

TENNESSEE PRINCIPAL

Inside Fall 2014 Issue:

- *Award Winning Schools*
- *Shelby County*
- *CCSS, Recess, STEM vs. STEAM*

*JOURNAL OF THE
TENNESSEE PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION*

Kingsport SCORES!



TPA

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Articles printed may be quite divergent in point of view and controversial as TPA feels that our members can best be served through discussions which challenge and stimulate their thinking. Therefore, the articles published in the journal represent the ideas and/or beliefs of the authors and do not necessarily express the view of TPA unless so stated.

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Contents

Fall 2014

Volume XXVII
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On the Cover



On the cover we are honoring Kingsport City Schools, recently awarded the SCORE Prize as the #1 district in the state of Tennessee. Dr. Lyle C. Ailshie, Superintendent, poses with his proud group of principals and administrators. See more on this honor inside starting on page 8.

Features...

Tennessee's Best	8
The Smartest Kids are in Tennessee	11
A Long and Winding Road	12
State Education Summit	14
Leveraging Your membership	16
A Tale of Two Systems	20
Tn Council for Career Trainings	25

Research ...

Stats on STEM and STEAM	23
Common Core Survey	26
Recess	27
What motivates Teachers?	28

Columns...

Editor's Page	5
President's Message	6
TPA Corporate Sponsors	32

Editor's Page



Catherine Prentis

Principal, Retired from MNPS

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Hello Friends:

It is always great to reconnect with fellow principals from across the state. I am pleased to bring you so many interesting, informative and helpful items in this issue of Tennessee Principal.

We take a look back at the great NAESP conference of 2014 that happened in our own state in July. I encourage you to attend the next one in Long Beach, CA in July, 2015. But before then, please seek out the opportunity to go to our state conference in Memphis in December. Both these meetings provide perspective on the difficult job of being a principal. Hearing fresh ideas and getting together with others who actually “get” what you do everyday, make those difficult tasks seem manageable. If you’ve never been to either of these professional development opportunities, please do so this year.

Other items of interest you will find in this issue include two in-depth articles on Memphis and Shelby County. Patrick Smith and James Mitchell explain the ins and outs of the latest changes in our largest school system in “A Long and Winding Road” and “A Tale of Two Systems.”

Help celebrate the successes of some schools whose efforts were recently recognized both statewide and Nationally. “Tennessee’s Best” highlights the schools recognized by SCORE and Blue Ribbon. I was interested to see that all thenominees were relatively small and for the most part, non-urban. Several years ago financial research showed that schools with fewer than 800 students could not sustain quality programs in a fiscally responsible way. But based on these results, we may want to redefine how we measure success.

And did you know Tennessee is frequently compared to Michigan? Read about how our kids stack up against the so-called “Gold Standard” of education on page 11.

I want to welcome the new President of TPA, Holly Flora and thank three others who work tirelessly for this organization. First, welcome home, Nancy Meador! She completed a very successful NAESP presidency, retired from MNPS, and is continuing to support TPA membership. Look for her great article on membership.

Teresa Dennis can do anything! She planned for and recruited a group of hardworking principals and administrator to assist the NAESP delegates at the national conference at Opryland Hotel. Her organizational skills contributed mightily to the success of the conference. Thanks, Friend, for a job well done!

Congratulations, Steve Barnett! He was recently named the National Distinguished Principal for Tennessee. In the spring journal we will feature a full length article on Steve and his journey to Washington,, D.C. to accept the award.

Take care, all. I hope your school year is great and that all your teachers and students continue to thrive under your leadership. Work hard, but take time to play a bit. Remember that play allows the mind to learn unexpectedly. And often that’s the best learning of all.

Find Us On The Web At www.tnprinassoc.org

President's Message



Holly Flora
President, Tennessee Principals Association
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Dear Tennessee Principals,

On behalf of the entire TPA Board of Directors, I want to invite each of you to attend our annual conference in Memphis this December 8th and 9th. The TPA Annual Conference will provide Tennessee principals with an opportunity to grow professionally and also network with principals across the State.

The theme of this year's conference is Leveraging Principal Leadership. The agenda for our conference includes Coach Jim Johnson, Muriel Summers and Dorsey E. Hopson II. (See page 30 for a tentative schedule)

Coach Jim Johnson will share six keys to leadership that have guided his teams to immense success. The lessons in his presentation "Leadership That Makes Dreams Come True" will help principals become extraordinary leaders by learning to clarify vision, build trust, creating an edge, communicating effectively and leading by example. His message will impart also impart a deeper awareness of the power of the human spirit! Come learn and be inspired!

Muriel Summers will also provide support that will help to leverage leadership for Tennessee principals. As principal of A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary school, Muriel Summers and her staff created the first leadership elementary school in the nation using Franklin Covey's 7 Habits program as a foundation. By recognizing that each student possesses unique gifts and talents, and building on students' strengths rather than their weaknesses, AB Combs continually achieves high levels of academic performance year after year.

Dorsey E. Hopson II, Esquire will be the Awards Luncheon speaker on December 9th. Superintendent Hopson serves as the first Superintendent of the newly merged Shelby County Schools, the nation's 14th largest school district. Hopson received his Bachelors of Arts (with honors) from the University of Memphis. He then attended Georgia State University College of Law. Hopson graduated Magna Cum Laude from Georgia State University in 1998 and ranked 12th in his graduating class. Hopson has a deep passion for education and the law. He strongly believes that every child can learn and that education is the great equalizer. He also believes that the key to student achievement is to ensure that every classroom has an effective teacher and every school has an effective leader. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from one of Tennessee's finest educational leaders.

We look forward to seeing you soon in Memphis!

See page 29 for a tentative schedule for the 2014 Annual Leadership Professional Development Conference.
Go to www.tnprinassoc.org to register.

Principals Leveraging Leadership

December 8,9, 2014 – The Peabody Memphis



Tennessee Principals Association

2014 Annual Leadership Professional Development

TENNESSEE'S BEST

In later October, SCORE announced the 2014 prize winners. **Kingsport City Schools took home the top district honor this year.**

"Being recognized as a SCORE Prize finalist for the second consecutive year speaks strongly to the great work being done by the teachers and staff throughout **Kingsport City Schools**," Superintendent **Lyle Ailshie** said. after KCS was nominated in September.

"Their commitment to a vision of excellence leads our students and community to great academic results. Every success we have is due to their exemplary work in the many varied roles that exist throughout our district."

Two principals in KCS gave their reaction to this honor. **Holly Flora, principal of Jackson Elementary and current president of TPA** stated, "The vision of KCS is *Student Focused-World Class*. Educators in Kingsport work tirelessly to ensure that every child receives a "world class" education that will prepare them for college and the workforce. Educators at every level align their work in order to establish high standards for students, ensure excellent teachers, cultivate strong



Brian Partin, Principal of Thomas Jefferson Elementary, Kingsport

leaders and use data to enhance student learning."

Another principal in KCS, **Brian Partin, past president of TPA and currently on NAESP board of directors**, reacted to the honor by saying he was humbled and, "We know that without the community support and dedicated educators, our mission to provide a world-class

education would not be possible."

The two other school systems that were nominated for this award are **Maryville City Schools**, who won in 2011, and **Williamson County**, a finalist in 2011. TPA salutes these fine districts.

Hillsboro Elementary-Middle School, in Williamson County, was named the winner of the statewide SCORE prize for middle schools and a National Blue Ribbon School.

Dresden Elementary School's principal, Mike

Laughrey, was named the winner in the Elementary division. **Covington High school in Tipton County** rounded out the winners.

Three finalist schools at each grade level and three districts were nominated back in September. Finalists were identified through a blind data review using a weighted criteria selection process that takes into account performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program or TCAP and growth from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System or TVAAS.

Since September, the SCORE Prize selection committee made up of educators and community partners visited each nominated school and district. The second stage of the selection process, served to document the policies and practices that have enabled them to make significant gains in student achievement.

This is fourth year that SCORE has recognized the best schools in our state. Each school winner received a \$1,000 prize, the district \$25,000, and all received statewide positive press.

