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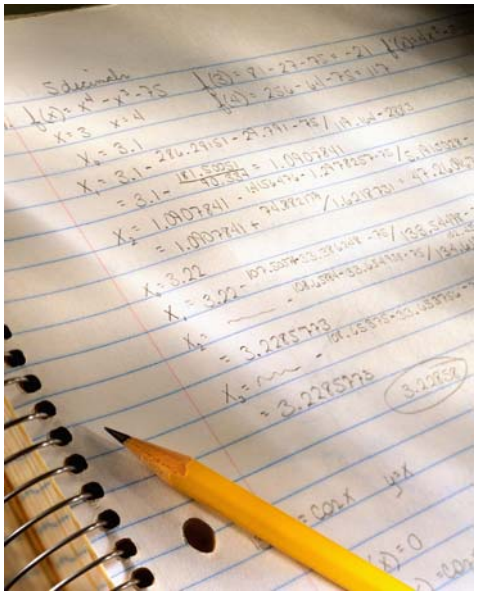
Comptroller of the Treasury
JOHN G MORGAN

OREA

District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools

Knox County Schools



December 2006

STATE OF TENNESSEE

John G. Morgan
Comptroller

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

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December 20, 2006

The Honorable John S. Wilder
Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
and
Members of the House and Senate Education Committees

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-602 requires the Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Department of Education to study schools and districts that have failed to meet state standards of adequate progress. Every year, the state Department of Education releases a list of high priority schools and districts that are at varying stages of meeting these standards. For the purposes of this report, OEA reviewed schools in the School Improvement 2 category of the state's high priority schools list during the 2004-05 school year, which included 24 schools in five districts. This system report for Knox County Schools is one of five addressing the affected school systems. OEA also produced a statewide report summarizing trends noted throughout the five districts.

The scope for this study was limited to four education policy areas that impact the quality of instruction and student achievement: goals and governance; teaching quality; student discipline, attendance, and dropout; and instructional support. This report identifies areas for improvement and highlights exceptional and noteworthy practices in Knox County Schools, and suggests recommendations for improvement.

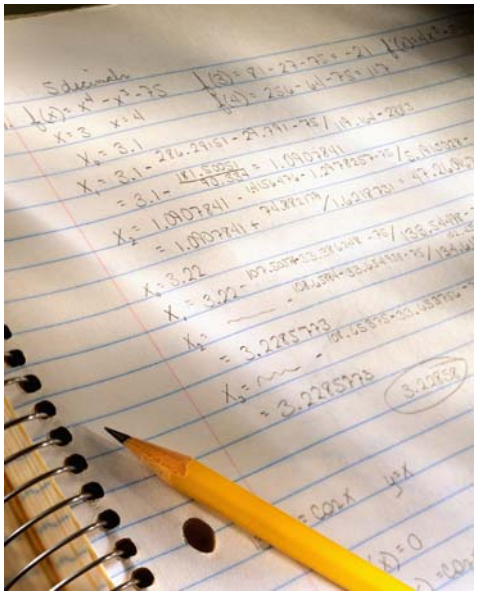
Sincerely,

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Lana Seivers
Department of Education

District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools

Knox County Schools



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The Office of Education Accountability was created in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury by *Tennessee Code Annotated* 4-3-308 to monitor the performance of school boards, superintendents, school districts, schools, and school personnel in accordance with the performance standards set out in the Education Improvement Act or by regulations of the State Board of Education. The office is to conduct such studies, analyses, or audits as it may determine necessary to evaluate education performance and progress, or as may be assigned to it by the Governor or General Assembly.

Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability. Authorization Number 307341-03, 85 copies, December 2006. This public document was promulgated at a cost of $1.68 per copy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knox County Schools had three schools in the 2005-06 school year that had failed to make adequate yearly progress for three years in a row. As required by *Tennessee Code Annotated §49-1-602*, the Office of Education Accountability must study these high priority schools and districts, called "Improvement 2" schools and districts. This report is the Knox County Schools portion of that study.

Knox County Schools continues to focus on student achievement, and as a result the district was removed from the Tennessee Department of Education's 2006-07 high priority list. The three schools reviewed for this report serve very different populations. One of the three schools in Improvement 2 status – 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, and is also looking at ways to improve the magnet program in the district based in part on another Improvement 2 school, Austin-East. The district also continues to make strides in teaching quality, and is exploring innovative ways to develop quality teachers. One area of weakness, however, is administrator professional development.

Specifically, the report concludes:

The district is evaluating its magnet program, in part because Austin-East Magnet High School – an Improvement 2 school – has not attracted students.
According to school officials, the district began the magnet program at Austin-East in an attempt to desegregate the school. However, the school remains over 80 percent African-American. In addition, the school does not attract many students from outside the school zone in part because of the location and reputation of the school. Partly because of a lack of significant student achievement gains and an inability to attract more students at Austin-East, the district has engaged in an outside evaluation of the entire magnet concept to determine if a redesign is necessary for Knox County. (See pages 6-7.)

Despite Knox Adaptive Education Center's unique learning environment – resembling an alternative program more than a traditional school – the Center is designated with a state school code, resulting in its inclusion in all NCLB requirements.
The state Department of Education issues a school code to any applying school as long as it operates in a stand-alone building and has a principal and teachers. School codes allow the Department to keep track of all schools, to ensure data accuracy, and to hold schools accountable. The school code also mandates that the school be held to all existing school and student accountability systems, including federal NCLB requirements.

Because Knox Adaptive Education Center, an alternative learning environment, has chosen to have a school code, the school is included in all NCLB accountability measures, including meeting AYP for graduation rate, attendance rate, and math and reading/language arts assessment scores. As with most alternative schools, KAEC does not graduate students; students return to their original schools after a designated period of time at the alternative school or once behavior has improved. Thus, in the state's 2005 report card, the school is listed as having a zero percent graduation rate, ensuring that the school will fail to meet adequate yearly progress for graduation rate. (See pages 8-9.)

Though Knox Adaptive Education Center serves 100 percent special needs students and 90 percent economically disadvantaged students, the school does not receive funds for supplemental education services.
Knox Adaptive Education Center receives state and local funding for special education that supplants its Title I eligibility status. Because the school is not eligible for Title I, KAEC is not eligible to receive funds to provide free supplemental education services to its low-performing

students. Despite the fact that the school is not receiving benefits from No Child Left Behind (such as free tutoring), KAEC is still accountable for all NCLB sanctions. (See page 10.)

The district has instituted a pilot teacher incentive pay plan to encourage teacher recruitment and retention in inner city schools.
Knox County Schools worked with the state Department of Education to pilot the New Teacher Academy induction program. In addition, the district is piloting a teacher pay-for-performance program in three schools, one of which is Northwest Middle School, an Improvement 2 school. The program, called the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), provides financial bonuses up to $4,000 to teachers based on their evaluations and on student assessment scores. (See pages 10-11.)

