Tennessee K-12 Funding Increase Talking Points

Tennessee is in the bottom five in education funding. We must do better:

- NEA ranks Tennessee 46th in the nation in funding per student;
- Ed Week ranks Tennessee 44th for education funding and gives the state a lowly D+;
- Tennessee’s funding rank has been steadily falling, from 41st in 2016 to 46th today;
- We are only ahead of Mississippi in funding per student. Tennessee is far behind neighboring states like Kentucky and Alabama in funding per student;

The state is the cause of bottom-five funding:

- Southern state governments are majority funders of education;
  - Tennessee state government is a minority funder, providing only 46% of K-12 funding;
    - State and local funding per student in Tennessee: $9,009.
    - Southeast average funding per student: $10,214.
    - To bring Tennessee to the southeast average will cost $1.2 billion;
    - The cause of state shortage is focus on the BEP.

The BEP is starvation funding:

- No school system can run on the BEP because no system does;
- The BEP generates only $7,132 per student on average;
- Local governments must provide on average 30% of the lowly $7,132;
- “Fully funding” the BEP is meaningless because it is starvation funding.

The state can and must do more on education funding:

- In the past five years, the state has generated five times more revenue surpluses ($3.5 billion) than increases in K-12 funding ($700 million);
- The non-partisan Sycamore Institute says the state has $3 billion to budget:
  - $476 million from last fiscal year
  - $1.1 billion in surplus this fiscal year (July 2020 – June 2021)
  - $1.5 billion available for next fiscal year (July 2021 – June 2022)
- The state is currently collecting record surplus revenue that could:
  - increase this fiscal year surplus to $1.6 billion, next year revenue to $1.8 billion.

We’ve heard the excuses before, it’s time to make record investments:

- The state chronically low-balls revenue estimates on purpose;
- Low-ball estimates caused budget surpluses at least three-times greater than K-12 increases;
  - An example: In 2014 then Gov. Haslam made a $100 million commitment to have the fastest improving teacher salaries in the country. That year the proposed state teacher raise was eliminated when state revenue estimates plummeted. Educators did not get a raise while state ended with a surplus of more than $500 million.
- Low funding hurts students and schools.