How do they do it? I asked principals who were nominated for the SCORE prize to weigh in on what their schools are doing differently and these are some of their comments:

Kari Miller at Hillsboro stated "Our K-8 structure, which was once Hillsboro's deficit, is now our greatest attribute. Beginning on my first day as principal of Hillsboro in 2010, we departmentalized and leveled our nine grade levels of students based on data, with every teacher at Hillsboro becoming a specialist in their subject, grade level, and role. Since then, new staff members have been carefully hand-selected not only for their teaching ability, but also for their passion for student success, evidence of their belief that all students can learn, and their leadership skills. Departmentalization has resulted in more meaningful and innovative types of collaboration. More importantly, it has led to the development of teacher-leaders throughout the building. Every teacher at Hillsboro is a go-getter, taking communal ownership of the decisions, instruction, and achievement



Kari Miller, principal of Hillsboro School in Williamson County

results that happen in our school.

"The staff has brought about incredible growth in our student achievement, and Hillsboro School is now a high performing school, with proficiency levels that have risen from roughly 55% proficient/advanced in 2010 to 95% proficient/advanced in 2014. This year, we were named a 2014 Tennessee Reward School for progress and performance, a 2014 National Blue Ribbon School, and now a 2014 SCORE Prize winner."

Michael Laughrey said, "I believe our school climate is most important. Respect and responsibility are instilled into all students and modeled by our staff. When the SCORE team visited our campus they asked one of our students how she would handle students who have less than her? Her answer was "DES is a community and we treat everyone the same and take care of each other. Special programs that encourage good behavior and effort are in evidence. Multiple programs that students can be recognized for their good behavior and effort – Citizen of the Month – Citizen of the Year – Principal's Club – Ambassadors – Roadrunners are the primary ones."

Thomas Fuhrman, principal of a finalist school, Westwood Elementary, in Manchester, echoes this sentiment by saying, "The family environment in our school, though composed of students and staff from various types of families beyond, is one that appreciates, respects, and values every child and is comprised of people who work diligently to provide academic challenges and support simultaneously."

Another SCORE finalist high school, Martin Luther King Magnet in Nashville has additional honors to brag about. Principal, **Angela Carr** said, "Our teachers work hard with our students to push them and stretch them academically. Due to this hard work, MLK is a reward



Michael Laughrey, Principal of Dresden Elementary, with some of his students who win awards all the time.

school for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014. We have also been nominated as a Blue Ribbon School and look forward to having this nomination confirmed." That prize was recently awarded to this worthy school.

Winners and finalists are also highlighted throughout the year as part of SCORE's work to identify and share practices that are improving student academic performance. These principals shared some of their best practices that pushed them to these top recognitions:

Kari Miller stated that her teachers "use data to guide all of our decisions. Formative data guides our master schedule, student classes, daily instruction, enrichment and remediation, and instructional time. We have been implementing RTI² for four years, and our small group interventions/enrichment opportunities individually target student needs."

Angela Carr's students qualify for a lottery to attend this academic magnet school focused on math and science. "MLK assesses the math skills of each student in order to place each student in the math course that will meet his/her needs. Each subject area department meets on a regular basis in order to set goals and plan to meet these goals for the betterment of classroom instruction."

Thomas Fuhrman pointed out the way that his teachers at Westwood work with students. "Teachers and staff seek ways to address individual student's needs by trying to ascertain information about all factors that influence our students' education. Not only do they come together weekly in cluster meetings to analyze trends in student work and share best practices for approaching student learning, but they also seek to understand the home lives of students and to provide support in the form of everything from basic food and clothing necessities to challenging enrichment programs and mentoring opportunities."



Hillsboro K-8 students showing their pride!

continued page 10

SCORE AND BLUE RIBBON continued

At Dresden Elementary, the staff uses a school wide grade level collaboration – both vertical and horizontal – PLC's and small group reading groups using the Beverly Tyner reading model.

SCORE leaders also commented on the process. "The work of schools and districts to prepare students is vital to the continued economic vibrancy and well-being of our state, and these schools and districts show us what is possible," said former **Senator Bill Frist**, the founder and chairman of SCORE who served as host for the event. "The SCORE Prize is one of those unique moments when we applaud and lift up Tennessee schools, school districts and their communities for their work to raise student academic achievement."

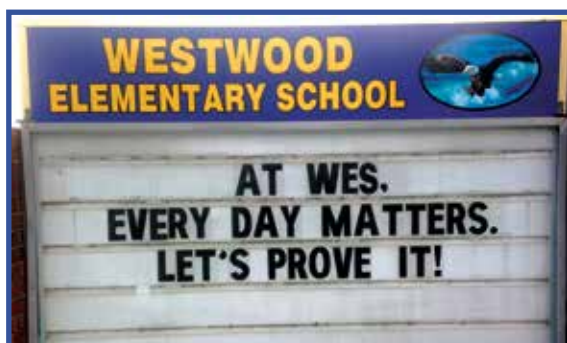
"The SCORE Prize event is a celebration of the amazing work that is happening in classrooms across our state to prepare students for success after high school," **SCORE President and CEO Jamie Woodson** said. "It is a celebration of teachers, school leaders, parents, community members and students who are rising to the challenge and achieving more."

In addition to the finalist who were quoted for this article are: **Highland Park Elementary in Loudon County; Freedom Prep, Shelby County; KIPP Academy, Nashville, both charter middle schools' and Ravenwood High School in Williamson County.**

Finalist school districts were Maryville City Schools, who won in 2011 and Williamson County who was a finalist in 2011.



Finalist school, **Westwood Elementary, in Manchester**, shows off their school spirit to the community before you even get into the building.



Six Tennessee Schools Named Blue Ribbon Schools

Foothills Elementary School

Maryville City Schools

Hillsboro Elementary-Middle School

Williamson County

Kenrose Elementary School

Williamson County

Madison Academic Magnet High School

Madison County

Martin Luther King Jr Magnet High School

Davidson County

Trinity Elementary
Williamson County

The Smartest Kids are in Tennessee

by Ron French - Bridge Magazine

Rose Park Middle School in Nashville, didn't used to have much to brag about – a low-performing school in a struggling urban district in a state lurching around the bottom of national academic rankings.

Today, Rose Park Math and Science Magnet Middle School has a waiting list of more than 300 students for enrollment. Though most of its students are poor, its academic performance puts it in the top 5 percent of schools in Tennessee – a state that has shot past Michigan on some key measures of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (or NAEP) test and is now the fastest improving education state in the country.

Michigan's scores on the NAEP, the gold standard of cross-state academic comparisons, are average or below average in every measurement.

What is happening in this nondescript building, and in thousands of other schools across Tennessee, that isn't happening in Michigan?

Bridge visited Tennessee and three other states that are high-achieving or fast-improving to look for answers: Tennessee and Florida, where academic achievement was similar or worse than Michigan a decade ago, but where state policies have led to stunning growth; and Massachusetts and Minnesota, both acclaimed for their high-achieving students.

Tennessee's turnaround isn't the result of money – the state spends less per pupil than Michigan, and pays its teachers substantially less (an average of \$48,049 a year, compared with \$61,866). It isn't charters – the percentage of students enrolled in charter schools is one-sixth that of Michigan.

What Tennessee does have, though, is a commitment to a set of reforms that, combined, have changed the course of its public schools. One of those policies – high-stakes teacher evaluations based partly on student test scores – is on a path to being implemented in Michigan. Other reforms, including an increased investment in teacher training and collaboration, and quick-turnaround student data, haven't happened in Michigan. For Tennessee, it all started with a hard look in the mirror.

Tennessee is a poorer state than Michigan. The median household income in the Volunteer State is \$42,764 (44th in the nation), compared to Michigan, \$46,859 (33rd); more live below the poverty line in Tennessee, and fewer have a college degree. And, until recently, Tennessee's children were performing worse academically.

Today, test scores tell a story of two states on different trajectories. In 2003, Michigan had NAEP scores well above Tennessee in all academic measurements. By 2013, Tennessee had raced past Michigan in 4th grade math and reading scores and was nipping at Michigan's heels in 8th-grade measurements. Make no mistake, Tennessee remains a long way from joining the nation's elite. Indeed, it's scores still place Tennessee in the bottom half of states nationally. But its gains, in just a few years, are the steepest in NAEP history.

