



# TEACH

The teaching and learning journal of the Tennessee Education Association



## Gains toward professional pay seen statewide

As local school budgets passed across the state, the summer shaped up to be one of the best in years for educator raises. TEA member advocacy led to robust improvements in salary schedules, strong state mandates on pay increases, and a flood of federal education dollars that could be used for compensation or to free up local funding to improve pay.

“We made important steps to meeting our goal of professional pay. For years we’ve pushed to get more state dollars for education salaries and worked to ensure they got into paychecks. We saw substantial progress on both of these fronts this year,” said TEA President Beth Brown.

The General Assembly unanimously passed TEA-backed legislation guaranteeing teacher salary funding in state budgets increased the State Minimum Salary Schedule for teachers, driving those dollars into paychecks. The state budget had \$120 million earmarked for teacher compensation,

**Salary increase**  
Cont. on page 7

## Influx of federal relief money requires educator input on how funds are used

In three rounds of federal COVID aid to schools, Tennessee has received more than \$4.5 billion in total. In the spring, Congress passed the third and largest aid package, sending \$3.26 billion directly to school districts across our state. These dollars must be spent over the next three years.

The relief aid is known as the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). The first two rounds—ESSER 1 and 2—were used by districts in a variety of ways. Many districts gave educator bonuses; Greene County provided \$3,000. Some districts added mental

health workers, food service vehicles and even paid for employee daycare.

“Districts statewide have benefited greatly from the first two federal aid packages, making important investments for students and educators,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “The third round of ESSER funding dwarfs the first two and provides districts with an unprecedented influx of cash to make significant improvements for students and educators.”

**ESSER funds**  
Cont. on page 8

**FEDERAL COVID RELIEF, 2021**  
To: Tennessee K-12 & higher ed  
**\$3,259,300,000**

## We teach facts, not feelings: Vague new law attacks professional integrity of educators

A new law on teaching history is causing concern and sowing confusion among teachers of every grade. TEA is taking on the new law and is ready to defend the professional rights of members.

As long as a teacher is teaching to the Tennessee state standards, they are in compliance with the law.

“The vague language in this amendment could bring false accusations of violating the law. Now more than ever it is important to be a member of TEA,” said TEA President Beth Brown.

Passed hastily in the last days of the legislative session, the law prohibits things that are not taught by any Tennessee teacher, such as the violent overthrow of the United States government or that there are no laws, only power concepts.

The bill was based on myths often

pushed by privatizers that Tennessee schools are indoctrinating students in theories and concepts not part of the state standards. One prohibition is teaching students they “should feel” guilt and other negative emotions based on personal culpability for history.

“We teach facts, not feelings,” Brown said. “Some of the facts we teach in the state standards are difficult, like lynching during Jim Crow. They may evoke an emotional response from students, but that’s different than instructing students how they should feel. This is where the vagueness and lack of common sense of the law come into play.”

To inform the public and Tennessee educators

about the realities and fallacies of the new law, TEA is launching a public information campaign stating clearly that teachers follow the Tennessee state standards and highlighting the absurdity of the law, including a commercial to be broadcast on

**Teaching facts not feelings**  
Cont. on page 7



Watch the TEA video on HB 580 online.



# Teaching is about more than academics, it's about integrity

By TEA President Beth Brown



Throughout my years as a student, I learned countless lessons from my teachers, and many of them—to no educators' surprise—were not academic. Mrs. Wolfe, my first-grade teacher, taught me learning can and should be a joyful process. My fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Gist, taught me every single point of a grade is earned through hard work. Mrs. Nixon, one of my sixth-grade teachers, taught me the importance of thinking both critically and creatively. My freshman English teacher and yearbook advisor, Mrs. Sanders, taught me the importance of meeting deadlines. And my

parents, both of whom were also my teachers, taught me the importance of integrity. I internalized these lessons and have endeavored to teach them to my students over the past twenty years.

*Don't insult our professional integrity. Don't question our commitment. Just let us teach.*

During those twenty years, I have learned countless other non-academic lessons. I learned that teaching is not students giving the right answer. Instead, teaching is everything leading up to that moment. It is early

morning lesson preparation; it is standing in line at the copier, lunch in hand; it is one-on-one time with students; it is evenings and weekends spent grading. It is cold dinners followed by five hours of sleep... and then rinse and repeat. Teaching is sacrifice and passion and commitment to ensuring our students receive a high-quality and well-rounded education.

