paid off.

"Salary increases will be our number one priority for the 2017-2018 school year and for subsequent years after that," Director of Schools Janet Graham stated in a letter to the Cumberland Co. EA. "Our goal is to work with everyone involved



After years of not receiving the state increase, Cumberland Co. EA President Julia Timson led the fight to get her members a raise.

so we can provide the best salaries to the best teachers, and keep quality educators in Cumberland County."

The local association is not resting on this victory. Cumberland Co. EA also successfully petitioned the local board to begin collaborative conferencing and was voted to represent all Cumberland teachers. Engaging in PECCA will give the association the opportunity to ensure teachers don't go so long without a raise next time.

"Seeing the power of organizing first-hand was an eye-opening experience for CCEA members," Bain said. "They now realize that we can stand together and take action.

United action can accomplish great things for educators and students."

This is just one example of the power of organizing at the local level. TEA is fortunate to have a network of local association leaders and UniServ staff statewide dedicated to working in the best interests of Tennessee educators and students.

Local organizing wins Bedford Co. teachers insurance reimbursement

Victory proves significance of collaborative conferencing MOU

Empowered by success stories from across the state, more locals associations are organizing collaborative conferencing votes and winning the right to represent teachers in Tennessee school districts under the Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act.

Teachers in Metro Nashville, Cumberland, Bedford, Giles and Greene counties were among the latest to entrust negotiations with local school boards to TEA affiliates.

"We don't take this great responsibility lightly. Our leaders recognize that teachers trust TEA and our local associations to have their backs on important issues and work with them to improve public education in our state," said TEA President Barbara Gray. "We are proud to represent the majority of teachers in Tennessee and to work on behalf of all Tennessee students and educators to ensure every child has access to a quality public education in our state."

Passed in 2011, the PECCA law provides a way for local associations to negotiate tough issues with local school boards concerning working conditions, salary and benefits, and teachers are seizing on that opportunity.

Bedford County victory sets precedent

Following the repeal of collective bargaining, many educators worried how much weight a memorandum of understanding under PECCA would really carry.

A major victory came last year in the form of a court decision in Bedford County, which demonstrated the strength of the MOU provisioned in PECCA, proving that it has the same legal significance as collectively bargained contracts.

The Bedford County Board of Education was bound by the MOU negotiated by the Bedford

County Education Association to pay a certain level of its teachers' health insurance premiums. When the board failed to live up to its legal obligations, with assistance from TEA's legal team and local UniServ coordinator Jackie Pope, the Bedford County teachers stood up to defend their rights.

"The biggest takeaway from this fight is that we have to stand up for ourselves," said Tamra King, former BCEA president. "We had a very good relationship with the school board, but when they took our insurance away, that really affected our members. We had to draw the line."

King said it wasn't her decision alone: every teacher she spoke with and the local association leaders felt like it was time for teachers to fight for their rights.

"Until we stand up for ourselves, things aren't going to get better, because nobody is going to do this for us," King said. "It took a couple of years, we won, but the battle is far from over."

Looking back at the fight to win back insurance premium funds, TEA UniServ Coordinator Jackie Pope said it's clear that without the local association, no single teacher could have negotiated the contractual commitment in the MOU, and no single teacher could have afforded legal assistance to recover what that teacher lost when the Board breached the MOU.

"The members of BCEA are the real heroes here. They put themselves on the line to ensure that all teachers in Bedford County were protected. This only happens when all educators come together, when they join the professional association and support a common cause," said Pope. "Working with BCEA leaders to go to bat for our members when the MOU was not followed by the district demonstrated not only the strength of the MOU, but the power of organizing at the local level."



Having the MOU in place when the school board decided to cut benefits was a key component of BCEA's success.

"Without the MOU, we could not have taken the steps to correct the wrong," said Samantha Cochran, BCEA member-at-large and TEA building representative at Community Elementary School. "Fighting to win back what was already negotiated and agreed upon also helped us increase our membership. For too long, people were asking, 'What is BCEA, TEA and NEA doing for us?' This victory was a huge step in showing that TEA and NEA took our situation to heart. I live on a single income, so I'm personally grateful to TEA and NEA for helping us fight for it."

In order to get the PECCA conferencing process underway, teachers in each school district first have to vote to negotiate with a school board, and then vote on the organization they wish to represent them in those talks. TEA affiliates have been winning the majority of those votes during the last several years.

"The Bedford County ruling has definitely strengthened our confidence in the collaborative conferencing process. Winning back the insurance money was a long process, but helped galvanize and strengthen membership, so even the recent skeptics are saying that all local associations need to get an MOU in place immediately to protect the rights of educators," President Gray said.