Knox County Schools is focusing on teacher professional development to assist with NCLB highly qualified requirements.
In part because of a high teacher turnover rate, Knox County Schools, assisted by the state Department of Education, piloted the New Teacher Academy, an induction program with information sessions taught by veteran teachers and staff. The Academy, which graduated its first inductees in May 2006, was praised by principals and staff for the thorough teacher development sessions. In addition, Knox County established a Professional Development Center that houses a variety of resources for teachers. The district also assigns new teachers in Knox County Schools a peer mentor in his/her designated school. (See pages 11-12.)

Knox County Schools has not adequately focused on professional development for administrators.
Though the district has placed a significant emphasis on teacher professional development, it does not have a similar professional development focus for principals and other administrators. The district does run two institutes – one on issues for urban schools and the other on diversity – that incorporate administrator training, but effective and ongoing professional development for administrators is lacking. Despite the lack of focus on principal professional development, the district has improved its principal assessment and evaluation. (See pages 12-13.)

Austin-East High School and Northwest Middle School have experienced decreases in disciplinary actions.
Principals indicated that previous administrations at both Austin-East and Northwest Middle schools had allowed student discipline to deteriorate. Improvements have resulted from renewed administrative interest and prompt responses to incidents that require disciplinary action. According to school staff, the decrease in disciplinary actions has resulted from a concerted effort of the school administration and staff to regain control and to restore order at the schools. (See pages 14-15.)

The report recommends:
Knox County Schools should involve officials from Knox Adaptive Education Center in regular data meetings.

Knox County Schools should resolve school coding decisions for Knox Adaptive Education Center.

Knox County Schools should use the Principal Assessment Center to develop improved professional development opportunities for administrators in the system.

The Knox County School Board should reinvent and fund a strong magnet school system based on the University of Tennessee's magnet evaluation.

(See page 16.)

See pages 18-19 for Knox County Schools' official response to the report.

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INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Code Annotated §49-1-602 charges the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to study schools and districts that have failed to meet state standards of adequate progress.[1] Every year, the state Department of Education releases a list of high priority schools and districts that are at varying stages of meeting these standards. For the purposes of this report, OEA reviewed schools in the School Improvement 2 category of the state's high priority schools list.

This report identifies areas for improvement and highlights exceptional and noteworthy practices in Knox County Schools. In addition, OEA developed reports for the four other districts with Improvement 2 schools and a statewide policy report that looks at state actions affecting high priority schools.

SCOPE

The purpose of OEA's study is twofold. First, it informs the legislature of how well districts' existing policies and practices support the improvement of student achievement in Improvement 2 schools. Second, it includes recommendations that support improving student achievement. This report focuses on findings and recommendations for Knox County Schools. The state-level report focuses on findings and recommendations at the state level.

There are 24 Improvement 2 schools in five school districts – the four large urban districts in the state and Fayette County. The study reviewed all 24 schools and the five districts.

The scope for the study was limited to four education policy areas that impact the quality of instruction and student achievement:

<u>Goals and governance</u>

- How clearly are districts and schools setting goals and assessing their progress?
- How well are districts and schools developing a positive and effective work environment?
- How effectively are districts and schools involving families and the community in improving achievement?
- Are resources allocated to schools in a way that allows them to be used for the most important student achievement improvement efforts?

<u>Instructional support</u>

- How effective have supplemental education services, namely tutoring, been at targeting students' learning needs?
- How well are districts and schools using technology to improve student achievement?
- How effective is the district at ensuring that teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials?

<u>Teaching quality</u>

- How well are districts' professional development initiatives meeting the needs of teachers and administrators?
- How effective are teacher and administrator evaluations and how are teachers and administrators held accountable for improving student achievement?
- Are districts taking the necessary steps to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers?

<u>Student discipline, attendance, and dropout</u>

- What are districts and schools doing to establish safe and orderly environments in the schools?
- How effective are districts and schools at addressing drop out and attendance issues?

[1] *T.C.A. §49-1-602* requires the OEA to study jointly with the Department of Education schools placed "on notice." The term "on notice" is no longer used by the Department; instead, the Department calls all the schools and districts on the list "high priority," and has renamed "on notice" schools and districts as those in the third year of failing to meet adequate yearly progress (also called School Improvement 2).

METHODOLOGY

The Office of Education Accountability used a variety of methods to collect information about schools' and districts' policies. Staff conducted a literature review to define the four areas of study and determine indicators of best practices. In addition, staff reviewed numerous school, district, and state documents pertaining to the four areas. OEA conducted surveys of district staff and school principals and also interviewed district superintendents, key district staff members, school principals, assistant principals, and other school staff.

SNAPSHOT OF THE DISTRICT

Since the Office of Education Accountability studied the Knox County school district in 2001, the district has made some progress in governance, such as working with standards, data collection and dissemination, and in parental and community relations. Though the district has improved its training and orienting of new teachers, teacher turnover is still a problem. In the areas of student discipline, attendance, and dropout, the district focuses on its most pressing problems, such as low graduation and attendance rates in the Improvement 2 schools.

The three Improvement 2 schools in Knox County – Austin-East Magnet High School, Northwest Middle School, and Knox Adaptive Education Center – serve different purposes and varying populations: one is a magnet high school, one is a regular middle school, and the third is an adaptive or alternative school for all grades with eligibility limited to students with emotional or mental problems. All three schools serve a large percentage of minority students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, student populations in the three schools are highly mobile – students move in and out of the schools with frequency. The three schools also have a large number of elementary or middle schools that feed into them. The result is a diverse group of students with varied academic backgrounds and cultural attributes. In addition, the three schools suffer from high teacher turnover and low parental involvement.

The Knox Adaptive Education Center (KAEC), an innovative alternative school for students suffering from emotional or mental problems, presents challenges to the traditional classifications of schools under No Child Left Behind. The students in this school are, for the most part, only temporarily in this environment. They generally are sent from another school and usually return to the original school after a period of time. Students with treatable mental and emotional conditions may be assigned to KAED for a portion of a school year or for several years until they can resume studies at their regular schools. State law (TCA 49-6-3402) mandates that no student can graduate from an alternative school. The district either returns students to their original schools, or if the students do not have an original school (a rarity), the district assigns a school for graduation purposes. This situation makes it difficult to calculate a "graduation rate" for KAEC. KAEC is an Improvement 2 school for three reasons: 1) the school did not meet AYP for percent of high school students proficient or advanced in math; 2) the school did not meet AYP for percent of high school students proficient or advanced in reading/language arts/writing; and 3) the school did not meet the federal benchmark for graduation rate.