Education Trust-Midwest, an education reform advocacy group based in Michigan, estimates that, based on NAEP scores, African-American fourth-grade math students in Tennessee are now a half-year ahead of African-American students in Michigan. Michigan was one of six states in the nation that lost ground in fourth-grade reading scores over the decade, and tied with South Carolina for the worst growth in the county in 4th grade math (Tennessee, meanwhile, tied for third best).

Jamie Woodson, president and CEO of Tennessee SCORE, an education reform group based in Nashville, tracks the turning point to 2007. That year, nine of 10 Tennessee students were judged proficient in reading on the state's own standardized test, similar to Michigan's MEAP. But when those same students took the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the test taken by students across the country, only three out of 10 Tennessee students were proficient.

"It was an embarrassing and public moment," recalled Woodson, who was Republican chair of the state Senate Education Committee at the time. "It was a truth moment as a state." The truth was that Tennessee wasn't very good at educating its children.

Republicans and Democrats rallied around a series of reforms focusing on accountability for students and teachers. Tennessee became one of the first in the nation to adopt the Common Core State Standards, now in more than 40 states, a set of concepts and skills that students are expected to learn at each grade level in math and English language arts to succeed after high school. It dumped the cupcake state standardized test and replaced it with a more rigorous exam and higher "cut scores" for students to be judged proficient. Proficiency rates were cut in half overnight. (Michigan students were similarly jolted in 2012 when the state significantly raised "cut scores" on the MEAP; as in Tennessee, the move was aimed at more closely aligning the state test with more rigorous national standards.)

Tennessee set about toughening teacher evaluations. Evaluations had been required only twice every 10 years. After the reforms, evaluations are required annually, and those evaluations have teeth. Teachers are scored on classroom observations and on how

continued page 30

A Long and Winding Road:

By James B. Mitchell, Jr., Ed.D.



Tennessee public education history was made on August 4, 2014 when six new PK-12 grades municipal school districts began operations in Shelby County. This was an unprecedented event in Tennessee. The lengthy and complex processes that led to the creation of the six new school districts unfolded over a period of more than three years. This article provides a brief summary of the major events that occurred during those years.

On December 20, 2010, the Board of Education of the Memphis City Schools (MCS), by a 5 to 4 vote, approved the surrender of its charter to operate as a Tennessee special school district (SSD). In a March 2011 referendum, 17% of the registered voters in the city of Memphis actually voted, and the charter surrender was approved. Under Tennessee law, a SSD that surrenders its charter must transfer the administration of the SSD to the local county school district. Therefore, the Shelby County Board of Education was forced to make plans to assume responsibility for the education of a total of approximately 150,000 public school students. The massive complexity of this task created numerous legal and legislative battles and resulted in the formation of six new municipal school districts within Shelby County. The major events are as summarized below.

- The Shelby County Board of Education filed a lawsuit to challenge the 2011 charter surrender referendum plus the process of the charter surrender by the Board of Education of the Memphis City Schools. That lawsuit was not successful.
- In an effort to provide a logical structure for the complex task of combining two of the largest Tennessee school districts, the Tennessee General Assembly in 2011 approved legislation (i.e., Public Chapter One) which required a two-year school merger transition planning process when a public school district surrendered its charter. This legislation also removed a prior statewide ban on the creation of new municipal school districts.
- In September 2011, the six municipalities located north and east of Memphis and within Shelby County (i.e., Arlington, Bartlett, Collierville, Germantown, Lakeland, and Millington) employed a Tennessee consulting firm, Southern Educational Strategies, LLC, (SES) to prepare in-depth studies regarding the feasibility of creating new municipal school districts in each city.
- In-depth reviews of the SES feasibility studies and numerous public meetings and forums were conducted in each city. In July 2012, voters in each municipality overwhelmingly approved the creation of new school districts plus the approval of an increase of ½ cent in the local option sales taxes collected within each city to help fund the new districts.

The Creation of Six New Tennessee Municipal School Districts

- The Shelby County Board of Commissioners had previously sued the State of Tennessee and the six cities in a United States District Court claiming that the municipal school districts were unconstitutional because the creation of new municipal school districts as authorized in Tennessee Public Chapter One applied only to Shelby County and therefore was unconstitutional. In November 2012, the Federal judge agreed. Judge Samuel Mays declared as unconstitutional the municipal school district section of Tennessee Public Chapter One, and the process to create new school districts in Shelby County was temporarily halted.
- As a result, in April 2013, the Tennessee General Assembly passed new statewide legislation that authorized the creation of new municipal school districts in any Tennessee county.
- In July 2013, voters in the six cities in Shelby County again held referendums, and the voters in all the cities again overwhelmingly approved the creation of new municipal school districts.
- In November 2013, voters in each of the six municipalities elected the members of their new boards of education.
- In December 2013, complex financial negotiations between all of the parties involved in these issues resulted in agreements by the Shelby County Board of Education to transfer the existing school buildings, furniture, fixtures, computers, books, and all equipment to the six new municipal school districts. These agreements yielded a decision by all parties in January 2014 to drop all of the pending lawsuits, and the case was dismissed by the Federal court judge.
- The six new municipal boards of education then employed a superintendent for each of their new school districts, and the school boards started the immense task of policy development and operational decisions required to plan for school openings in August 2014.
- Superintendents then started to make some of their most important decisions of all. These were the decisions regarding the employment of excellent principals, teachers, and staff for each school.
- Finally, on Monday, August 4, 2014, a total of approximately 30,000 students reported for classes in 33 schools located in the six new school districts located in Arlington, Bartlett, Collierville, Germantown, Lakeland, and Millington.

The complex processes needed to create six new Tennessee school districts required extremely hard work by numerous individuals and organizations. Their efforts were successful, and the 2014-2015 school year has launched very effectively in the new school districts in all six cities. Excellent principals, teachers, and staff are now employed, very strong parent and community involvement is evident, and each of these new municipal school districts in Shelby County is poised for a successful future.

Dr. James B. Mitchell, Jr. served for 34 years in the Shelby County Schools as a teacher, vice-principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. He currently serves as Affiliate Research Professor at The University of Memphis. Dr. Mitchell is a founding partner of Southern Educational Strategies, LLC, an educational consulting firm based in Memphis, Tennessee

State Education Summit

As members of the Tennessee Principals Association, you have a voice! Last month, TPA president Holly Flora and Executive Director Ernie Bentley accepted an invitation by Gov. Bill Haslam to participate in the Tennessee Educational Summit held in Nashville, Tennessee. TPA was proud to serve as a key participant in the discussion on important issues that affect Tennessee principals.

The Summit was called by Gov. Bill Haslam in an effort to hear from Tennessee's top lawmakers, educators, business leaders and advocates to discuss the future of education policy in Tennessee. Haslam joined Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey to moderate a round table discussion focused on Common Core Standards, the TEAM Evaluation model and school choice.

"This is a chance to review where we've been, take a look at where we are today, and make sure we're planning for where we want to go," Haslam said in a statement.

The agenda for the summit allowed for key members of the Tennessee Department of Education to provide an explanation and background for agenda items and followed with a round table discussion and Q&A for each topic.

"There's no question that we have made some significant progress in Tennessee, but we still face real challenges," Haslam said at the end of the summit. "And there's no question there's still a lot of discussion to be had. I think that discussion is going to happen best when it happens like today, when all the stakeholders are at the table."

While Common Core Standards was a key discussion point, following the Summit Haslam said that he particularly wants to talk even more about the controversial Common Core standards, which aim to improve schools. They have been adopted by 44 states, including Tennessee.

The governor said many people don't understand them, or have wrong information.

"We very much intend to have a full vetting of those standards ... and let people have a chance to talk very speci-

cally about what they like and don't like," he said.

At the Summit, supporters of Common Core Standards pointed out that the new benchmarks were developed not by the federal government, but by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. They also argued that the higher standards are necessary to provide students with critical thinking, problem solving and writing skills needed for college and career readiness.

Assessment was also an agenda item that received lots of attention as a result of the legislative decision earlier this year that delayed the testing component of Tennessee's Common Core standards.

Under the proposal, the state Department of Education put out a "request for proposals" for alternate testing and as a result, the state's current testing program, known as TCAP, continues in the interim.

Haslam said it's understandable that some teachers and others attending the summit want to make sure the new assessment process lines up with the higher standards.