A recent law passed by the Tennessee General Assembly questions the professional integrity and commitment of me and every other Tennessee educator. Pushed by out-of-state private-interest groups, this new law is designed to erode confidence in Tennessee's public schools and hard-working Tennessee educators and threatens school funding if a teacher or school is found to be in violation of the vague, subjective language in the law.

If folks want to know what is happening in Tennessee's public schools, I invite them to visit; educators are always looking for community involvement in and support of the amazing things happening every single day in classrooms across the state. If visiting our great public schools simply is not an option, here is a quick overview.

In our public schools, educators—who have already earned at least one degree from an accredited educator preparation program, completed job-embedded training, and passed multiple licensure exams—continue to hone their skills through dozens of hours of professional development each year. Educators spend nights and weekends planning instruction and submitting lesson plans to their administrators. Educators undergo annual evaluations via a state-approved evaluation model.

You know what else they are doing? Teaching Tennessee state standards with fidelity and professional integrity. Every. Single. Day.

Australian actress Mia Wasikowska said it best: "I want to just do my job and do it well." That is exactly what Tennessee's educators want, too.

Don't insult our professional integrity. Don't question our commitment. Just let us teach. Let us do our job—teaching Tennessee state standards with professional integrity and commitment to fact—without worrying about some vague law pushed by folks who know nothing about us, our students, or Tennessee state standards.

# Students counting on us as we start another atypical year

By TEA Executive Director Terrance Gibson



Excitement, eagerness, anticipation and joy are all typical feelings that educators across the country experience annually as summer winds down and we usher in a new school year.

Educators meet the start of each school year with a renewed sense of commitment to our students, the communities we serve and our profession.

The excitement of pulling classroom materials together or organizing workspaces is coupled with our eagerness to see how former students have grown, welcoming new ones and our enthusiasm to try new strategies and pedagogical approaches.

Unfortunately, we are once again facing a start to a new school year that will be anything but typical.

Regardless of the world's irregularities or the inconsistencies in educational environments, educators will press on as the school year kicks off.

As students return, educators have stressed the need for focus on the whole child. This must be done with care, attention, resilience and hard work as we serve the students who have endured so much over the past year. We must engage policymakers and hold all stakeholders accountable as we create supports to address trauma and the inconsistent learning environments students experienced last school year.

As we start school, districts across our state will be completing plans to use billions of federal dollars to help public schools recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) this looks to be the most federal money poured into public education since Race to the Top. ARP provides more than \$170.3 billion for K-12 schools, higher education and related programs under the U.S. Department of Education, including \$122.8 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief Fund (ESSER).

Tennessee will receive an estimated \$2.5 billion in ESSER funds and an estimated \$700

million in higher education emergency relief funds. TEA and all local affiliates must continue to work to leverage this opportunity for schools and members. Read more on pages 1 and 8 of this publication about the resources TEA staff have provided to assist local affiliates as they engage with their district administrators who must submit LEA plans to TDOE by August 27. LEAs have a great opportunity to use these unprecedented funds to add supports to address student trauma, the digital divide, poverty relief and notable resource gaps experienced by our communities.

Educators will also find important policy and legislative changes TEA won for our members this past spring and summer. The state salary wins, teacher evaluation relief, and new licensure flexibilities are just a few of the reasons why potential members are attracted to our TEA and must be asked to join.

Though we don't pick our students, being educators is the calling we chose to make a difference. No matter who shows up at the start of school, TEA members are committed to giving them the best of us.

We must continue to promote the association mission, advocate for our students, and lead in our professional practice.

*We must engage policymakers...as we create supports to address trauma and the inconsistent learning environments students experienced last school year.*

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**First in-person TEA conference since 2019!**



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***Red for Ed  
Gala***

**The conference will kick-off with a Red for Ed Gala on Friday to celebrate the hard work of Tennessee educators and TEA.**

**Dress is semi-formal.**

***You don't want to miss this!***

**Register now: [TEAteachers.org/Symposium](https://TEAteachers.org/Symposium)**



TEA is powered by educators like you who share a passion for our profession and our students.