Exhibit 1: Background facts for Knox County Schools, 2004-2005 School Year

Schools and Staff	
Number of schools	88
Number of schools on notice[2]	3
Number of teachers	3,438
Number of teacher waivers	0
Number of teacher permits	0
Average teacher salary	$41,637
Student Population	
Number of students	53,130
African American	8,129 (15%)
Caucasian	45,622 (81%)
Hispanic	1,272 (2%)
Other	1,162 (2%)
Limited English proficient	481 (1%)
Students with disabilities	6,956 (13%)
Economically disadvantaged	20,420 (41%)
Number of students in Improvement 2 schools	1,018 (2%)
Suspensions	3,609
Expulsions	29
Graduation rate	76%
Grades K-8 attendance	95%
Grades 9-12 attendance	93%
Fiscal Information	
Total expenditures	$354,244,871
Expenditures per pupil per ADM	$6,846
Federal revenue	10%
State revenue	34%
Local revenue	56%

SOURCES: Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card 2005; State of Tennessee Annual Statistical Report of the Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 2005.

[2] The Department of Education used performance data from 2004-05 when determining the 2005-06 high priority schools and districts.

HIGH PRIORITY STATUS

The district has three schools in the School Improvement 2 category. Overall, the district has 10 schools on the high priority list, with seven in School Improvement 1, three in School Improvement 2, none in Restructuring, and no schools currently under Reconstitution. In the past, the district has reconstituted two schools.[3]

Exhibit 2: Schools in School Improvement 2 in Knox County School System – 2005-06

School Name	Reason for High Priority Status
Austin-East Magnet High School	% proficient/advanced in math and reading/language arts/writing for all students, African American students and economically disadvantaged students; graduation rate[4]
Knox Adaptive Education Center	% proficient/advanced in math for all students; % proficient/advanced in reading/language arts/writing for all students; graduation rate
Northwest Middle School	% proficient/advanced in math for African American students and economically disadvantaged students; % proficient/advanced in reading/language arts/writing for all students, African American students and economically disadvantaged students

SOURCE: TN Department of Education, 2005 Report Card

In August 2006, the Tennessee Department of Education released the 2006-07 High Priority Schools list. Two of the three High Priority Knox County schools from 2005-06 have not improved and are now under corrective action. These two schools are Austin-East Magnet High School and Knox Adaptive Education Center. Northwest Middle School has reported improvement; the school made AYP in the 2005-06 school years and is now listed as School Improvement 2-Improving. The total number of schools in the district listed as High Priority decreased from 10 schools in 2005-06 to seven in 2006-07.[5] Knox County Schools itself has come off the list – up from School Improvement 1- Improving in 2005-06.

CHANGES SINCE THE 2001 STUDY

The Office of Education Accountability (OEA) first reviewed schools on notice in 2001. Both the 2001 study and this report look at goals and governance and instructional support issues. However, the 2001 study also looked at facilities, climate, and class size. OEA broadened the study this year to include teaching quality and student discipline, attendance, and dropout issues. In the 2001 report, OEA made several recommendations for Knox County Schools. Some progress has been made on a number of these, several of which are listed below with comments from the Assistant Superintendent of Operations:[6]

1. Knox County should continue to use the district level planning document. Further, the district should continue to make all schools aware of the district improvement plan and evaluate individual schools' progress concerning goals. Knox County evaluates and revises the district level planning document annually, exceeding the State Board of Education rule that requires updates every two years. The district continues to use the district planning document, and

[3] Email to Mike Montgomery from Donna Wright, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, Knox County School District, "Fw: Questions for Schools on Notice Report," April 24, 2006.

[4] In 2005-06, Tennessee used the event dropout rate – a measure of the proportion of students who dropped out of school in a single year – for its graduation data. The state now uses the graduation rate definition – the percentage of students graduating on time.

[5] Tennessee Department of Education, *Adequate Yearly Progress Results – 2006-07.* Assessed November 7, 2006 from http://state.tn.us/education/nclb/ayp/doc/2006%20High%20Priority%20Schools.pdf.

[6] Emails to Mike Montgomery from Donna Wright, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, Knox County Schools, "Re: Comments on Recommendations," May 29, 2006 and "Re: A Few Comments," May 30, 2006.

district staff assists schools in using the district document in developing school improvement plans.

2. Knox County Schools should evaluate the results of Project GRAD.
   Preliminary evaluations of Project GRAD, the district's dropout prevention program, have been conducted, but the project is only in its second year of the reading component and the third year of the math component. Project GRAD USA has commissioned a professor from Case Western Reserve to evaluate the overall program. The evaluation should be completed this year.

3. The district should continue to require schools to develop and maintain building-level technology plans. Further, both the system and individual schools should continue to apply for technology grants and should keep student availability of technological resources high.
   School inventories and technology plans are updated each year, and several schools have obtained tech grants. However, the district is still responsible for applying for the majority of technology grants.

4. The Knox County School Board and County Commission should collaborate to ensure school improvement.
   Efforts are attempted in this area but a lawsuit filed several years ago by the School Board against the County Commission has strained the relationship. To further the need for school funding, the Great Schools Partnership foundation was formed to assist the school system to meet strategic goals.

5. Knox County system and school officials should consider working towards SACS accreditation for the remaining unaccredited schools in the system.
   It is anticipated that all schools in the Knox County district will be accredited by 2007-08. Currently, all middle and high schools are accredited, including all high priority schools.

6. Knox County Schools should continue to use alternate methods of verifying special education student counts until problems with state-provided software are resolved.
   The special education count is being monitored by the district. According to district officials, the district collaborates with other similar systems that are experiencing the same special education problems to assist with verification.

7. Knox County Schools should strengthen and evaluate existing policies and practices to increase teacher retention and should explore incentive packages for teachers willing to work and stay in inner city schools.
   A pilot teacher performance incentive pay plan has been initiated at three schools with the anticipation of examining performance pay for all of the urban schools.

8. Knox County Schools should continue to implement its elementary curriculum and other strategies to curb the effects of high student mobility rates.
   According to district officials, the schools with the highest mobility rates are among those in the Empowerment Zone, an area of Knoxville that has been selected for a federal grant to spur community revitalization. Schools within this zone have implemented Project GRAD, a dropout prevention program, which also helps with mobile students. According to district officials, the reading and math portions of Project GRAD are comparable from one school to the next, making it easier for a mobile student to transition to a new school.