Attendees also talked about school choice and related alternatives like vouchers, which lets parents move a child from a failing public school to a private school, with the state providing funds for tuition. The school voucher legislation failed again this year in the legislature as it has in the past. Following the Summit the governor was quoted as saying that "he's not sure if he'll try again on vouchers."

Haslam has said that he plans to hold more discussions about educational changes in Tennessee, particularly to focus on the Common Core Standards. TPA is a voice for you! Your TPA board members are advocating for you as a principal both personally and professionally. Let your voice be heard. As TPA looks forward to future participation and collaboration in future conversations with our state leaders we want to hear from you. TPA works on your behalf and we are eager to do whatever it takes as we continue to support Tennessee Principals. -Holly Flora

TPA PRESIDENTS ATTEND TENNESSEE BREAKFAST DURING NAESP CONFERENCE IN JULY

A gathering of Tennessee Principals Association Presidents are pictured with Dr. Ernie Bentley, Executive Director, far right. They are (from left) Brian Partin, Yvonne Allen, Janice Tankson, Constance Hayes, Debra Bentley, Holly Flora (current president), Teresa Dennis, and Sharon McNary. Brian is currently serving on the NAESP Board of Directors and Janice is chair of the NAESP nominating committee.





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Leveraging Your Membership!

You are a member of a professional association . . . now what? ***Make membership work for you!*** Take advantage of services, opportunities, and products that are provided! After all, you paid dues to be a member of both the Tennessee Principals Association (TPA) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

Tennessee Principals Association (TPA)

The Tennessee Principals Association is a principal-led, principal driven organization. Currently, approximately 400 elementary and middle school principals belong to the state organization. Dr. Ernie Bentley is the Executive Director who works closely with the Board of Directors. Members of the Board are building level principals who lead/represent elementary and middle level principals across the state of Tennessee (see p. 3 for a complete list of the TPA Board of Directors).

The best way to leverage your professional association memberships is to **GET INVOLVED!** Involvement leads to connections with principals across the state! This is one of the most powerful and beneficial reasons to become a member. Knowing there are colleagues that understand, relate, and encounter the same problems, challenges and successes is a valuable resource for YOU! Connections can also lead to future opportunities. ***Would any of these opportunities appeal to you?***

- ☐ Attending the TPA Annual State Conference
- ☐ Presenting at the TPA Annual State Conference
- ☐ Serving as an Ambassador for membership recruitment
- ☐ Meeting with state lawmakers to discuss issues/needs for principals
- ☐ Serving on the TPA Board of Directors
- ☐ Seeking a position as an elected officer of TPA

Every principal has “something to offer!” Make a difference in your profession and contribute to principals statewide! **GET INVOLVED!!!**

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

Membership in TPA automatically provides you with membership to the National Association of Elementary School Principals. TPA and NAESP are unified which means your annual dues pay for membership in BOTH TPA and NAESP! Yes, this includes middle level principals as well! “Middle School/Middle Level” may not be included in the acronym, but the support, services, and resources are there for middle level principals through grade eight! You are included!

NAESP serves and supports Pre K-8 principals. Approximately 20,000 elementary and middle level principals from across the country have membership in NAESP. Dr. Gail Connelly is the Executive Director who works closely with the Board of Directors. Members of the Board are building level principals who lead/represent elementary and middle level principals across America.

How does a building level principal get involved at the national level? Typically, national involvement is built upon experiences obtained at the state level. This leads back to the “CONNECTIONS” referenced earlier! Communication or recommendations usually feed from the state to the national level, especially, if you desire to serve on the NAESP Board of Directors, as an elected officer, or on a national level committee.

However, a TPA/NAESP member does not have to serve as an officer, board, or committee member to get involved at the national level. There are several services and resources available to any member. ***Would any of these opportunities appeal to you?***

- ☐ Attending the NAESP National Conference
- ☐ Presenting at the NAESP National Conference
- ☐ Meeting with federal lawmakers to discuss issues/needs for principals
- ☐ Becoming a Nationally Certified Mentor through the NAESP Mentor Training Program
- ☐ Serving on the New Principal Panel
- ☐ Being selected and recognized as a National Distinguished Principal in Washington, DC

What are some member benefits?

In addition to “**getting involved**,” and “**connecting**” with others (which is HUGE), there are other benefits and resources for TPA/

Dr. Nancy Flatt Meador is a recently retired principal from Nashville, TN. Dr. Meador is currently serving on the NAESP Board of Directors as Past President. She is also working with the TPA Board of Directors this year.

NAESP members. Be sure to visit the state and national websites listed at the end of this article – there is a LOT of information literally at your fingertips!

Many principals join to receive the legal protection which is provided with membership. Every year you join, a \$1,000 is added to your legal protection fee fund. For a member that joins ten years in a row, he/she has accrued \$10,000 in possible legal fees. (Please note, \$10,000 is the cap for accrual – you must renew annually to keep this amount in place.) If membership renewal lapses, the fund balance goes back to \$0 when you rejoin.

GREAT professional learning opportunities are also available to members. Membership allows you to attend at reduced registration rates with quality, nationally known experts presenting. As educators, we are always seeking ways to improve! Get on board with the professional development opportunities afforded to you by your state and national professional associations.

How Do I Start Leveraging My Membership?

First and foremost, make sure you are a **CURRENT** member! Your membership cycle begins in July each year. If you are a principal, assistant principal, aspiring principal, retired principal, or a central office level administrator, you need to join/renew **ANNUALLY!** Put this important reminder on your annual calendar so that benefits and resources of membership do not lapse.

Sharon McNary, Principal at Richland Elementary School in Memphis, TN, and 2013 National Distinguished Principal for TN, organizes membership recruitment. Sharon is a member of the TPA Board of Directors, and serves as the State Representative for membership – both in TPA and NAESP. Working with Sharon on the TPA Board of Directors, are the Grand Division Directors for membership: Dr. Steve Barnett (east TN); Dr. Ted Murcay (middle TN); and Dr. Teri Evans (west TN). Sharon, Steve, Ted, and Teri have organized a cadre of “Ambassadors” spread across the state to assist with membership recruitment. If you are interested in becoming a Membership Ambassador, please contact Sharon McNary at mcnarysk@scsk12.org.

When I made the decision to join TPA/NAESP in 1996, I did not realize the impact that this decision would make on my personal and professional life. WOW! I know and network with principals from across the nation because of the experiences encountered through my professional associations. I have used my professional voice to elevate how important **PRINCIPALS** are and what they need to be successful! I hope you will do the same!

Electronic Resources with LOTS of INFORMATION

Tennessee Principals Association - www.tnprinassoc.org

National Association of Elementary School Principals - www.naesp.org

New Principal Panel www.newprincipal.org

Current Membership AMBASSADORS in Tennessee

EAST TN Membership Ambassadors

Kathy Duggan, Robbie Norman, Darlene Miller (Knox County)
Chuck Carter (Hamlen & Greenville Counties)
Josh Wandell, Shanna Hensley, Rachel Walk (Tri-Cities)
Stephanie Hinton and Penny Leffew (Chattanooga area)

MIDDLE TN Membership Ambassadors

T'Shaka Coverson & Marsha McGill (Metro Nashville)
Robin Pinder (Cumberland County)
Chris Lafferty (Rutherford County)
Cindy Davis (Williamson County)

WEST TN Membership Ambassadors

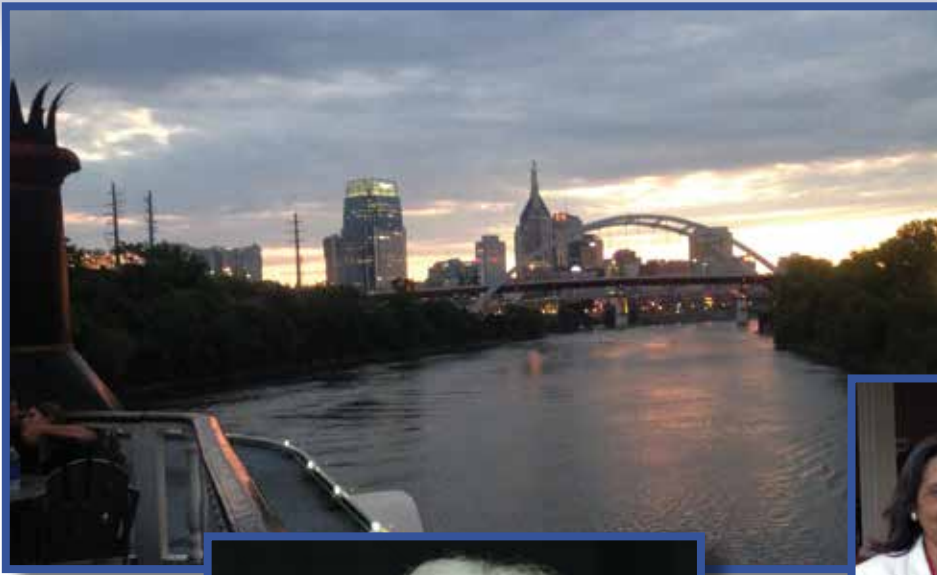
Stephanie Beach, Lisa Frieson, Angela Holloway, Flora Childress (Shelby County)
Zak Percoski (Germantown School District)
Gina Gore (Arlington School District)
Selina Sparkman (Millington School District)
Melissa McConnell (Collierville School District)