## Advocacy

TEA works at the state level to advocate for public education funding, fair evaluations, salary increases and more. Your local association advocates for the priorities and needs specific to your community to ensure all students have access to a quality public education.

## Leadership

TEA is one of the largest providers of high-quality professional development and leadership trainings for educators in the state. TEA covers everything from classroom management and teacher evaluations to leadership in organizing and advocacy work. Our trainings are designed to empower you to be a leader in the classroom and in your community.

## Support

In the moments that matter most, TEA has your back. TEA members have a support system of TEA staff who live and work in your district, the best team of education law experts in the state and tens of thousands of educators statewide. No educator expects to get into a tough spot, but TEA will be there if you do. TEA staff and leaders work tirelessly to protect your rights and ensure you are treated fairly.



Join the **ONLY ASSOCIATION** that empowers you to change lives and build great public schools.



[TEAteachers.org](http://TEAteachers.org)



# TEA Fights for Educators

## Salaries & K-12 Funding

### SALARIES

TEA has long advocated for aggressive efforts to improve the salaries of Tennessee teachers, particularly for those among the lowest paid in the state.

- TEA was successful in pushing a bill to increase the State Minimum Salary Schedule and ensure the raise passed by the General Assembly would show up in teacher paychecks.
- TEA efforts led the State Board to exceed the increase to the salary

schedule, resulting in a much-needed increase for the state's lowest paid teachers.

### K-12 FUNDING

TEA backed numerous bills that would have provided funding for resources like more nurses, counselors, RTI specialists and social workers that our students need to meet their mental and academic challenges.



## TNReady & Evaluations

### TNReady

The General Assembly passed TEA-backed legislation exempting teachers, schools and districts from accountability measures using testing data from the 2020-21 school year, unless the data was to their benefit.

### EVALUATIONS

TEA worked closely with the state board to revise the evaluation hold-harmless policy to include provisions to empower educators with more control over their evaluations.

## Professional Integrity

While Tennessee educators and parents were focused on keeping children engaged and closing out a long and challenging school year, the General Assembly was busy passing a vague new law that questions the professional integrity of teachers and attempts to drive a wedge between parents and educators.

HB 580 addresses an issue that does not even exist in Tennessee. TEA knows educators are committed

fact-based instruction on difficult but important topics.

The stakes are too high for our already under-funded schools. TEA members are pushing back, insisting the Department of Education provide pre-clearance for lesson plans on the subject areas in question. Tennessee teachers must have clarity from the state to protect our students from losing the resources they need for academic achievement.



## Fights Ahead

Increasing public education funding will continue to be a top priority for TEA. The state can afford a significant increase in its investment in our students.

TEA also remains committed to reducing and ultimately eliminating high-stakes testing, and improving teacher evaluations.

The key to winning these big fights and

others is to vote for pro-public education candidates in all elections. Every election from the county commission to the state house can have a significant impact on your classroom.

If educators turn up in large numbers for every election, we will have friends of public education in all elected seats in the state!



