

Tennessee Schools On Notice

2001-02



Statewide Summary: Tennessee Schools on Notice

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability
December 2002



STATE OF TENNESSEE
COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

John G. Morgan
Comptroller

STATE CAPITOL
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0264
PHONE (615) 741-2501

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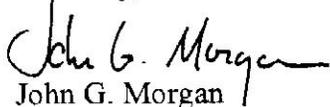
The Honorable John S. Wilder
Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
and
Members of the House and Senate Education Committees

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-602 requires the Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Department of Education to conduct a joint study of schools and/or systems placed on notice of probation. In September 2001, the Department and the State Board of Education officially placed 98 schools in 11 systems on notice. This system report is one of 11 addressing the affected school systems.

OEA analysts reviewed aspects of each system, other than curriculum and instruction, which current research indicates may affect student achievement, including governance and management, funding and resources, parent and community involvement, and facility condition. Each report provides recommendations for improvement.

Sincerely,


John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Faye Taylor
Department of Education

Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



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Ethel Detch, Director
Phillip Doss, Principal Research Analyst
Kim Potts, Principal Research Analyst
Melissa Smith, Associate Research Analyst

Ethel R. Detch, Director
Office of Education Accountability
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0268
615/401-7911
www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports

John G. Morgan
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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,
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Executive Summary

In 2001, the Tennessee Department of Education identified 98 schools in 11 systems needing to improve student academic performance. The State Board of Education approved the list in September, and the commissioner officially placed the schools on notice. *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-602 requires the Department of Education and the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to study the schools and/or systems on notice and produce recommendations on how the systems can meet state performance standards.

To fulfill its statutory responsibility, OEA produced a report for each system with schools on notice. The studies focused on the systems (but addressed individual schools to the extent possible) and primarily considered general school, student, and staff information; governance and management; funding and resources; parent, community, and business involvement; facilities and climate; and class size. This report attempts to place the 11 system reports in a statewide context.

Research indicates that schools with low achievement are disproportionately likely to:

- have a large number of students from low income and minority backgrounds
- be located in communities with significant concentrations of poverty and its associated problems
- have low standards and expectations for their students
- have a weak curriculum
- have limited parental involvement
- employ less experienced and fewer well-qualified teachers and other instructional staff
- have high staff turnover rates
- have lower morale than in other schools
- have a school environment that lacks order and discipline¹

OEA staff found that no single system with schools on notice could be characterized by all these factors. Although the 98 schools are on the state's official "low-performing" list, analysts found that most schools visited demonstrated many positive traits, and most central offices appear to be focused on helping schools improve and increasing student learning. However, at least some of the common characteristics of low-performing schools are true of most of the systems and schools. Several have large numbers of students from low income and/or minority backgrounds and have large concentrations of poverty in their communities. Most have limited parental involvement, many have high staff turnover rates, and some employ a large number of teachers that are less experienced and less qualified than teachers in higher performing districts.

A caveat is important here: In this first year of study, OEA did not use a control group, which would have been useful for comparing on-notice schools to other schools.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, January 2001, *School Improvement Report: Executive Order on Actions for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools*, Washington, D.C., p. 4.

Although analysts saw first-hand many of the schools placed on notice, they did not see or analyze data for any schools not placed on the list. Whether schools on the list are very different from or similar to other schools in the state remains an unanswered question, one that OEA may explore in a future study.

In addition, policymakers should be aware that other factors may affect whether a school is placed on notice, none of which OEA can address with absolute certainty: 1) Are the criteria set by the Department of Education and the State Board of Education appropriate? 2) Do the tests Tennessee students take, which are also used in determining on-notice status, adequately reflect what is taught in their classrooms? 3) Are Tennessee teachers adequately equipped to teach the state standards? 4) Has Tennessee adopted quality standards?

The report contains system-level and state-level conclusions, summarized below.

System-level conclusions

Student readiness

Educators in the systems with schools on notice report widespread lack of readiness for school among children entering their schools. The Memphis City School System provides the most telling evidence for this claim. The system tests its kindergarten students during their first month of school using a norm-referenced test, for which the percentiles range from 1-99 with the 50th being average. In the fall of 2001, the system's average scores in the four categories tested (math, language, memory, and auditory) ranged from 16 to 27.