This photo shows Nancy's commitment and involvement in TPA and NAESP. This summer prior to the NAESP national conference at Opryland Hotel, volunteer principals from across the US built a playground for Inglewood Elementary School, in East Nashville. Nancy pitched in! *Landscape Structures* was the corporate sponsor and equipment supplier for this service project.

Get involved . . . Leverage Your Membership!

See What Happened Last Summer



The NAESP 2014 Best Practices for Schools Annual Convention and Exposition set sail in Nashville with a riverboat cruise featuring a fund raiser with author **David Baldacci**, called *Denim and Diamonds*



Some of the featured speakers were (from top left, clockwise) **Sandra Day O'Connor**, former Supreme Court Justice, who touted the need for Civics instruction; author, **Robert Fulghum**, reminded us of the importance of kindergarten; **Peter Yarrow** led principals in song and cautioned us to teach respect; and **Dr. Carol Tomlinson** presented leadership strategies for differentiated instruction.



Don't Miss 2015 in Long Beach, CA



We are grateful for the support of our corporate sponsors, whose contributions included treating the Tennessee Delegation to a wonderful breakfast and recognition program. The sponsors shown are: **Nicole King, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; Frank Miller, Frank Miller Enterprises; Teresa Sherman, Mentoring Minds; and Robert Bates, CogniSens.**



And to make sure everyone was able to successfully navigate the beautiful Opryland Convention Center, **Teresa Dennis** (retired principal from Nashville) marshalled a hard working group of guides. From left are **Teresa and Dr. Greg Patterson**, (above) **Dr. Debra Smith, Rob Hancock, Pattye Evans, Gary Cowan Dr. Constance Hayes, Dr. Steve Barnett, Lenna Allen and Caitlyn Evans** (future NAESP member?) (right) **Michael Jordan, Kay Stafford and Dr. Paul Doyle.**



A Tale of Two Systems



by Patrick Smith

Longtime United States House Speaker, the late Tip O'Neill, is noted for the political adage, "All politics is local". O'Neill knew to keep his political eyes focused on local politics because that's where the issues began that eventually reverberated

in Washington, D.C. Similarly, those local issues and battles often reverberate in the halls of the state legislature each January when legislators come to Nashville and do the business of the Tennessee General Assembly. A quintessential example of one of these issues is the Shelby County Schools – Memphis City Schools consolidation. The tussle that ensued after the Memphis City Schools Board of Education voted to abolish the school district (or more precisely, to put that question before the voters of the Memphis City Schools district) ultimately wound up front and center before the state legislature. And eventually it involved the federal courts.

Background:

The Shelby County (SCS) – Memphis City Schools (MCS) consolidation grew out of years of intra-county jockeying over local funding for education. These local funding battles are characteristic of Tennessee's governance structure for k-12 public education funding. Unlike many states, school systems in Tennessee do not enjoy taxing authority and are dependent upon another governmental entity for funding.

Tennessee's school districts come in three varieties: (1) county school districts in which the county commission appropriates money for education; (2) city school districts which are attached to a city government and funds are appropriated by the city council; and (3)

special school districts (SSDs) that are created by private acts of the legislature, which set the geographic boundaries and the property tax rates of these districts. Shelby County Schools is a county school district, and Memphis City Schools is a special school district notwithstanding the name that suggests otherwise (see e.g. Lebanon SSD and Franklin SSD). One of the myths or misunderstandings around special school districts is that they have taxing authority. This is inaccurate. The Tennessee Constitution only allows the legislature to delegate taxing authority to counties and cities. Thus, it is the legislature that adopts private acts and amendments to them that make changes typically initiated and requested by special school district boards. For example, if a special school district board desires new revenue via an increase in the property tax rate in the district, the board asks their legislators to file a bill to amend the private act accordingly. These private act changes are normally adopted by the General Assembly as a matter of routine and legislative courtesy to the area's legislators. Because of this quasi-autonomy feature, the Tennessee Schools Boards Association has long sought enabling legislation that would permit county boards to convert to special school districts. County government representatives have always opposed this legislation.

Why is this background on local k-12 funding important to the Memphis - Shelby County story? Because local education funding lit the fuse on the MCS – SCS consolidation conflict.

Regardless of system organization (county, city, or special school district), property tax for education, which is levied countywide, must be shared with all the school districts within the county for obvious reasons – all property owners are paying county property taxes irrespective of the school district in which they physically reside. This sharing is done on a per capita (student) basis. Similarly, the countywide sales tax that is dedicated to education by state statute must also

“How Two Tennessee School Districts Became One, Then Became Seven”

be shared among all school districts in the county on a per student basis. This means, as a practical matter, when Shelby County Schools sought to raise new revenue to construct a school building, it had to account for additional funds that had to be raised for sharing purposes with the Memphis City Schools district.

A Shot Over the Bow

While this intra-county funding squabble had been going on for years, the political winds in Nashville suggested the prospect of allowing county school districts to convert to the special school district status might actually be gaining some traction. Should that legislation pass and should Shelby County subsequently convert to a special school district, Memphis City Schools could be significantly, financially impacted in a negative way. A new Shelby County special school district could avoid some of the revenue sharing with MCS by levying property tax only on the geographic area covered by the new special school district.

It is also worth noting here that there had been some legal question over the organizational structure of Memphis City Schools since the City of Memphis government has traditionally funded MCS, yet it was created by the state via charter. In fact, there had been a fight and a lawsuit between MCS and the City of Memphis over approximately \$40-\$50 million MCS claimed (and the state agreed) the city government owed MCS under the state's “maintenance of effort” law. The state Court of Appeals sided with MCS holding that the city was obligated to fund the school system. So it was an anomaly that MCS was a special school district but, because of the city's charter, the city had an obligation to fund it. But in the end MCS was an SSD, granted a charter by the state in 1869 and amended since then by private act of the legislature.

Since MCS was a special school district, it could exercise the option available to all special

school districts under state law (TCA § 49-2-502(a)) to “transfer the administration of the schools of the special school district to the county board of action...”. That same law required that if the board of the SSD votes to do so, a referendum must first be conducted on the subject and a majority of the voters in the SSD must vote to do so before the transfer is effectuated. In that event, Shelby County Schools would be legally obligated to absorb the MCS district.

Apparently concerned over the prospect of state law changes that could permit Shelby County Schools to become an SSD, the Memphis City Schools board was first to the proverbial punch by acting to start the process to essentially abolish MCS. On December 10, 2010, the MCS board voted to surrender its charter to operate MCS and transfer administration to the Shelby County Board of Education. On January 19, 2011, the Shelby County Election Commission scheduled a referendum election for MCS voters. The Shelby County Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution in opposition to the transfer on January 27, 2011. The referendum election was held on March 8, 2011. Approximately 67% of those casting ballots voted in the affirmative to approve transferring the administration of Memphis City Schools to Shelby County Schools.

The Legislature Weighs In

Tennessee's education laws encourage school district consolidation, even across counties. While consolidations have always been within a county (e.g. Knoxville City Schools - Knox County, Covington - Tipton County), the statutes actually also provide for multi-county consolidation. The laws spell out a voluntary multi-district consolidation process, which provides for a planning committee and recites a list of areas to be addressed in the planning process in merging systems. To the contrary, the education laws were largely silent on the process of a how a county

“A Tale of Two Systems”... continued

school system absorbs a special school district.