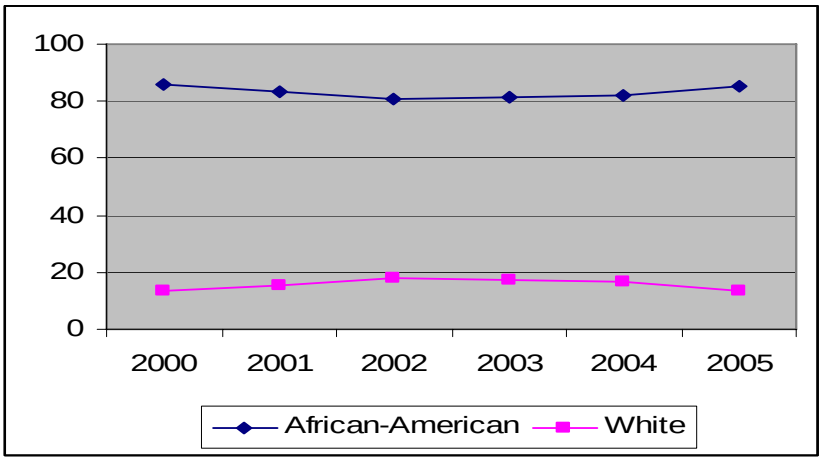
9. Knox County Schools should continue to implement, strengthen, and evaluate strategies to decrease student aberrant behavior at schools on notice.
   The district continues to be concerned about student discipline. Some school officials mentioned that in some cases community pressure has reduced disciplinary actions by administrators based on issues of race and gender. See pages 14-15 for more information on discipline in schools on notice.

CONCLUSIONS: GOALS AND GOVERNANCE

The district is evaluating its magnet program, in part because Austin-East Magnet High School – an Improvement 2 school – has not attracted students.

Knox County Schools opened its first magnet program in 1993, and has since added four additional programs, all of which are school-within-a-school magnet components (as opposed to the entire school being a magnet). Austin-East Magnet High School is the newest magnet in Knox County, opening in 1997. The school has three specialized areas of instruction in its magnet program – performing arts, environmental sciences, and information technology – in addition to its regular curriculum. According to school officials, the district began the magnet program at Austin-East in an attempt to desegregate the school. However, the school remains over 80 percent African-American.

Exhibit 3: Percent African-American and White Students Enrolled in Austin-East Magnet High School, 2000-2005.



SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, Annual Report Cards, 2000-2005; Accessed at http://www.tennessee.gov/education/mrptcrdarch.shtml

According to school officials, Austin-East Magnet High School does not attract many students from outside the school zone in part because of the location and reputation of the school.[7] The principal and district officials are aware of this issue and have attempted to entice students from other school zones to attend Austin-East, but with limited success.

Despite its lack of draw for out-of-zone students, Austin-East has seen some limited gains in student achievement. In 2003, 28 percent of Austin-East students were scoring below proficient on the English II Gateway exam; in 2005, the number scoring below proficient had dropped to 26.3. In addition, students scoring below proficient on the English I end-of-course exam dropped from 42 percent to 30.3 percent between 2003 and 2005. Math test scores have not seen similar gains; in fact, the number of students scoring below proficient on the Algebra I Gateway has increased – from 36 percent to 38.5 percent – between 2003 and 2005.[8]

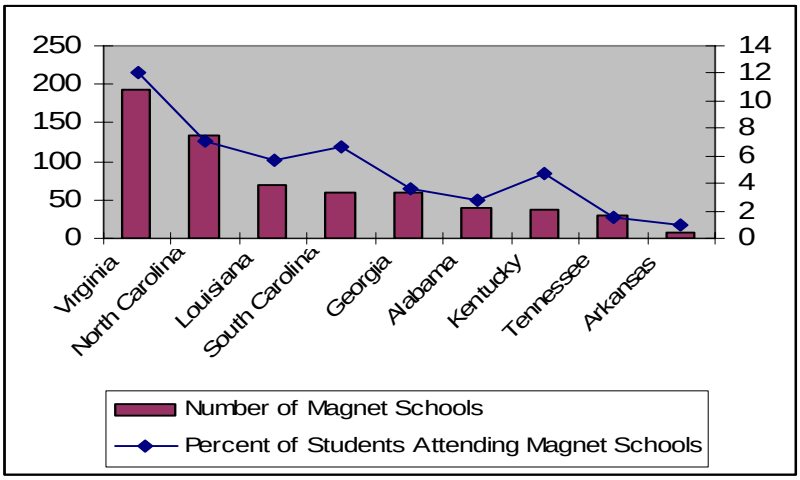
In part because of the lack of significant student achievement gains, the district has engaged in an outside evaluation of the entire magnet concept to determine if a redesign is necessary for Knox County. This evaluation, conducted by University of Tennessee professor Russell French, Ph.D., and associates, was completed in August 2006.[9] A district official explains: "As a result [of the evaluation], the board has

[7] Interview with Brian Hartsell, Principal and staff from Austin East Magnet high School, January 24, 2006.
[8] Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card 2003 and 2005.
[9] Email to Mike Montgomery from Donna Wright, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Knox County Schools, "Re: Schools on Notice Report," June 15, 2006.

determined that we need to create a strategic plan to redefine and rethink our magnet programs. It is critical that we redefine our mission [for magnet schools], particularly [with] the high school. The board now understands the urgency with Austin-East in corrective action that we need a strong plan today."[10]

The number of magnet schools has steadily increased over the past three decades, with the U.S. Department of Education reporting 1,811 magnet schools in 30 states and the District of Columbia in 2003-04.[11] Of the 30 states with magnet schools, California tops the list with the highest number – 457 – with Illinois (376) close behind. Exhibit 3 shows the number of magnet schools in southern states and the correlating percentages of students in magnet schools in those states.

Exhibit 4: Number of Magnets in Southern States and Percentages of Students Attending Magnet Schools in Southern States, 2003-04



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Elementary and Secondary Students, Staff, Schools, and School Districts: School Year 2003-04.

Many magnet schools throughout the U.S. have witnessed significant improvements in student achievement, but simply calling a school a "magnet" is not enough to improve scores. To correlate gains in student achievement with a magnet school, the magnet school should have:

- A specialized curriculum or teaching method that is consistently applied by staff;
- A safe, ordered environment that incorporates an image of excellence;
- A committed and enthusiastic faculty;
- A focus on career and the future prospects of students;
- A committed, charismatic principal;
- A commitment to and implementation of research-based education reforms; and
- School and teacher autonomy.[12]

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education illustrates key components in starting a magnet school that will help improve achievement. Those components include:

- Choosing appealing and sustainable themes;
- Focusing on excellent teachers and staff;
- Cultivating community resources;
- Defining specialized roles based on the theme of the magnet school;
- Working with the district and developing support for the magnet concept in general.[13]

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[10] Email to Katie Cour from Donna Wright, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Knox County Schools, "Re: Knox Report," September 12, 2006.

[11] National Center for Education Statistics, accessed at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006307.pdf on September 26, 2006.

[12] Morton Inger, "Improving Urban Education with Magnet Schools," ERIC/CUE Digest Number 76, 1991.

[13] "Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs," U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, September 2004; Accessed at http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/magnet/report.pdf on September 6, 2006.

Despite Knox Adaptive Education Center's unique learning environment – resembling an alternative program more than a traditional school – the Center is designated with a state school code, resulting in its inclusion in all NCLB requirements.