Various studies have found that when at-risk children attend high-quality preschool programs, fewer are placed in special education in later grades, fewer are required to repeat a grade, and more graduate from high school. Preliminary data analysis by the Department of Education has indicated the effectiveness of Tennessee's pre-kindergarten program. The state would benefit from additional analysis of this program as its pilot students progress through the educational system. (See pages 8-10.)

Teacher shortages

Both rural and urban systems with schools on notice report difficulty hiring an adequate number of properly-certified teachers. Though certain hiring difficulties can be alleviated by effective system-level administrative decisions and teacher placements, this challenge will likely increase across the state with the implementation of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2002. The law requires that all Title I schools employ only "highly qualified" teachers beginning in the fall of 2002, and that all schools do so by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, the percentage of Tennessee's teachers with waivers and permits (only about four percent of the overall teaching force) varies widely among urban and rural systems. The highest percentages of waivers and permits among the systems with schools on notice are in the largest urban system (Memphis City) and a rural system (Fayette County). (See pages 10-12.)

Technology

Some on-notice schools may benefit from enhanced use of technology for both student learning and teacher professional development. Some schools on notice are in rural areas and in some cases are extremely geographically isolated. Some have small student populations and serve multiple grade levels. Often they are unable to provide students with a variety of classes, particularly in middle and high school grades. In addition, the schools' locations can make it difficult to hire teachers with the needed certifications and provide them quality professional development. Some principals also indicate that teachers lack adequate training to use technology effectively in the classroom. (See pages 13-14.)

School accreditation

Most of the schools on notice (84.7 percent) are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In Tennessee, SACS accredits approximately 68 percent of public schools.² Accreditation ensures that schools have created a school plan and met a minimum number of standards for school operation; however, accreditation does not necessarily ensure a particular level of student academic achievement. According to state officials, SACS school improvement plans are less data-driven than state plans. A higher percentage of SACS schools are on notice compared to non-accredited and total schools. (See page 13.)

State-level conclusions

Placing schools on notice and providing technical assistance

The criteria the Department of Education and State Board of Education used to place schools on notice are not widely understood among school officials. The process for placing schools on notice has been law since 1992, and department officials note that school officials should have been aware for several years that the state was tightening its accountability system. However, the criteria changed from those used to designate "heads-up" schools in 2000, something system and school officials were not expecting. Several believe the department should have informed them of the criteria well before the announcement of identified schools. Also, OEA analysts found during interviews that some officials in the systems and schools on notice still did not fully understand the criteria, though they indicated otherwise. Department officials express confidence that school principals now understand the criteria more fully as a result of focused technical assistance by Exemplary Educators. (See pages 14-15.)

The Department of Education's method for projecting cumulative school dropout rates from school-level data exaggerates the effects of recent changes. School-level dropout rates used to place high schools on notice are projections rather than actual data. The Department of Education's projection method takes into account only the most recent year's average dropout rate for all four grades ("event rate") in calculating the

² SACS accredited 1,110 of 1,623 schools in the state in school year 2000-01 according to the 2001 Statewide Report Card.

cumulative, four-year dropout rate (“cohort rate”) for the graduating class.³ Thus, high schools have different actual cohort rates than the projection suggests. Moreover, school-level cohort rates are not comparable with district-level cohort rates, for which the Department of Education uses actual data versus projections.

The recent reauthorization of ESEA requires states to measure the dropout rate with the event rate, rather than the cohort rate. The apparent rationale for using event rather than cohort rates is that the accountability system is an annual process, and therefore the measure of performance ought to be annual rather than cumulative over four years. In contrast, Tennessee’s use of cohort dropout rates bases present accountability decisions on conditions in past years. (See page 15.)

Although the Department of Education acted quickly to provide additional technical assistance to failing schools, some of the assistance has not been available uniformly in all on-notice systems. This includes both the Exemplary Educator (EE) program and assistance from the department’s regional offices. For example, Memphis City Schools, the system with the largest number of schools on notice, was assigned relatively few EEs in 2001-02. As of late April 2002, 50 of the system’s 64 on notice schools shared 18 EEs, five of whom only began working near the end of the school year. In contrast, the only on-notice school in Campbell County, which has fewer than 50 students, was assigned three EEs. A department press release dated September 22, 2000, describing the EE program, indicated that EEs would serve up to two schools. In Memphis, several EEs serve three schools.

