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Knox County Schools Should Focus on Principals, Magnet Program

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Knox County Schools has effectively focused on teacher quality, but struggles to provide adequate professional development for principals, a new study by the Comptroller's Office finds. In addition, the district needs to revamp its magnet system.

The report by the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability, titled "District Approaches to Improving High Priority Schools – Knox County Schools," looks at the district's response to three schools in the district that have failed to make adequate yearly progress on state assessments for three years in a row.

Magnet schools – The district is looking at ways to improve its magnet system, in part because Austin-East Magnet – a high priority school – has not attracted students. The district is currently analyzing results from a University of Tennessee evaluation of the magnet system.

Unique school status – One of the schools – Knox Adaptive Education Center – faces particularly unique challenges because of its special education student population and its alternative school status. The district continues to assist this school, but needs to work with the state to determine how the state should hold the school accountable for improvements.

Principal professional development – One area of significant weakness for Knox County is its professional development for principals. The district runs two institutes that incorporate administrator training, but effective and ongoing professional development for administrators is lacking. However, Knox County Schools does have a strong teacher professional development component in place.

The report recommends that Knox County officials:

- Involve staff from Knox Adaptive Education Center in regular data meetings
- Resolve school coding decisions for Knox Adaptive Education Center with the state
- Use the Principal Assessment center to develop improved professional development opportunities for administrators
- Reinvent and fund a strong magnet school system.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at www.comptroller.state.tn.us.

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