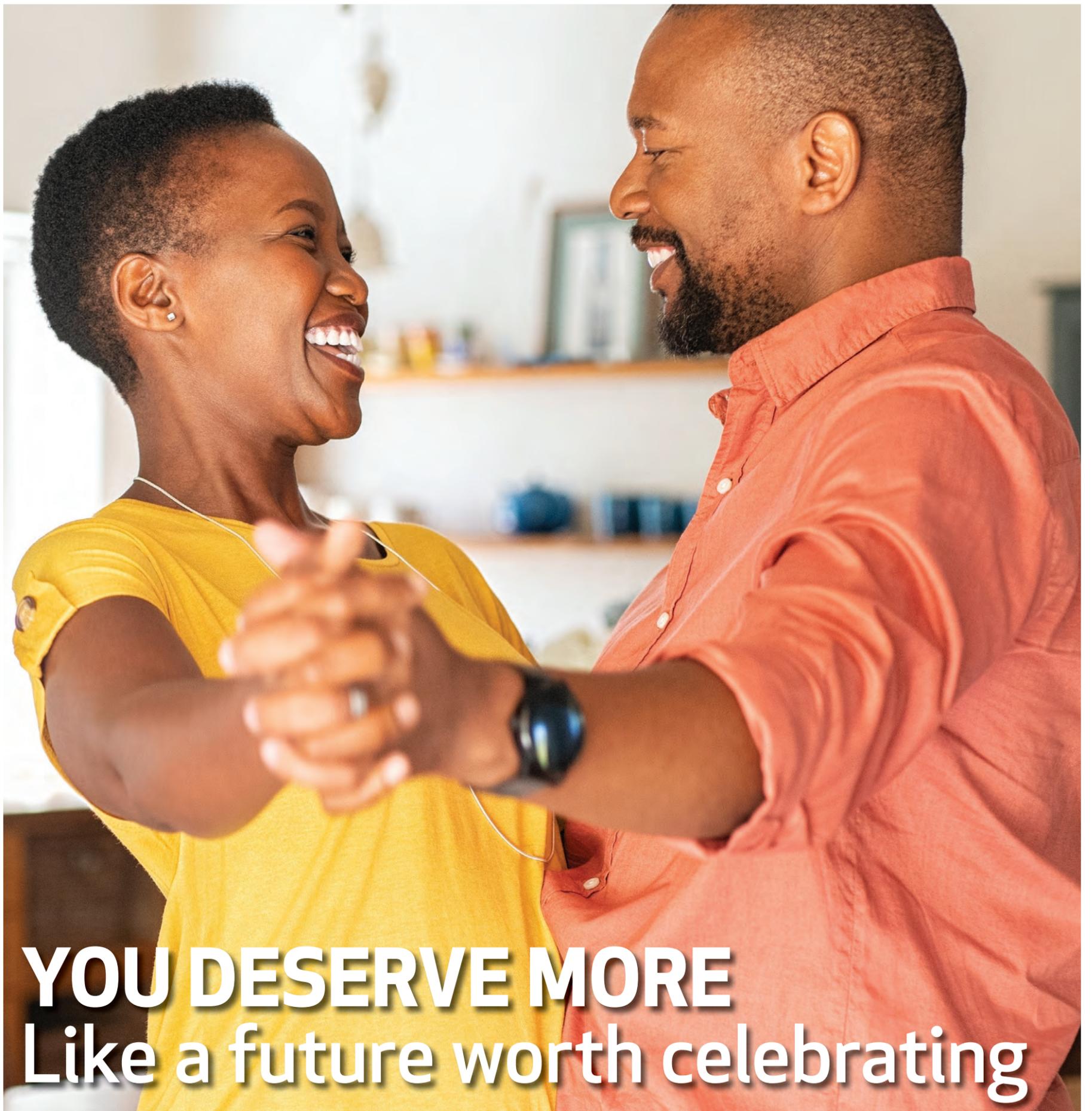
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## COVID-19 precautions still important in new school year

With new-case rates of COVID-19 virus on the rise in Tennessee, it is important that educators continue to exercise caution as school buildings begin to reopen for the new school year.

“Tennessee educators have been resilient, courageous and caring throughout the pandemic, but we are not out of the woods yet,” said TEA President Beth Brown. “While TEA fought for and achieved funding for safety and protection of Tennessee students and educators in the past year, starting the new school year in the safest manner possible is our highest priority.”

As a state, we have made progress since this time last year, but there are still many health and safety concerns facing our educators and student. While 97% of new COVID cases are among people who have not been vaccinated, the seven-day new-case average in Tennessee is on the rise as the more transmissible Delta variant spreads throughout the state and nation.

TEA continues to be in close contact with the state health officials and local district leaders to ensure precautions are in place to ensure the health and wellbeing of all students and staff.

According to the July guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, students, educators, and staff should continue wearing masks at school if they are not fully vaccinated for COVID-19. While prioritizing reopening school buildings for in-person instruction, the CDC also said students should also maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance in classrooms and did not rule out situations where masking requirements could be appropriate.

TEA’s COVID resources and FAQs are available at [TEAteachers.org/COVID](https://TEAteachers.org/COVID).