The Department of Education’s Division of Accountability oversees the Exemplary Educators Program, which was modeled after a similar program in Kentucky. The department, in collaboration with AEL, Inc., selects and provides training to recently retired educators to conduct school improvement activities for on notice schools. Many school administrators interviewed by OEA analysts were complimentary of the EEs assigned to their schools. (See pages 15-16.)

State Funding for K-12 Education

In 2001, the state average per pupil expenditure of \$6,055 was below the national average of \$7,436.⁴ The Department of Education Report Card gave the state a grade of “F” for per pupil expenditures. Per pupil expenditures were below the national average in all 11 systems with schools on notice, and were below the state average in five of those systems; six systems, however, were at or above the state average. In the Quality Counts 2001 and 2002 reports from *Education Week*, Tennessee received a grade of D+ for its per pupil funding adequacy and equity. (See page 17.)

³ The actual cohort rate is the total dropouts from the current year’s graduating class (over four years) divided by the ninth grade net enrollment for that class (i.e., four years earlier). The event rate is the total number of dropouts in a given year divided by the net enrollment for that year. The Tennessee Department of Education’s projected cohort rate is calculated by the following formula: $1 - (1 - \text{event rate})^4$.

⁴ <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01>.

In 2001, the state average teacher salary of \$37,431 was below the national average of \$42,436.⁵ The Department of Education Report Card gave the state a grade of “D” for teacher salaries. Teacher salaries were below the national average in ten of the 11 systems with schools on notice, and were below the state average in seven of those systems. Teacher salary averages vary from \$30,348 in Bledsoe County to \$46,751 in Alcoa City. Tennessee ranked 32nd nationally in teacher salaries paid in 2000-01, down from 27th in 1997-98.⁶ Tennessee ranked 21st nationally in average beginning salaries for teachers with a B.A. degree.⁷ (See pages 17-18.)

The cost differential factor in the Basic Education Program (BEP) formula is not based on the actual cost of operations in those counties that benefit from this additional state funding. Counties with above-average wages according to this index receive additional state funding for salaries, TCRS contributions, and FICA contributions. Counties with average or below-average wages do not receive this additional state funding. In the 2001-02 BEP, 15 school systems in nine counties received additional state funds as a result of the cost adjustment.⁸ The adjustments ranged from a low of 0.18 percent in Hamilton County to a high of 21.35 percent in Williamson County.

A cost adjustment based on wages alone: may make recruiting teachers more difficult for school systems in counties without a CDF adjustment (e.g., Hardeman and Fayette Counties, which do not receive CDF adjustments, indicated that they regularly lose teachers to Shelby County, which does receive a CDF adjustment); may artificially inflate the BEP by funding adjustments in counties where salary incentives are not necessary for teacher recruitment and retention; and may be inefficiently distributed because it does not reflect the actual cost of operating schools. (See pages 18-19.)

Data Problems

The Department of Education does not collect some data that will likely be needed for ongoing evaluation of schools. Some other department data sets were not comparable or contained inconsistencies and inaccuracies As a result, OEA staff did not report some figures for each school or system and relied on many documents received directly from systems and schools. Ongoing state efforts to evaluate school and district performance will necessitate greater data collection and analysis at all levels. As Tennessee intensifies its education accountability system, officials must ensure data required and used to evaluate schools are available and correct. (See page 19.)

Some state department data sets and widely-used documents were inconsistent or inaccurate. These included different totals for student counts on the 2001 Statewide Report Card and the 2001 Annual Report; special education counts that do not reflect the total number of students receiving services; and lack of comparable data in the zero tolerance database. (See pages 19-20.)

⁵ <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01>

⁶ American Federation of Teachers, “Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2001.” Table I-1.

⁷ American Federation of Teachers, “Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2001.” Table III-1. Beginning salaries were averaged for years 1999-2001.

⁸ These are: Anderson, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Maury, Roane, Rutherford, Shelby, and Williamson.

Recommendations

The report offers the following recommendations:

Legislative Recommendations

The General Assembly may wish to consider expanding funding for the State Board of Education's Early Childhood Education Plan. Many studies have validated the positive impact of pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children.