Knox Adaptive Education Center (KAEC) describes itself as the "psychoeducational center for Knox County Schools."[14] The school serves students in grades K-12 who have significant mental health issues, and reports a special education population of 100 percent. In 2005-06, 105 students – the majority in grades 9-12 – attended the school. KAEC has six "intervention consultants" that work with the special needs students.

Though many districts offer separate schools for students with severe disabilities, most districts do not have a school devoted solely to severe mental health issues. In fact, the authors of this report were unable to locate another school similar to KAEC in Tennessee.

The district currently has four sites that allow students who have been suspended or expelled in grades 9-12 a chance to earn a degree. Those schools are Richard Yoakley School, Byington-Solway Technology Center, Historic Knoxville High School, and the Knox Adaptive Education Center, all identified by the district as alternative programs. The Education Commission of the States identifies two types of alternative schools: 1) schools that serve students who have not been successful in the traditional classroom and 2) schools that serve students who have been suspended or expelled for disciplinary reasons.[15] Knox Adaptive Education Center fits the first definition of an alternative school.

The state Department of Education issues a school code to any applying school as long as it operates in a stand-alone building and has a principal and teachers. School codes allow the Department to keep track of all schools, to ensure data accuracy, and to hold schools accountable. With a school code, schools are included in the state report card, districts receive school-level disaggregated data from assessments, and schools may receive other state technical assistance; however, the school code also mandates that the school be held to all existing school and student accountability systems, including federal NCLB requirements. According to an official at the Tennessee Department of Education, individual schools determine whether or not to apply for a school code. Some alternative schools opt out of the school code, and several alternate between having a code one year, and getting rid of it another – a habit that the Department wishes would end. Department of Education staff said that the Department tries to discourage alternative schools from obtaining their own school code because of numerous administrative obligations associated with it, including purchasing an attendance package, adhering to assessment reporting procedures, and developing a school improvement plan.[16]

Because Knox Adaptive Education Center has chosen to have a school code, the school is included in all NCLB accountability measures, including meeting AYP for graduation rate, attendance rate, and math and reading/language arts assessment scores. As with most alternative schools, KAEC does not graduate students; students return to their original schools after a designated period of time at the alternative school or once behavior has improved. Thus in the state's 2005 report card, the school is listed as having a zero percent graduation rate.[17]

In response, district officials explain they are requesting that the school code be removed from KAEC. However, because school codes are linked to attendance and funding levels, the district must now resolve the issue of having a base school to serve as a student's locale for assigning assessment scores, attendance, and other measures. The district plans on requesting this change, which should benefit the school.

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[14] Interview with staff from Knox Adaptive Education Center, January 24, 2006.

[15] Education Commission of the States website; Accessed at http://www.ecs.org on October 4, 2006.

[16] Email to Russell Moore from Anna Kniazewycz, Statistical Analyst Supervisor, Tennessee Department of Education, "Re: School Codes," September 13, 2006.

[17] Tennessee Department of Education, 2005 Report Card.

In part because the school does not graduate students, which results in a failure to meet AYP, school officials claim that they, along with district officials, joke about being on the high priority schools list. Though KAEC's inclusion in NCLB requirements may be inappropriate, the school may suffer from the district's attitude toward it. For example, the school does not receive disaggregated data from the district and the principal is not included in the regular data meetings.[18] District officials share data and trends both from assessment analysis and from data submitted by school data collectors with principals at a monthly principals' meeting. Principals can evaluate their data and trends in comparison to similar schools at these meetings. Like most other districts in the state, Knox County Schools staff incorporate the data into a Needs Assessment for the school system, which is then used to form district goals and objectives. However, Knox Adaptive Education Center is not included in this data analysis system. According to the district, the school's unique special needs population and its transitory student population exclude its staff from benefiting from data discussions. However, inclusion in regular data meetings could benefit the school and help with communication issues. For example, KAEC staff said that they were unaware that the first attempt by a student on a Gateway exam is used to determine AYP. Regular data meetings with the district could prevent this type of miscommunication. The principal at KAEC commented that she would like to be a part of the data meetings and system, at the very least, to be aware of what other schools (including feeder schools) are doing.[19]

Continuous data collection and analysis are necessary to monitor a wide range of education information to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind and target policies toward low performing schools, but are beneficial for other reasons as well:

- Teachers need timely and disaggregated information about all students entering their classrooms; this information allows teachers to individualize instruction.
- District officials need to identify high performing schools and programs to determine best practices.
- Education stakeholders need to determine if students are being properly prepared for success after high school.
- Educators, parents, and policymakers need to identify early academic goals that prepare students for future success; for example, targeting math proficiency for the 8th grade math exam so students are more likely to pass the 9th grade algebra exam.[20]

Though Knox Adaptive Education Center does not receive disaggregated data from the district, the school has developed an innovative data collection and sharing system that helps with parental involvement. On a daily basis, teachers send notes home to parents describing students' academic accomplishments, behavioral issues, and any medical issues as reported by the school nurse. The school encourages parents to contact teachers or counselors to discuss the reports, which, staff noted, helps the parents stay involved in all aspects of the child's wellbeing each day in school.[21] Further, parents have access to the school's library of reference material on mental disabilities, behavioral issues, and many other topics of use to a parent with a special education child.[22] In addition, KAEC has ongoing conversations with administrators from the students' original schools throughout the students' experiences at KAEC, namely through regularly scheduled meetings with the students' original principals.

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[18] Interview with staff from Knox Adaptive Education Center, January 24, 2006.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Chrys Dougherty, "Getting Smart About Data: Satisfying Federal Reporting Requirements While Helping Schools Improve, ECS, Issue Brief, Accountability (K-12)", 2000, accessed May 5, 2006, http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/40/23/4023.htm.
[21] Interview with staff at Knox Adaptive Education Center, January 24, 2006.
[22] Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS: INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Though Knox Adaptive Education Center serves 100 percent special needs students and 90 percent economically disadvantaged, the school does not receive funds for supplemental education services.

No Child Left Behind includes a series of sanctions that must be administered by a district when a school fails to meet AYP in any category. After two years of a school's failing to meet AYP, the district must offer public school choice – allowing students to enter any school they choose – to students in the low-performing school. After three years, the district must provide supplemental education services, such as tutoring, to low-performing students in Title I schools on the high priority list. Title I refers to the first section of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the most recent reauthorization of which is No Child Left Behind). The Act was created to help educate disadvantaged students. Specifically, Title I Part A provides federal financial assistance to improve teaching and learning of children in high-poverty schools. Title I schools are identified according to the following requirements:

1. the school must have above 75 percent of students in poverty based on a district ranking of all schools in the system
2. schools below 75 percent of students in poverty may be eligible once all schools above 75 percent in poverty have been served.

In addition, the district may elect not to identify a school as Title I if the school is receiving supplemental funds from other state or local sources that can be used for schoolwide reform.