## More NEA Members Are Finding Student Loan Debt Relief

As of **May 2021**, more than **17,750** NEA members have reduced or eliminated their student loan debt obligations with help from the [NEA Student Debt Navigator tool](#). Here’s a look at the numbers:

**\$284.8M**

The total amount of student loan debt eligible for forgiveness

**\$34,540**

The average amount of student loan debt forgiven

**\$23.7M**

The total annual projected savings on student debt repayments

**\$2,000**

The average annual savings on student debt repayments

[NEAMB.com/student-loan-debt](https://NEAMB.com/student-loan-debt)

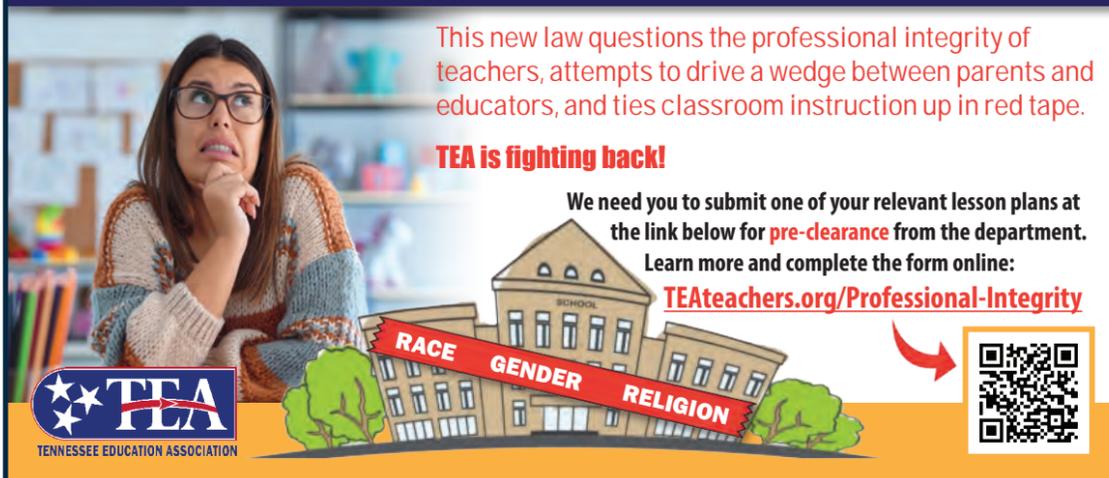
## Worried about teaching social studies or certain ELA texts? Vague new state law seeks to erode confidence in Tennessee teachers and threaten school funding.

This new law questions the professional integrity of teachers, attempts to drive a wedge between parents and educators, and ties classroom instruction up in red tape.

**TEA is fighting back!**

We need you to submit one of your relevant lesson plans at the link below for **pre-clearance** from the department. Learn more and complete the form online:

[TEAteachers.org/Professional-Integrity](https://TEAteachers.org/Professional-Integrity)



### Teaching facts not feelings

Cont. from page 1

television and social media.

A significant aspect of the commercial is the launch of a pre-clearance initiative, where members upload a lesson plan for pre-clearance by the state. Pre-clearance requests by hundreds of members on lessons aligned to standards that factually address difficult periods of history provide an opportunity to show the public quality teaching while highlighting the absurdity of the law.

The state will not have the manpower for pre-clearing lessons of hundreds of teachers—which would cost millions of dollars and make timely instruction near impossible—and demanding pre-clearance demonstrates the folly of the law.

“When we teach the civil rights movement, one of the most effective strategies we highlight is the taking of positive and direct action,” Brown said. “Since enforcement of the law falls to the commissioner—where she must withhold state school funding if

a violation takes place—it makes sense to demand the state make rulings on what is acceptable and what they find is not. By pushing for this, we’ll demonstrate the absurdity of the law.”

The Tennessee Department of Education has announced it will issue guidance on the new law on August 1. State Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn has said implementing laws is her job, and that teachers deserve to understand what is expected of them.

“It will be very difficult to create strong guidance on the vague language that was in the amendment,” said TEA Legal Counsel Steve McCloud. “The law uses terms like ‘inherently’ and ‘impartially’ that are subjective and have no definition in state code. Things that are passed as hastily as this do nothing but cause confusion and take the focus off teaching and learning.”