The General Assembly may wish to consider state-level initiatives to help school systems retain and attract highly qualified teachers, including pay incentives, incentives to delay retirement, and/or the development of teacher academies to encourage high school students to pursue teaching as a career.

The General Assembly, especially members of the Select Oversight Committee on Education and the House and Senate Education Committees, may wish to consider visiting the state's on-notice schools. State officials' greater first-hand knowledge of these schools' achievements and challenges could help lead to more focused state intervention. Most principals indicated state legislators had never visited their schools.

Administrative Recommendations

The Department of Education should expand its evaluation of the state's early childhood education pilot program in spring 2003 using TCAP data available for program participants and present its findings to the House and Senate Education Committees and the Select Oversight Committee on Education. In spring 2003, the first pilot students, now in 3rd grade, will participate in state-mandated TCAP tests.

The Department of Education should continue to explore ways to improve the educational experiences of students and teachers in rural, isolated areas, with particular consideration toward technology. The SREB notes that web-based courses may be used to serve students who are: failing a course or grade; will drop out of school without quality intervention; need one course to graduate from high school, but cannot take the needed course because of scheduling reasons; are assigned to alternative education programs because of academic or behavior problems; or cannot attend school for health reasons.⁹

The department should examine the relationship between SACS accreditation and student performance. Schools and systems seeking and maintaining accreditation must commit time and money to the process, but the benefits are not clear. The state may want to consider creating and implementing its own performance-based accreditation process that is more clearly aligned with state standards and more data-driven.

The Department of Education should continue to facilitate school officials' understanding of the accountability system and should ensure on-notice schools and systems have equal

⁹ William R. Thomas, Director for Educational Technology, *Funding Web-based Courses for K-12 Students to Meet State Educational Goals*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2002.

access to technical assistance opportunities. The department has hired additional EEs for the 2002-03 school year. In addition, systems have access to regional department and federal programs staff, equipped to answer relevant questions.

The Department of Education should consider using the event dropout rate to place high schools on notice. The newly reauthorized ESEA requires Tennessee to measure dropout using the event rate. Further, using the event rate would base annual accountability decisions on present conditions.

The Department of Education should evaluate the Exemplary Educator program in addition to other technical assistance approaches developed by LEAs to determine the strategies' effectiveness in improving student achievement. Where LEA-developed approaches are found to be effective, the department should encourage other systems to adopt similar practices. In addition, if the Exemplary Educator program appears to be effective, the department may want to consider extending it to work with schools in danger of future state identification.

The department should continue to improve data collection, management, and reporting and recommend changes to related statutes to the General Assembly, if necessary. The department should examine its reporting requirements and consider the long term needs for data used to evaluate schools. The department should then consider what it collects from schools and systems and make adjustments in the context of accountability and in observance of state and federal laws and regulations. Staff should also ensure school systems complete zero tolerance and other state reporting forms correctly before compiling and releasing state reports.

Officials in each system with schools on notice should determine if those schools receive different treatment than others by comparing student demographic and other qualities of identified schools to system-wide figures. Where inconsistencies appear—e.g., a greater percentage of minority students are served in on-notice schools or more permitted teachers are assigned to the on-notice schools—education and other community officials should explore the reasons and consider solutions.

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Introduction

In 2001, the Tennessee Department of Education identified 98 schools in 11 systems needing to improve student academic performance. The State Board of Education approved the list in September, and the commissioner officially placed the schools on notice. The 98 schools had a combined average daily membership (ADM) of 64,775 in school year 2000-01 and comprised 7.2 percent of the state's student population. See Appendix A for a list of all systems and schools on notice for 2001.

Once schools are on notice, *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-602 requires the Department of Education and the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability to study the schools and/or systems. The study must produce recommendations on how school systems can improve and meet state performance standards.

The Department of Education and the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) studied the schools and systems on notice in 2001 separately. Each agency designed research protocol to examine areas within its expertise. The department concentrated on curriculum and instruction, and the OEA examined other areas potentially affecting student achievement. The OEA considered the following areas:

- general school, student, and staff information
- governance and management
- funding and resources
- parent, community, and business involvement
- facilities and climate
- class size

The study focused on the 11 school systems but addressed individual schools to the extent possible.