Knox Adaptive Education Center receives state and local funding that meets the requirement described above; that is, funds targeting special education supplant its Title I eligibility status. Because the school is not eligible for Title I, KAEC is not eligible to receive funds to provide free supplemental education services to its low-performing students. Despite the fact that the school is not receiving benefits from NCLB (such as free tutoring), KAEC is still accountable for all NCLB sanctions.

CONCLUSIONS: TEACHING QUALITY

The district has instituted a pilot teacher incentive pay plan to encourage teacher recruitment and retention in inner city schools.

Knox County reports a problem with teacher retention that has increased in recent years. The district lost over 600 teachers in 2004-05 compared to just over 400 in 2003-04. According to district staff, roughly two-thirds of these teachers resigned and one-third retired. [23] In response, Knox County Schools worked with the state Department of Education to pilot the New Teacher Academy induction program. In addition, the district is piloting a teacher pay-for-performance program in three schools, one of which is Northwest Middle School, an Improvement 2 school. The program, called the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), provides financial bonuses up to $4,000 to teachers based on their evaluations and on student assessment scores.[24] The Great School Partnership, a local foundation, is funding the $1 million cost of the program.

Interviews at the school and district level indicate that many teachers leave to seek careers outside of education or seek more lucrative teaching positions in neighboring county and city school systems. Exhibit 5 shows the average teacher salaries for Knox County and its neighboring counties. As the table illustrates, six counties pay teachers, on average, less than Knox County, and seven counties pay more.

[23] Email to Mike Montgomery from Linda Ward, Administrative Assistant, Knox County Schools, "Statements Requested from Knox County," August 8, 2006.

[24] Joe Sullivan, "Teacher Pay Differentials Needed," Metro Pulse, Accessed at http://www.metropulse.com/articles/2006/16_16/insights.shtml on September 12, 2006.

Exhibit 5: Average Teacher Salaries of Knox and Adjoining Counties

County/City	Average Teacher Salary
Grainger County	$37,071
Union County	$37,748
Jefferson County	$37,997
Anderson County	$40,486
Sevier County	$40,525
Loudon County	$41,385
Knox County	**$41,637**
Roane County	$41,898
Clinton City	$42,188
Blount County	$42,322
Lenior City	$42,577
Maryville City	$50,173
Alcoa City	$50,405
Oak Ridge City	$51,550

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Annual Statistical Report, 2004-05.

Pay increases have shown promise in other districts in attracting and retaining teachers, specifically in hard-to-staff schools. The Education Commission of the States writes: "States' experience confirms that states and districts do successfully draw teachers from neighboring states and districts by paying higher beginning teacher salaries or offering attractive bonuses…Similarly, at least in the short term, salary bonuses for teaching in hard-to-staff schools have proved to be an effective incentive."[25]

(See the Office of Education Accountability's state report, State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools, for a related finding.)

Knox County Schools is focusing on teacher professional development to assist with NCLB highly qualified requirements.

In part because of a high teacher turnover rate, Knox County Schools, assisted by the state Department of Education, piloted the New Teacher Academy, an induction program with information sessions taught by veteran teachers and staff. The Academy, which graduated its first inductees in May 2006, was praised by principals and staff for the thorough teacher development sessions.

Topics for sessions include:

- Learning the ropes (curriculum guides, testing, professional development, discipline, and other administrative issues);
- Organizing the classroom;
- Effective lesson planning;
- Teaching diverse students; and
- Using technology in the classroom.

Teachers are paid a stipend for attending the sessions, which are held bimonthly for a cohort of new teachers both for efficiency and for developing rapport among new teachers. Principals interviewed for this report noted that teachers in high priority schools benefit significantly from the cultural diversity sessions.[26]

In addition, Knox County established a Professional Development Center that houses a variety of resources for teachers, including:

[25] Education Commission of the States. *The Progress of Education Reform,* "Teacher Recruitment," Vol. 2, No. 2, August-September 2000.

[26] Interviews with staff at Austin-East Magnet High School and Northwest Middle School, January 24, 2006.

- Teacher U – an online professional development program; sample classes include "Dealing with Angry Children in the Classroom" and "ADHD: What It Is and How You Deal with It in the Classroom."
- Instructional Technology Department – training and technology support to teachers; the Department places an emphasis on integrating technology into the curriculum.
- New Teacher Induction – New Teacher Induction has three components: an intensive beginning of the year orientation, the New Teacher Academy described above, and a mentoring teacher for help throughout the year.
- Information about working with students in the Extended Learning Program, an intense, after-school program for motivated students.
- A library of books, videos, tapes, and other materials teachers may use.
- A Teacher Resource Center where teachers can create their own classroom materials using district supplies and equipment for a small fee.[27]

The focus on teacher improvement extends to the district-initiated but school-run mentoring program. Each new teacher in Knox County Schools is assigned a peer mentor in his/her designated school. Upon completion of the mentoring requirements (assisting a new teacher for two years), mentors receive a stipend. Principals report that the program attracts several of the more qualified teachers dedicated to assisting novice teachers. The district does not evaluate the mentoring program, but principals commented that teachers are pleased with the program.[28]

The district's emphasis on teacher professional development is in part related to the No Child Left Behind requirement that all teachers be highly qualified by 2005-06. As part of general NCLB reporting requirements, districts must publicly report annually on their progress toward meeting all NCLB requirements, including the highly qualified teachers provision.[29] This public accountability, coupled with a restriction of federal funds if the district fails to meet the highly qualified provision, has bolstered Knox County's professional development efforts.

Knox County Schools has not adequately focused on professional development for administrators.

Though the district has placed a significant emphasis on teacher professional development, it does not have a similar professional development focus for principals and other administrators. One principal said that administrator professional development is a district weakness, and that the district's regular principals' meetings rarely have a professional development aspect. In response, officials from Knox County Schools described the state Professional Administrators Licensing program, which encompasses 72 hours of training for administrators moving from a beginning license to a professional license.[30] This statewide licensure standard requires districts to work with beginning administrators to develop a professional development program; however, all districts in the state are already required to do this. Strong administrator professional development programs go beyond the existing state requirements. The district does run two institutes – one on issues for urban schools and the other on diversity – that incorporate administrator training, but effective and ongoing professional development for administrators is lacking.

Professional development for administrators is a significant part of improving student achievement, as illustrated in *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement*. In one example, the authors show that even small changes in a principal's ability can result in large gains in student achievement. Specifically, the report found 21 areas of a principal's

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[27] Know County District Schools, *Professional Development Center*, accessed May 5, 2006, http://www.kcs.k12tn.net/pdc/index.htm.