Because of this absence or gap in the law, the General Assembly enacted Public Chapter 1 of 2011, which amended the law on special school district dissolution – the same law under which MCS went out of business. Governor Bill Haslam signed the bill on February 11, 2011. The legislation amended the law to provide for a transition plan to be developed and the transition of MCS to SCS would occur in the third full school year after the referendum election. But, perhaps most importantly, also contained in Public Chapter 1 was language that eliminated the prohibition on establishing new, municipal school districts. That prohibition had been put in the law years ago in keeping with the prevailing public policy of encouraging district consolidation. Lifting that ban was extremely important to the Shelby County electorate outside the City of Memphis, the majority of whom opposed consolidation and viewed establishment of municipal districts as a means to circumvent the consolidation.

Calling All the Lawyers

The Shelby County Board of Education filed a lawsuit in federal court on February 11, 2011, against the Memphis City Board of Education and other defendants including the author of this article in my official capacity as the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Education. I had been appointed by Governor Bill Haslam to serve on an interim basis pending the appointment of a new Commissioner. Ultimately, parties to the lawsuit included, in addition to SCS and MCS, the Memphis City Council, the Shelby County Commission, the Tennessee Department of Education, five individual members of the Shelby County Board of Education as “Intervening Plaintiffs”, and the Memphis City Education Association. There were various other claims filed by and between many of the parties as part of responses to the original Shelby County Schools complaint. For example, the Memphis City Council filed a “cross-claim” against the

Department of Education and the Memphis City Board of Education filed a cross-claim against the City of Memphis.

Shelby County Schools raised nine claims in its complaint including due process and equal protection claims on behalf of students, a declaration of rights and responsibilities regarding teachers and staff, and a declaration of the proper legal procedure for MCS to cease operations. The complaint asserted that it would be impossible for Shelby County Schools to place teachers and resolve property matters and funding disputes in a proper, legal, and timely manner. The SCS board asked the court to declare the rights of all the parties, to declare that the effort to close MCS was void, and to relieve the SCS board from absorbing MCS.

The Court Rules

On August 8, 2011, U.S. District Court Judge Samuel Mays entered an order in the case. The opinion addressed all issues raised by Shelby County including the constitutionality and applicability of Public Chapter 1. The court found that the part of Public Chapter 1 that provides for a transition planning process for the transfer of a special school district to the county school district did apply to the MCS-SCS merger. The court reserved judgment on the portion of Public Chapter 1 that lifted the ban on establishing new municipal school districts. Several parties to the lawsuit challenged the validity of that portion of the Act as being outside the bill’s caption – a state constitutional principle that requires bills to address only those matters in the language of the bill’s caption.

The Parties Agree

In September of 2011, the court approved a consent decree in which all the parties joined except the Tennessee Department of Education, which was dismissed from the lawsuit. The decree incorporated the court’s earlier order, set elections for a new board of education for Shelby County and

Get the stats on STEM vs. STEAM

By Laura Devaney, Managing Editor, [@eSN_Laura](#)

Advocates say STEAM education—with an “a” for the arts—should trump STEM education

STEM education is, by now, familiar to educators and parents across the country. Without STEM knowledge, students won't be well-prepared to enter college and the workforce. But some are hoping that STEAM education, which includes the arts, will receive more support in classrooms.

According to [research compiled by the University of Florida](#), students who engage in music education often perform better on math tasks. For instance, one study showed that students who took music appreciation scored 61 points higher on their SAT verbal section and 42 points higher on the SAT math section.

The most common elementary school arts subjects include music (94 percent) and visual arts (83 percent), with a few schools offering dance (3 percent) and theater (4 percent).

Despite an increased call for arts integration, 51 percent of art teachers say they are unhappy about a perceived decline in art education, which many attribute to an increased focus on test results and the subjects included in standardized tests.

Six percent of public elementary schools offer no specific music education, and 17 percent offer no specific visual arts instruction.

It's true that STEM is crucial. Four out of five college students said they decided to study STEM in high school or earlier, and STEM helps students develop deductive reasoning, problem solving, and reasoning skills. STEAM supporters say that adding arts into this focus will expand STEM's benefits.

Ninety-three percent of Americans said they believe the arts are crucial when it comes to offering a well-rounded education to today's students, and 86 percent said arts education helps improve children's attitudes about school. STEAM studies help develop and strengthen creativity and innovation skills, communication and collaboration, and flexibility and adaptability.

“A Tale of Two Systems”... continued

called for the school systems to be combined at the start of the school year in 2013.

More Legislative Action

In 2012, the legislature passed another bill (Public Chapter 905) that was intended to narrow the option to start municipal districts to Shelby County only. This was done to address concerns of other legislators from outside Shelby County who were hesitant about permitting new municipal school districts in their counties. The federal court later ruled that PC905 violated the state constitution as it applied only to Shelby County and didn't have a provision for local approval. To cure the constitutional problem with PC905, the General Assembly again passed legislation in 2013 aimed at allowing the establishment of new, municipal school districts in Shelby County. This legislation applied statewide thus curing the constitutional problem with the prior Act.

Fast Forward

With enabling legislation finally in place, six municipalities ultimately voted to levy taxes to start new school districts: Arlington, Bartlett, Collierville, Germantown, Lakeland, and Millington. What was once basically the service area of Shelby County Schools is now served by six, new, municipal school systems. What was once the service area of Memphis City Schools is now served by and is officially the Shelby County Schools district. And the Memphis City Schools system is no more. All politics is local.

Patrick Smith formerly served as Interim Commissioner of Education and Deputy Commissioner under Governor Bill Haslam and as a Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Phil Bredesen.



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Tennessee Council for Career Training Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHILE THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR DEMANDING HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION FOR TENNESSEANS, THERE IS AN economic and moral imperative for providing students with the knowledge and tools they need for personal and professional prosperity. The Tennessee Council for Career and Technical Education has identified three topics of particular importance that drive the commendations and recommendations in this report.

WORKFORCE DEMAND. Demand for increasingly skilled labor is clearly on the rise both in Tennessee and nationally. The skills gap is widening and a shortage of qualified workers is evident in Tennessee. To significantly improve the quality of Tennessee's workforce, there must be aligned funding, accountability measures, and data tracking that enable various state government agencies to collaborate to support the desired outcomes. Work-based learning (WBL) can be a significant implementation strategy by which inter-agency planning reaches individual students. Pathways Tennessee cultivates strong statewide and regional collaboration around shared priorities to capitalize on the educational, economic and employment strengths and opportunities of the state.

RIGOROUS EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES. Rigorous learning standards that align with professional expectations will be a critical factor in best serving and preparing students. Higher standards lead to improved student achievement and Tennessee is beginning to see evidence of its more rigorous Tennessee State Standards paying off. Increasing the rigor of career and technical education standards is a significant step toward raising attainment levels for CTE students and ensuring their success after high school. More rigorous CTE courses will provide for deeper learning of technical and academic content and stronger employability skill development. Additionally, robust early postsecondary opportunities, like dual credit, will continue to provide advanced learning options resulting in smoother transitions between high school, postsecondary opportunities, and careers. For these CTE courses and early postsecondary opportunities to benefit students, adequate equipment must be provided in educational settings.

COUNSELING FOR SUCCESS. Students and their families need more information about growing industries in Tennessee and the education necessary to follow these career paths. Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and community colleges have a track record of providing access to growing Tennessee industries and successfully placing students in careers related to their skill sets. Too many students have been missing out on opportunities because they do not have adequate counseling to help them understand and access existing resources. Earlier planning assistance and increased exposure to high-skill, high-demand career options will be imperative to helping students and families understand and take advantage of their postsecondary opportunities. Students need coordinated and consistent information beginning in elementary school and robust counseling services that continue through the transition to postsecondary to truly benefit from the Tennessee Promise, a last-dollar scholarship to provide two years of tuition-free postsecondary education.



National Survey: Common Core standards working well

Greg Toppo, USATODAY

“Common Core” academic guidelines for public schools are sowing controversy as teachers implement them across the USA. Several states have balked at requiring them and even comedian Louis C.K. last May took to Twitter to complain, “My kids used to love math. Now it makes them cry. Thanks standardized testing and common core!”