Background and Methodology

The 98 Tennessee schools placed on notice failed to meet achievement and growth criteria established by the Tennessee Department of Education under the authority granted in *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-601 – 602. The law states that schools placed on notice must improve student achievement by the end of the first year or be placed on probation. Schools on notice that achieve adequate yearly progress after one year will remain on notice but will be specified as “improving.”¹ Schools unable to achieve adequate yearly progress can be on probation up to two years before facing sanctions such as reconstitution or alternative governance. The following figures display the criteria developed by the Department of Education to identify schools on notice.

¹ With the passage of the 2002 “No Child Left Behind” Act, Tennessee has adapted its accountability requirements to the federal law. Schools must show improvement for two consecutive years to move off notice completely. The 98 schools reviewed in this series of reports were placed on notice according to state law in September 2001; the “No Child Left Behind” Act became federal law in January 2002.

K-8 criteria used to place schools on notice:

Achievement criteria

School-wide three-year achievement averages in reading, language arts, and mathematics less than 40 NCE (normal curve equivalent)

Schools on notice have a three-year achievement pattern of 48-73% of their student population in the below average group.

Growth factors (Adequate Yearly Progress)

1. School-wide cumulative three-year value added of 100 percent in reading, language arts, and mathematics
2. Closing the achievement gap by a reduction in the number/percentage of students in the below average group in reading, language arts, mathematics, and writing

Schools on notice failed to meet one or both of the growth factors.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Accountability.

9-12 criteria used to place schools on notice:

Achievement criteria

Achievement levels in Algebra I End of Course, 11th grade writing, and ACT composite

Schools identified as on notice had below average achievement in two or more of these areas.

Growth factors

1. Positive Value Added (meeting predicted targets)
2. Closing the achievement gap by a reduction in the number/percentage of students in below average group
3. Positive trend in reducing dropout rate

Schools on notice failed to meet one or more of the growth factors.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Accountability.

(In August 2002, the Commissioner of Education recommended and the State Board approved the new status of schools based on 2001-02 test data. See Appendix B.)

To complete its study, the OEA assigned teams of analysts to the 11 systems with schools on notice. The department provided names of district liaisons who acted as guides through each school system's administrative structure. At a minimum, staff interviewed the following persons in each system:

- District liaisons designated by Directors of Schools
- Department of Education Regional Directors
- Principals of schools on notice

The Department of Education contracted with retired educators, referred to as Exemplary Educators, to provide technical assistance to the systems and schools on notice. OEA staff did not meet with Exemplary Educators (EEs) during the joint study because the Department of Education felt interviews with OEA could compromise EEs' relationships with systems and schools. Department of Education staff were also concerned about EEs' time constraints.

Other district staff members often participated in the interviews or were interviewed individually. OEA staff also:

- Conducted an extensive literature review of school improvement strategies and low performing schools issues
- Reviewed audits of systems with schools on notice
- Participated in staff training focused on school visits
- Observed training for Exemplary Educators conducted by the Department of Education and AEL, Inc. (contractor for Exemplary Educators program)
- Attended school board meetings in some systems with schools on notice
- Requested and reviewed available documentation from each system

Staff visited each school on notice in all systems except Memphis City. In that system, staff visited 15 of the 64 on-notice schools. The OEA's study resulted in 11 system reports. Each system report includes background information, conclusions, and recommendations.

Common characteristics of low-performing schools

In recent years, several studies have addressed school improvement and student performance, as well as related accountability issues. Research indicates that schools with low achievement are disproportionately likely to:

- have a large number of students from low income and minority backgrounds
- be located in communities with significant concentrations of poverty and its associated problems
- have low standards and expectations for their students
- have a weak curriculum
- have limited parental involvement
- employ less experienced and fewer well-qualified teachers and other instructional staff
- have high staff turnover rates
- have lower morale than in other schools
- have a school environment that lacks order and discipline²

SREB notes that separate studies of school performance in North Carolina and Texas found common characteristics among low-performing schools similar to those listed above: weak leadership, inexperienced teachers, high turnover in faculty, and a lack of focus on state content standards.³

Research-based strategies for improving schools

Improving student achievement in struggling schools is difficult. Research suggests that improvement can be achieved with concerted effort on the part of all major stakeholders.