[28] Interviews with staff at Northwest Middle School, Austin-East Magnet High School, and Knox Adaptive Education Center, January 24, 2006.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Email from Rodney E. Russell, Ed.D., Supervisor of Staff Development, Knox County Schools to Katie Cour, " Re: Professional Development question," September 9, 2006.

responsibilities that impact student achievement and should be a focus of any professional development for principals. The top five areas, in order of their impact on student achievement (from greatest impact to least) are:

1. Situational awareness – knows the details and undercurrents in the running of the school.
2. Intellectual stimulation of staff.
3. Change agent – willing and able to challenge the status quo.
4. Input – involves teachers in important decisions.
5. Culture – fosters shared beliefs and sense of community.[31]

As with teacher professional development, researchers find that the most effective professional development for administrators occurs over a long-term period, includes work with peers, is carefully thought through and planned, and is embedded in the daily job of the principal.[32]

One example of a strong district initiative for administrator professional development is in Louisville, Kentucky. The Louisville school district joined with a local foundation to develop a teacher and administrator training program. The program's administrator elements include:

- Cohorts of principals who meet regularly for a period of weeks to discuss leadership issues,
- Principal-developed professional development plans that are regularly evaluated,
- Peer evaluation of leadership skills,
- Leadership workshops,
- Training on rules and requirements for administrators, and
- Mentorship opportunities.[33]

In addition, Knox County has developed a strong focus on instructional leadership through its professional development for administrators. District officials explain that the focus of principals' meetings is entirely on teaching and learning; the district also holds principal, assistant principal, and central office retreats that assist with networking and teamwork.

A survey of principals conducted by Public Agenda illustrates the need for improved administrator professional development. The report explains that both superintendents and principals believe that professional training is too often impractical and unfocused. In addition, almost every superintendent surveyed – 97 percent – stated that improving the quality of professional development opportunities for administrators would be an effective way to improve school leadership.

Despite the lack of focus on principal professional development, the district has improved its principal assessment and evaluation. To augment the state's required Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth in assessing principals, the district has added a Principal Assessment Center that uses certified trainers to evaluate administrator practice. This assessment tool could be a substantial springboard for developing a targeted professional development system for principals.

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[31] Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brian McNulty, "Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement," McRel, 2003.

[32] Kent Peterson, "The Professional Development of Principals: Innovations and Opportunities," Paper commissioned for the first meeting of the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation, September 2001.

[33] Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS: STUDENT DISCIPLINE, ATTENDANCE, AND DROPOUT

Austin-East High School and Northwest Middle School have experienced decreases in disciplinary actions.

Two of the Improvement 2 schools experienced declines in disciplinary actions for non-zero tolerance violations. Northwest Middle School experienced 960 total discipline referrals (meaning a student was referred to a school administrator for disciplinary reasons) in the 2003-04 school year. The number dropped in 2004-05 to 837 total referrals, a 13 percent reduction.[34]

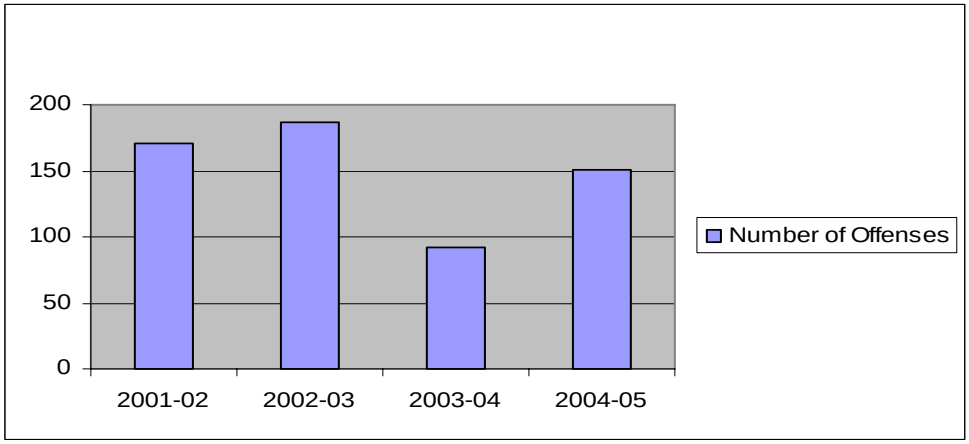
Austin-East Magnet High School also improved its discipline as noted in total suspensions and expulsions. In 2003-04, Austin-East administrators suspended 206. In 2004-05, the school had 170 suspensions – a decrease of 36.[35]

Principals indicated that previous administrations at both Austin-East and Northwest Middle schools had allowed student discipline to deteriorate. Improvements have resulted from renewed administrative interest and prompt responses to incidents that require disciplinary action. According to school staff, the decrease in disciplinary actions has resulted from a concerted effort of the school administration and staff to regain control and to restore order at the schools.[36]

Overall, Knox County Schools decreased disciplinary actions in 2005-06 based on suspensions and expulsions. In 2004-05, the district had 5,174 suspensions, whereas in 2005-06, the number dropped to 3,609 (a decrease of roughly 30 percent). Expulsions followed a similar trend; in 2004-05, the district expelled 44 students, but expelled only 29 in 2005-06 (a decrease of roughly 35 percent).[37]

The district has not seen the same decrease in zero tolerance incidents, though 2005-06 zero tolerance results were not available at the time of publication. As Exhibit 6 illustrates, Knox County Schools had an unusual drop in zero tolerance incidents for the 2003-04 school year, but saw a spike in incidents in 2004-05.

Exhibit 6: Total Number of Zero Tolerance Incidents in Knox County from 2001-2005

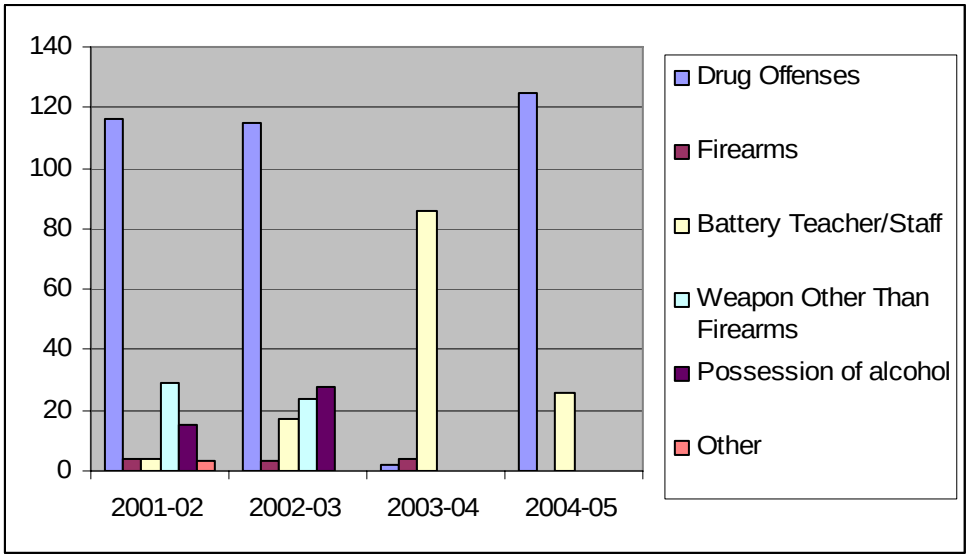


SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of School Safety and Support

[34] Northwest Middle School, School Improvement Plan, 2005-06.
[35] Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card, 2005.
[36] Interviews with staff at Northwest Middle School and Austin-East Magnet High School, Knox County Schools, January 24, 2006.
[37] Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card, 2005; State Report Card, 2004.