But teachers in states where the math and reading standards have been in place longest say that, in spite of the criticisms, Common Core is going well — and that most teachers feel prepared to teach new kinds of lessons.

In a new survey underwritten by the children’s publisher Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, both Common Core supporters, 79% of teachers say they feel “very” or “somewhat” prepared to teach under the new standards, up from 71% last year.

About two-thirds, or 68%, say implementation is “going well” in their schools, up from 62% last year.

But 81% of teachers say Common Core is “challenging” to implement, up from 73% last year.

The Common Core standards grew out of an effort by governors and state school superintendents to define what all students need to know by the time they graduate from high school. Among the controversial recommendations: that half of assigned reading be non-fiction. And some parents have complained that the standards lead to unnecessarily complicated math assignments.

“It’s a big shift in the way that kids learn and the way that teachers teach, so it’s going to take time for kids to kind of shift away from sitting in a row of desks and listening to a teacher lecture and taking notes and doing fill-in-the-blank,” said Kathryn Casteel, a math and science teacher at C.W. Stanford Middle School in Hillsborough, N.C. “It’s much more inquiry-based, and that’s very new to the kids.”

The survey, conducted in July by YouGov, polled 1,676 pre-kindergarten through 12th grade public school teachers from 43 states and the District of Columbia. All had participated in a similar survey in 2013.

Fewer than half of teachers say Common Core will be “positive” for most students, but among the small group of teachers who have taught for more than a year under the standards, the vast majority are enthusiastic. “The more teachers get into the Common Core, the more they believe in it,” said Margery Mayer, president of Scholastic Education. “But the more they understand it, the more they concede there are challenges.”

She added, “Overall we would say that the deeper they’re in, the more it’s taking root — and the more they’re seeing results in their classrooms.”

Critics on both the right and left have complained about the new standards, saying they’re badly conceived and a top-down directive. While the federal government had no role in crafting them, the Obama administration has tied millions of dollars in federal grants to states’ adoption of “college- and career-ready” academic standards like Common Core, leading many conservatives to call the standards a federal takeover of curriculum. Echoing their dislike of Obama’s Affordable Care Act, they’ve even dubbed the standards “Obamacore.”

The new survey, being released Friday, found that most teachers get their information about Common Core from colleagues, their bosses or from training sessions, but that an increasing number — nearly one-third — also get information from newspapers and other media. As an indicator of how the debate has played out on social media, twice as many teachers this year said they got information about Common Core through sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Vicki Phillips, education director for the Gates Foundation, said the survey findings show that teachers are enthusiastic about the standards but need more help to teach lessons built around them.

“Teachers don’t shy away from a challenge, but they need support,” she said. “We need to listen to them because nobody knows teaching like teachers.”

Recess redress:

The importance of play in education

by: Suzanne Mason

Ask any child what his or her favorite subject is in school, and most will say recess. Yet a 2010 Gallup poll conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that up to 40 percent of U.S. school districts have reduced or eliminated recess to focus more on academics.

Despite these changes, recess still remains an important part of a child's education. Here's how.

Brain development

A new study released in August by the University of Lethbridge in Canada showed that free play can help with the core essentials for development in the brain.

"The experience [of play] changes the connections of the neurons at the front end of your brain, which are a major part of the executive control system of your brain," researcher Sergio Pellis said. "And without play experience, those neurons aren't changed."

Recess also provides the brain the opportunity to "regroup" during playing time.

Countries like Finland are a perfect example of this idea at work. In Finland, students are allowed 15-minute breaks after every 45 minutes of instruction. Tim Walker, an American educator teaching in Finland, didn't see the point of these breaks at first.

"As a teacher in the United States, I'd spent several consecutive hours with my students in the classroom," he wrote. Walker decided to follow the way he was used to teaching in America by teaching two 45-minute lessons followed by a 30-minute break. He noticed when he switched to the two consecutive lessons that his students were not as refreshed and focused when he didn't incorporate the 15-minute breaks. Once I incorporated these short recesses in our timetable, I no longer saw feet-dragging, zombie-like kids in my classroom," Walker said.

These 15-minute breaks during instruction have made Finland one of the most successful education systems in the world. Ninety-three percent of Finns graduate from academic or vocational high schools — 17.5 percentage points higher than the United States — and 66 percent go on to higher education, the highest rate in the European Union. Yet Finland spends about 30 percent less per student than the United States.

Social skills

Recess also allows students to develop important life skills such as communicating with peers, teamwork and conflict resolution. According to a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics: "Recess promotes social and emotional learning and development for children by offering them a time to engage in peer interactions in which they practice and role-play essential social skills."

Schools who have cut recess from a child's daily schedule do look for alternatives to allow children to continue to have

some type of physical activity and to continue to develop a child's social skills. Organizations such as Playworks have come to the aid of these schools. Playworks, a nonprofit organization, works to create a positive atmosphere for play for both the student and the teacher.

"Yes, it gives kids the physical activity and the opportunity to play, but it's also the social-emotional learning aspect of it," said Nancy Barrand, a senior adviser for program development at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which provides funding for Playworks. "It's helping kids learn how to socialize, how to take turns, how to be able to wait, how to be able to compete without killing each other. It's all the things that one learns from play. Sometimes it's easier to learn those things from play than from reading a rule book and being told what to do."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most important ages for social development are 6-8 years old, also known as middle childhood. These are the years in which children show more independence from parents and family, want to be accepted and liked by their friends and pay more attention to friendship and teamwork. In a study conducted by the Mathematical Policy Research, the Playworks model actually works.

The study showed that teachers at Playworks schools reported 43 percent less bullying and exclusion than at non-Playworks schools. It also showed that Playworks students spent 43 percent more of their recess engaged in rigorous physical activity than their non-Playworks counterparts.

Health

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that children engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity a week. Fewer than half of children between the ages of 6 and 11 meet that recommendation.

Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, 44 percent of schools administrators have cut time for physical education classes and recess. A study conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows that children can accumulate up to 40 percent of their physical activity during recess.

"Even minor movement during recess counterbalances sedentary time at school and at home and helps the child achieve the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day ... which can help lower the risk of obesity," says Catherine Ramstetter, a health educator at The Christ College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years, according to the CDC.

Since U.S. school districts want to put more emphasis on education, researchers have shown that the school districts can do just that with allowing children to have recess. With all of the benefits associated with breaks, it's time for U.S. school districts go back on their decision to reduce the amount of recess.

What Motivates Teachers?

Valuable insight for administrators:

A recent Gallup poll of 170,000 Americans — 10,000 of whom were teachers — found that teaching is the second most satisfying profession (after medicine). Ironically, the same Gallup poll found that in contrast to their overall happiness with their jobs, teachers often rate last or close to the bottom for workplace engagement and happiness.

“Of all the professions we studied in the U.S., teachers are the least likely to say that their opinions count and the least likely to say that their supervisor creates an open and sharing environment,” said Brandon Busteed, executive director of Gallup Education, at the Next New World Conference.

This is a troubling trend at a time when schools need to continue to attract high quality educators. “If the perception in our country is that teaching is not a great profession to go into, we certainly aren’t going to be encouraging really talented young people to be thinking about the profession of teaching,” Busteed said in an interview with Stephen Smith on the American RadioWorks podcast.

That will be especially problematic as baby boomer teachers begin to retire. “What our research reveals is an important nuance that teachers rate their lives overall very highly; they love their lives,” Busteed said. “They love their work. They love what they do in terms of helping encourage young people.”

But they often dislike their bosses, the policies they must abide by, the tests that govern their lives and the low pay and lack of respect often shown by other adults. “It’s a big opportunity to try and get this right across school systems,

but also a tragedy in that all these people who otherwise would be off the charts with their performance if we could just improve their workplace environment,” Busteed said.

MindShift readers discussed openly what motivates them to keep teaching, as well as what changes they’d make to the system.

We talked to educators from across the country, about what they love about their jobs and what they’d do to improve their work environment. Listen to their stories.

“I’m motivated by the curiosity of my students,” replied Lewis Marshall A. Elaine, in a Facebook call-out to teachers to weigh in. “Being able to collaborate with more teachers who possess these qualities would make my job better: professionalism, positivity, and competency.”