A recent report by the Council of the Great City Schools analyzes the experiences of three large urban school districts that have raised academic performance for their district

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, January 2001, *School Improvement Report: Executive Order on Actions for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools*, Washington, D.C., p. 4.

³ Jim Watts, *Getting Results with Accountability: Rating Schools, Assisting Schools, Improving Schools*, Southern Regional Education Board, p. 18.

as a whole, while also reducing racial differences in achievement. The districts' reform strategies shared the following mutual elements:

- They focused on student achievement and specific achievement goals, on a set schedule with defined consequences; aligned curricula with state standards; and helped translate these standards into instructional practice.
- They created concrete accountability systems that went beyond what the states had established in order to hold district leadership and building-level staff personally responsible for producing results.
- They focused on the lowest-performing schools. Some districts provided additional resources and attempted to improve the stock of teachers and administrators at their lowest-performing schools.
- They adopted or developed districtwide curricula and instructional approaches rather than allowing each school to devise its own strategies.
- They supported these districtwide strategies at the central office through professional development and support for consistent implementation throughout the district.
- They drove reforms into the classroom by defining a role for the central office that entailed guiding, supporting, and improving instruction at the building level.
- They committed themselves to data-driven decision-making and instruction. They gave early and ongoing assessment data to teachers and principals as well as trained and supported them as the data were used to diagnose teacher and student weaknesses and make improvements.
- They started their reforms at the elementary grade levels instead of trying to fix everything at once.
- They provided intensive instruction in reading and math to middle and high school students, even if it came at the expense of other subjects.⁴

Common characteristics of Tennessee's on-notice schools

OEA staff found that no single system with schools on notice could be characterized by every factor listed on page 3. Although the 98 schools are on the state's official "low-performing" list, analysts found that most schools visited demonstrated many positive traits. Most are staffed by caring and energetic educators. Some facilities range in condition from good to excellent. Central office staff in most systems appear to be focused on helping schools improve and increasing student learning.

However, at least some of the common characteristics of low-performing schools are true of most of the systems and schools. Several have large numbers of students from low income and/or minority backgrounds and have large concentrations of poverty in their

⁴ Jason Snipes, Fred Doolittle, and Corinne Herlihy, *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*, MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools, September 2002, pp. xvii-xviii. (www.cgcs.org/pdfs/Foundations.pdf).

communities. Most have limited parental involvement, many have high staff turnover rates, and some employ a large number of teachers that are less experienced and less qualified than teachers in higher performing districts (as shown by the number of teachers with waivers and permits).

The percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price meals (FARM) is a commonly-used indicator of poverty. In Tennessee, 42.9 percent of students received FARM in 2000-01. As shown in the following figure, most systems with schools on notice have higher percentages of students receiving FARM than the state. Schools on notice within these systems (with the exception of Rutherford and Perry Counties, which each had one high school on notice) had a higher percentage of students receiving FARM than their system. It should be noted that high school students generally underreport their needs for FARM.

Students Receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meals, 2000-01

	% in System	% in Schools on Notice
Campbell	67.9	100
Claiborne	65.4	91.7
Davidson	52.0	64.3
Fayette	83.5	84.1
Hamilton	46.7	85.3
Hardeman	67.0	96.0
Hawkins	49.0	87.1
Knox	31.9	88.4
Memphis City	70.9	79.3
Perry	47.9	34.6
Rutherford	22.3	20.6

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card, System Report Cards, School Report Cards, 2001

Systems with schools on notice and individual schools attempt to curb the effects of poverty on the education of their students. Many students access social and other services through the schools. Some schools have access to Family Resource Centers, employ school social workers, and provide other services directly to the students. For instance, students at Sarah Moore Green Elementary School in Knox County have access to health, dental, and vision services coordinated at the school level.

Some of the systems, though not all, have a large number of minority students in on-notice schools. Other systems, however, have an overwhelming majority of Caucasian students. The table below displays the ethnic breakdown of students in the 11 systems on notice.