Oddly, only two drug-related zero tolerance incidents were reported in 2003-04, sparking a concern over data. In 2004-05, zero tolerance drug offenses hit a peak of 125 for the school district, but battery against a teacher or other staff member decreased, as Exhibit 7 illustrates.

Exhibit 7: Zero Tolerance Offenses Committed, 2001-02 to 2004-05



SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of School Safety and Support

According to district officials, Knox County Schools adjusted its zero tolerance policies in 2002-03, at which point the district considered drug use to be a lesser offense, thus not including it in zero tolerance (except for drug sales, hardcore drugs, or other unique situations). The policy was amended in 2003-04 again. The district did see an increase in assaults on employees in 2003-04, often related to teachers breaking fights up between two students and getting hit in the process. According to officials, the district is now concentrating on consistent reporting for zero tolerance incidents.[38]

[38] Email to Katie Cour from Donna Wright, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Knox County Schools, "Re: Zero tolerance and final findings," September 25, 2006.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knox County Schools should involve officials from Knox Adaptive Education Center in regular data meetings.

Even though Knox Adaptive Education Center's students are transitory and have special needs, school officials could benefit from inclusion in the district's regular data analysis meetings. In addition, the school and the district should refrain from joking about the school's inclusion in accountability measures. Though accountability for graduation rates is not appropriate for schools like KAEC that do not graduate students, the district should still maintain an attitude of high standards and expectations for all students.

Knox County Schools should resolve school coding decisions for Knox Adaptive Education Center.

District officials should initiate conversations with the state Department of Education to withdraw Knox Adaptive Education Center's school code. The district should also analyze its own policy toward alternative schools and school codes. By withdrawing school codes from alternative schools, the schools would no longer receive report card results, disaggregated data, or technical assistance from the Department of Education; however, the schools would also no longer be held to NCLB requirements. The district could look into ways that it could provide some of these services to schools that do not have school codes. For example, the district could develop its own school report card based on district assessment data that would benefit alternative schools.

Knox County Schools should use the Principal Assessment Center to develop improved professional development opportunities for administrators in the system.

Knox County Schools has developed a strong professional development system for teachers and now needs to move forward with its administrator professional development. The Principal Assessment Center, used to evaluate new principals, would be a good springboard for better linking principal evaluation to professional development. Regular meetings focused on instructional leadership for new principals, mentor systems for new principals, ongoing peer evaluation, and other networking possibilities could all greatly benefit administrators in Knox County Schools.

The Knox County School Board should reinvent and fund a strong magnet school system based on the University of Tennessee's magnet evaluation.

The district has already begun a reassessment of Knox County's magnet system. It is essential that the district continue focusing on its magnet schools and develop appropriate goals and missions for them. The magnet schools could be a source of great improvement for the district, but strong leadership in this area is necessary for this to happen.

APPENDIX A – PERSONS CONTACTED

Tammy Chaney
School Resource Unit, Knoxville Police Department

Janet Chesney
Teacher, Knox Adaptive Education Center

Ken Dunlap
Former Principal, Northwest Middle School

Brian Hartsell
Principal, Austin-East Magnet High School

Rhonda Kerr
Teacher, Knox Adaptive Education Center

Anna Kniazewycz
Statistical Analyst Supervisor
Tennessee Department of Education

Dr. Charles Q. Lindsey
Superintendent, Knox County Schools (KCS)

Claudia Lineberger
Principal, Knox Adaptive Education Center

Brian Piggush
Teacher, Knox Adaptive Education Center

Krista Rines
Teacher, Knox Adaptive Education Center

Rodney E. Russell
Supervisor of Staff Development, KCS

Dr. Kathy D. Sims
Executive Director of Human Services, KCS

Linda Ward
Administrative Assistant, KCS

Dr. Donna L. Wright
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, KCS

APPENDIX B – RESPONSE FROM DISTRICT

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Dr. Charles Q. Lindsey, Superintendent

November 22, 2006

Phillip Doss, Assistant Director
Office of Education Accountability
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Dr. Doss:

We have reviewed the draft copy on District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools: Knox County Schools. The findings within the report presents an accurate representation of the school system's efforts to assist the three schools designated as High Priority schools. We want to thank the research team for their professional approach in addressing this report and allowing the district to respond, clarify, and even correct information prior to release.

We are in agreement with the findings as presented, and offer a status report for each of the recommendations:

Knox County Schools should involve officials from KAEC in regular data meetings.
KAEC did not participate in the system data training meetings since the staff was specifically trained to work with data as it related to student individual education plans. As KAEC will become a service school, pending approval from the State Department of Education, student data will be charted from the sending school and included in the school data as a whole.

Knox County Schools should resolve school coding decisions for KAEC.
KCS has requested that KAEC be designated as a service school and that the sending (base) school shall be responsible for state testing, attendance, and other system-level responsibilities for the students receiving services at KAEC based on their IEPs. We are awaiting a decision from the State Department of Education for our request of service school status and the relinquishing of the school coding number.

P.O. Box 2188 • 912 South Gay Street • Knoxville, Tennessee 37901-2188 • Telephone (865) 594-1620/1610 • Fax (865) 594-1627

Knox County Schools should use the Principal Assessment Center to develop improved professional development opportunities for administrators in the system.

As we move into the second full year with the Professional Assessment Center, we will use the assessment program as a training center for the *Principalship*. We are in the planning phase of creating a center where we can identify potential candidates to be administrators by taking them through the assessment center, which was part of the original design.

The Knox County School Board should reinvent and fund a strong magnet school system based on the University of Tennessee's magnet evaluation.

The School Board will vote to approve a Magnet School Task Force in December. The charge of the task force is to review the recommendations as proposed by the University of Tennessee in the evaluation report. The task force will prepare a plan to rebuild/revitalize the magnet program within six months of formation to present to the school board for approval. The KCS School Board is committed to a quality, progressive, and appropriately funded magnet school program as a result of the comprehensive evaluation conducted by the university.

Thank you for the thoroughness of the Knox County Schools' report, and the opportunity to work with the research team in a constructive way. We will welcome a follow-up visit to further review where we are as a school system as we continue to strive for a quality education on behalf of all Knox County students.

Sincerely,

Charles Q. Lindsey, Ed. D.
Director of Schools

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◆Sherrill Murrell

◆indicates staff who assisted with this project

Note that former OREA staff members Corey Chatis and Jessica Lewis also assisted with this project.