McCloud says threats to professional practice like this law are why every teacher needs to be a member of TEA.

### Salary increase

Cont. from page 1

a 4% increase, and the state schedule had to increase by that amount or more. It turned out to be more.

TEA pushed for the state to act boldly on the state minimum, rewarding teachers who had endured a difficult school year due to COVID. The State Board of Education approved the largest increase in decades, increasing the base by \$2,000 to total \$38,000. This resulted in a 5.5% increase for every step on the state schedule.

“Getting large improvements in the state minimum not only impacts teachers at or near those steps in the state schedule, it also creates upward pressure on all educator salaries. A rising tide lifts all boats,” Brown said.

Teachers in most school districts received raises under the new minimum salary schedule, with many of these educators among the lowest paid in the state.

“I taught in a rural county, so I understand what it’s like to go years without seeing a pay raise,” said Brown said. “Many teachers in poor counties can barely make ends meet, let alone get professional compensation. Getting a minimum \$2,000 raise is a significant step in the right direction and sets a precedent for future salary fights.”

Members across Tennessee saw success in negotiating improved schedules through collaborative conferencing and other forms of advocacy working with their school boards and funding bodies to provide more local money to bolster salaries. Teachers in Nashville secured unprecedented investment in pay for their licensed staff, but also restructured their local salary schedule to include step raises every year for their teachers.

The average raise for Nashville teachers was nearly \$7,000, with some mid-career teachers getting more than \$12,000.

TEA is continuing to collect and compare 2020-2021 salary schedules and information on bonuses provided by federal stimulus dollars to continue the progress toward better professional pay.

“We can and will build on the success of this year,” Brown said. “Once you’ve set a precedent like this, it provides an opportunity not just to meet it, but exceed it incoming years.”

# ASK TEA

## ANSWERS FROM THE EXPERTS AT THE TEA HOTLINE

**Q:** I am an educator who teaches U.S. History, and I am concerned about the passage of Public Chapter 493. Part of my state standards include the following:

(US. 03) Explain the impact of the Compromise of 1877, including: Jim Crow laws, lynching, disenfranchisement methods, the efforts of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and the Exodusters, and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision.

(US.35) Examine challenges related to civil liberties and racial/ethnic tensions during this era, including: First Red Scare, Immigration Quota Acts of the 1920’s, Resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, Efforts of Ida B Wells, Emergency of Garveyism and the Rise of the NAACP.

**Should I be concerned?**

**A:** As education professionals trained in pedagogy, Tennessee’s teachers are committed to providing a high-quality education for their students within the framework of the Tennessee state standards and Tennessee’s Teacher Code of Ethics. This includes a commitment to fact-based instruction on difficult but important topics, a commitment not to suppress or distort subject matter relevant to students’ progress, and a commitment to make reasonable efforts to protect the emotional well-being of students.

Social studies state standards include difficult subjects about American history, literature, and society. A review of Tennessee’s social studies standards reveals that those standards were put together following extensive review, including 63,000 reviews and 14,000 comments. Approval for the current standards came after a committee put together by the governor spent over 100 hours in review. Our current social studies standards have been extensively vetted.

In addition, Tennessee is one of five states who have received an “exemplary” ranking in a review of social studies standards conducted by a bipartisan team of veteran educators and subject-matter experts.

Notwithstanding the confusing nature of Public Chapter 493, Tennessee educators who follow our Tennessee state standards and teach with professional integrity should be in full compliance with Tennessee law. To the extent any member is alleged to have violated any section of Public Chapter 493, that member will receive TEA legal representation.



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.

## Districts required to include association input on relief spending, TEA resources available to drive local advocacy efforts

**ESSER funds**  
Cont. from page 1

This third round of funding equals about half of the current yearly BEP funding.

Districts’ third round spending plans are due August 27. Dollars are used for school district needs and can be utilized up to a three-year period. Most importantly, how these dollars are used is a local decision and has a clear requirement to include local association input based on federal law.

“The doors are pretty much wide open for how this money can be used by districts,” Brown said. “The new federal dollars may be used for teacher compensation such as bonuses and stipends; mental health supports for students and staff; facility improvements for better air, water, and light; and items for communications and electronics.”