Teacher Dana Smith wrote: “The students are my motivation: love those crazy middle-schoolers! A better salary and being able to teach without headaches and heartaches from mandatory testing, nonsensical paperwork/computer work, and crazed administrators would make my job perfect.”

Vix Cee Kreidel wrote: “I am motivated to teach because I believe that every child deserves to have someone who believes in them. I love to watch the light bulb go off in a child as their eyes light up when they have an idea or ‘get’ something. Teaching would be easier if I got paid more to make up for all the things I buy for my classroom. Also if we were held accountable in other ways besides the test.”



Teresa Dennis, retired principal from Nashville, greets three former NEASP Presidents at the 2014 conference in Nashville. From left, Teresa, Nancy Meador (Tennessee), 2013-14; Barbara Chester (Oregon), 2010-11; and Mary Kay Sommers (Colorado), 2007-08.

Tentative Schedule at a Glance

Sunday, December 7

- 3:00-6:00 Registration
- 5:00 Vendor set-up begins
- 6:00 Executive committee meeting
- 7:00 Board dinner meeting (by invitation)

12 hours
TASL credit to
be requested!



Monday, December 8

- 8:00-10:00 First General Session: Muriel Summers
- 10:00-10:30 Morning break and exhibit hall ribbon cutting
- 10:30-11:30 First Set of Concurrent Sessions (leveraging leadership to change school cultures)
- 11:30-1:20 (lunch & dedicated exhibit hall time)
- 1:20-2:20 Second Set of Concurrent Sessions (leveraging leadership in the program of studies)
- 2:30-3:30 Third Set of Concurrent Sessions (emerging principal leadership success stories)
- 3:40-4:40 Fourth Set of Concurrent Sessions (reports on selected successful practices)
- 4:45 Final prize drawings in exhibit hall

Tuesday, December 9

- 8:00-11:45 Second General Session: Coach Jim Johnson
- 11:45 TPA business meeting
- 12:00-1:30 Awards luncheon with Dorsey E. Hopson II, Esq.
- 1:35 TASL credit verification, if needed



Smartest Kids...continued from page 11

much their students learned; poor evaluations could cost teachers their jobs.

“Bad teachers went to low-performing schools to hide,” said Rose Park Assistant Principal Jackie Freeman. “Now, they’ve been exposed.”

In reality, though, few teachers have been fired. Teachers must have three straight years of evaluations in which they earn a score of 1 on a 1-5 scale to be eligible for termination. At the end of the 2012-13 school year, 70 of Nashville’s 5,700 teachers were put on notice that they would be terminated if their evaluation scores didn’t improve in the next school year. Of those 70, about half raised their evaluation scores to a 2 or higher, about a quarter resigned, and “a handful” are now facing termination, said district spokesman Joe Bass.

The firing of a few bad teachers gets headlines, but it’s other elements of Tennessee’s educator evaluation system that are improving learning, said Cicely Woodard, a math teacher at Rose Park during the 2013-14 school year.

Classroom observations, previously rare, occur regularly now. “Principals are in the classroom all the time now,” said Woodson, who left the Tennessee Senate in 2011 to run SCORE, founded by former Tennessee Sen. Bill Frist. “There are major (positive) implications from that.”

Tests to measure student learning are given three times a year in Tennessee. Unlike MEAP results, which teachers don’t receive for months, results of the online, multiple-choice tests in Tennessee are available at the school within hours. Teachers can see what lessons worked and which need repeated while their classes are still working on a concept. “Conversations about data are happening all the time,” Woodard said.

Results are specific enough that teachers can see which children need help on which lessons. One room in the school, open only to teachers, is lined with cards, one for each student. On each student’s card are numbers indicating if the student has exceeded, met or still working on a multitude of concepts. The cards can be moved up and down the wall as a students’ challenges and successes change. “Teachers are tenacious with their data,” Rose Park Principal Robert Blankenship said.

The results are easy to see at Rose Park, nestled in a worn, working-class neighborhood in Nashville. About 57 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Seventeen languages are spoken in students’ homes. Despite those challenges, the school’s state standardized test scores are

about 50 percent higher than the district average. Teacher evaluations have been controversial, with teacher unions complaining loudly about top-down reform and a group of 60 school superintendents signing a public letter accusing Tennessee Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman of considering teachers, principals and superintendents of being “impediments to school improvement.”

But the evaluations, along with other reforms, have survived Republican and Democrat governors. The share of Tennessee teachers who say they are satisfied with the teacher evaluation process increased from 28 percent in 2012 to 48 percent one year later.

“I think (evaluations) had a positive impact on learning,” Blankenship said. “This has given tools to the teachers to be better at their craft.”

“I’ve never seen a public policy change behavior immediately like teacher evaluation,” Woodson said. “It’s changed how teachers collaborate with each other.” Teachers themselves are often involved now in team observations of colleagues’ classrooms, with discussions about expectations before the observations, and in-depth critiques afterward replacing the rote, checklist-style evaluations that teachers used to receive.

Michigan created its own high-stakes teacher evaluation system in 2011. But unlike Tennessee, Michigan still does not have a statewide protocol for how those evaluations are to be performed. A panel of education experts led by University of Michigan Dean of Education Deborah Lowenberg Ball developed an evaluation system for the state, but the plan has foundered in a deeply divided Legislature. Without a uniform system for evaluating teachers, there is no way to compare how teachers are performing across Michigan.

“It is important to underscore that in the initial year of implementation (2011-12), Michigan had over 800 unique district evaluation systems,” warned a Michigan Department of Education report on teacher evaluation reform. “This makes direct comparisons of district effectiveness ratings and systems extremely difficult, as ratings were not determined with standard rigor across districts.”

In Tennessee evaluations, standardized across the state, “It’s completely clear what the expectations are,” said Woodard, the Rose Park teacher.

As a Republican legislator, Woodson was a big supporter of teacher accountability. After she left the senate and

began working on education reform, though, she realized the importance of coupling accountability with adequate teacher support and training.

“You have to have a plan with accountability and support - you can’t have just one,” Woodson said. Once a high-stakes evaluation system is in place, “teachers will be hungry for information on how to improve. They’ll need simple, actionable information.”

To fill that need, Tennessee provides a stunning level of professional training. In the summer of 2013 alone, 30,000 teachers were trained in Common Core standards, led by 1,000 teachers who’d been trained as coaches instructors (Woodard is one of 25 Algebra 1 coaches in the state). In the past few years, 70,000 teachers have received training through the state and its Common Core coaches. Those teachers then become instructional leaders in their own school buildings.

Like Tennessee, Michigan has also adopted Common Core education standards. But Michigan has never provided a statewide training program for teachers in the new standards, leading to criticism even among teachers who strongly support Common Core.

In Michigan, “local districts and (intermediate school districts) have been left to figure out - or not - this training on their own,” said Amber Arellano, executive director of Education Trust-Midwest. “This has led to inconsistent access to quality training and support -- and often, no training at all.”

In Tennessee, every teacher is expected to use the same standards, and every teacher is assessed using the same rubric and tests. That clarity of expectations benefits teachers and students over the long run, Tennessee education experts say.

“There was an intentional focus on implementation,” said David Mansouri, executive vice president at SCORE. “Some states, they pass a policy and that’s it. In Tennessee, there was an acceptance of being patient, because it takes time.”

That message was driven home in November 2013, when the former Democratic governor and the current Republican governor of Tennessee stood on the same stage, sharing the announcement that Tennessee schools had made the largest gains in the nation in learning.

“The way this stuff gets done is two or three or four or five governors in a row keep plugging away at stuff,” former Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen told The Commercial Appeal newspaper of Memphis. “Everybody puts their own mark on it but you don’t just go careening off in some new direction every time there’s a change in control.”

The Tennessee turnaround could happen in Michigan, Woodson said, if leaders are willing to work together, follow a plan and shake up the K-12 system.

“I don’t think tinkering with the edges will get you the gains you’re seeing in Tennessee,” Woodson said. “You’ve got to disrupt multiple systems. Go big or go home.”

Everyone has to be rowing in the same direction to make major changes – something that hasn’t always happened among legislators and education leaders in Michigan. “Don’t assume that government or education or any single partner can get this work done alone,” Woodson said. “You’ve got to put your partners at the table and hold each other accountable.”

Woodson’s other advice: Patience. “Take the long view,” she said. “Where do you want to be, and figure out how to get there.”



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