Join the discussion!

Tell TEA, your elected officials and the Tennessee Department of Education (@TNedu) about what you and your students are experiencing with TNReady.

Instead of an over-emphasis on flawed high-stakes tests, how can legislators and the department help educators set Tennessee students up to succeed?

#SetUpToFail #TNReady



/TennesseeEA



@TEA_teachers

Budget priorities from page 1

"A salary increase is always at the top of TEA's list, and 2017 is no different. Gov. Haslam has made great strides in increasing state investment in public education, and salaries in particular, but there is still significant work to be done," said TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder.

An important part of the association's advocacy efforts this year will be educating legislators on the need to put safeguards in place to ensure the raise they pass actually shows up in teachers' paychecks.

Other budget priorities for 2017 include the RTI program, TCRS and health insurance needs.

"RTI has so much potential to really help our struggling students, but inadequate funding is holding back the state's less wealthy districts," Crowder said. "TEA strongly believes every student should receive a quality public education, regardless of their ZIP code, and fully funding the RTI program would be an important step in the right direction."

TEA has been successful in recent years in getting more state money allocated for teacher health insurance and protecting TCRS, but it is crucial that educators keep the pressure on legislators to continue properly funding these important benefits.

In addition to these recurring investments, the state surplus provides an opportunity for much-needed one-time funds, like technology purchases and classroom supplies.

"As the state keeps its eye on moving to an online state assessment, it must prioritize education technology purchases now," Crowder said. "We don't need to wait for another TNReady fiasco to equip our schools with the necessary technology."

Set up to fail from page 1

administered in all schools this spring, there is growing concern our students and teachers are being set up to fail. When a well-respected national test says "Great job!" but the state test shows failure, there is a problem with TNReady.

"We want the students we teach to have opportunities to be successful in life. One goal of the shift to TNReady was to change the way we test in order to better assess college and career readiness skills, but unfortunately that doesn't seem to be what is actually happening," said TEA President Barbara Gray.

Since the standard for student achievement is a good score on the ACT, it stands to reason that districts who have high ACT scores would also do well on the new TNReady end-of-course tests, but results from the 2015-16 school year indicate otherwise.

When we look at two of our state's highest achievers on ACT, Williamson County and Maryville, we see surprising TNReady results. These districts are showing achievement well above the national average in ACT, yet also showing that between 50-67 percent of their students aren't on grade level.

Clearly, students in these two districts are demonstrating a high level of college and career readiness based on the state's definition. The ACT is saying students are well-prepared and ready, yet the state is saying that a majority of those

same students aren't testing on grade level.

Set Up to Fail?

Some public education advocates are suggesting that a piece of the broader school privatization agenda is setting teachers and schools up to fail. That theory gains credibility when scores from the same group of students show a wide disparity between ACT numbers and TNReady results.

"If privatizers can say schools are failing, they can justify failed policies like rapid charter expansion and even vouchers," Gray said. "Teachers may see their growth scores drop and their overall ratings suffer. It is important for parents, educators and elected officials to consider that this is a part of a bigger plan to disrupt and dismantle our public schools."

Transparency is critical

Right now, all we have are these inconsistent results – top school systems in student achievement getting low marks on TNReady. But, thanks to TEA's aggressive push for testing transparency, we'll soon be able to see the questions on these tests. This transparency will give educators and elected officials greater understanding where the issues lie.

"Our teachers, parents, and students deserve fair, transparent testing that accurately reflects student work," Gray said. "Early results from TNReady indicate we might have a serious problem."

Be sure to thank your legislators for passing testing transparency, and ask them to be sure we get the questions and answers to TNReady, as intended.

TEA's 2017 Budget Priorities

SALARIES

TEA is advocating for an 8 percent increase in state teacher salary funds, which equates to approximately \$200 million. The association is also continuing its efforts to make sure increases actually show up in teacher paychecks by asking the legislature to take control of the State Minimum Salary Schedule.

1

2

RTI INVESTMENT

For a program like RTI to be successful, the state must properly fund it. TEA is advocating for a new line item in the state budget for RTI teachers in Math and Language Arts so every school can have specialists to work with struggling students.

3

BENEFITS

Tennessee teachers are fortunate to have a well-funded retirement plan, but it is important that we hold the state accountable in continuing to fully fund TCRS. TEA is also advocating for the state to fully fund educator health insurance needs.

4

ONE-TIME FUNDS

The state will have a significant surplus again this fiscal year. Legislators need to invest that money into one-time purchases for education technology and an increase in classroom supply money for every teacher.