Federal rules also require school districts get input from stakeholders, specifically educators and their associations. In Tennessee, TEA and local affiliates are professional associations recognized under federal law.

“There is no gray area in the rules. School districts must get meaningful consultation from local associations. If this is not happening in your district, you need to take action now,” Brown said. “Providing meaningful association input on these August 27 spending plans matters and can have a great impact.”

There is a simple strategy every local

association can implement to help shape these ESSER 3 spending plans. First, TEA has a model letter local leaders can send district leadership about consulting on the plan. It outlines federal rules and the importance of collaboration.

Next, there is a model survey that can be sent to members and non-members alike to ensure educator priorities for these funds are part of the planning. This survey can be customized for a local and will also educate members on what these funds can be spent on. Getting real and timely input from educators is the best way to influence the final spending plans.

“Local leaders don’t have to figure this out on their own. I encourage locals to rely on TEA expertise and resources on ESSER, along with the knowledge of best practices of other school systems in spending plans. We have the research and information to help drive the planning for these extraordinary funds,” Brown said.

The resources mentioned are available on the TEA website, TEAteachers.org, on the “Association input on fed funds” link. The information is for members only, but logging in is easy. The member number is printed in the address label on the cover of this publication.

TEA UniServ and staff are ready to assist local leaders and members in this short and important process. Now is the time to engage this simple strategy of a survey and letter to impact how these funds are used.

### ESSER 1: \$260 million

Passed March 2020, must be spent by Sept. 30, 2022



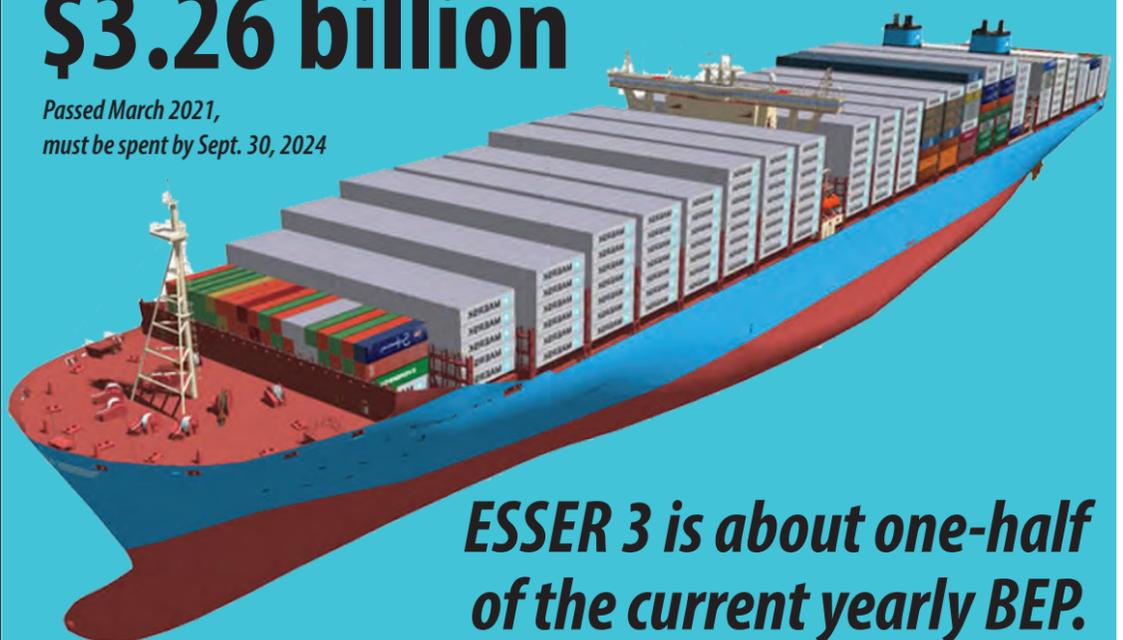
### ESSER 2: \$1.1 billion

Passed December 2020, must be spent by Sept. 30, 2023



### ESSER 3: \$3.26 billion

Passed March 2021,  
must be spent by Sept. 30, 2024



**ESSER 3 is about one-half of the current yearly BEP.**