Student Ethnicity in Systems with Schools on Notice, 2000-01

	% African American	% Caucasian	%Other
Campbell	0.5	99.3	0.1
Claiborne	0.7	98.8	0.6
Davidson	46.1	45.3	8.6
Fayette	69.8	29.1	1.1
Hamilton	33.3	63.8	2.9
Hardeman	54.4	45.1	0.5
Hawkins	1.0	98.5	0.4
Knox	13.6	83.5	3.0
Memphis City	86.7	10.3	3.0
Perry	1.7	97.5	0.8
Rutherford	10.7	84.8	4.5

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card, System Report Cards, 2001

Further, many of the 98 schools on notice within the 11 systems are less ethnically diverse than their respective districts. Several schools had student bodies that represented only one ethnic group. The following table shows the ethnic makeup of the schools on notice within each system.

Student Ethnicity in Schools on Notice, by System, 2000-01

	% African American	% Caucasian	%Other
Campbell	0	100	0
Claiborne	0	100	0
Davidson	73.2	22.9	3.9
Fayette	78.4	20.3	1.3
Hamilton	92.3	6.9	0.9
Hardeman	96.8	3.2	0
Hawkins	0	100	0
Knox	78.3	20.5	1.2
Memphis City	94.9	3.2	1.9
Perry	2.6	96.6	0.8
Rutherford	15.5	84.5	0

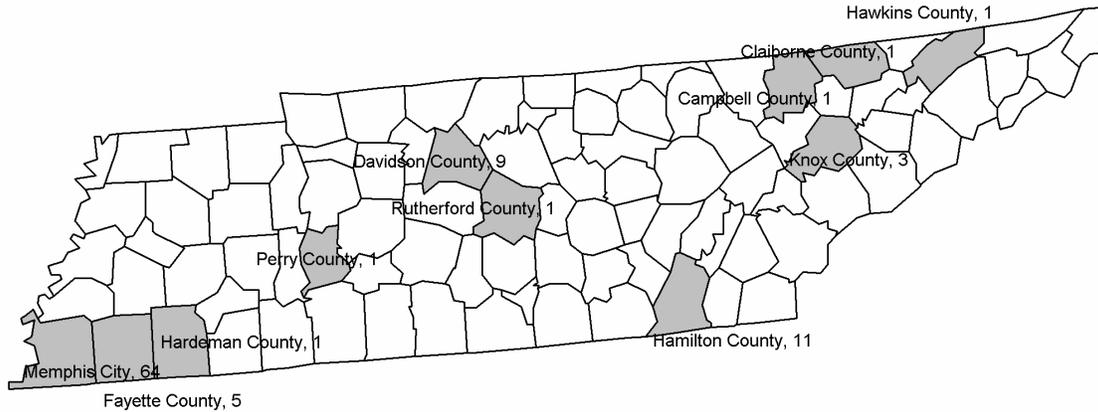
Source: Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card, School Report Cards, 2001

The 11 school systems and schools on notice experience varying levels of community support and parent involvement. Some systems, such as Hamilton County Schools, benefit from a strong, system-wide network of foundations and organizations that provide financial and other support to schools. Alternately, analysts found that the many groups interested in Memphis City Schools lack the coordination to give positive feedback and assistance. Likewise, individual schools noted varying levels of parent participation and support. Parents at some schools on notice have volunteered to build library bookshelves (Stony Fork School) and help paint (Somerville Elementary). However, most schools and systems noted a desire for increased parental involvement in academics.

Analysts also noted two other conditions present among many of Tennessee’s on-notice schools: high student mobility and a sense of isolation, even in urban settings. High mobility is shown to lower achievement for individual students, but may also have a general effect of lowering school- and district-wide performance.⁵

As shown in the following map, systems with schools on notice are located in each Grand Division of the state and include schools in both urban and rural areas. Some of the rural schools are located in extremely geographically isolated areas, with few opportunities for students to experience other settings. Somewhat unexpectedly, principals at several urban schools noted that some students had limited experiences with opportunities that, in many cases, are geographically near them. Some principals indicated that many Memphis City students had never been in downtown Memphis before, for example, or visited the Memphis Zoo.

Systems with Schools on Notice and Number of Schools



Some schools on notice are located in what are perceived as “dangerous” or “treacherous” areas. Lonsdale Elementary School in Knox County is located near a large public housing project that is frequently documented in the media as a hotspot for drugs and violence. In a similar manner but a different context, Stony Fork School in Campbell County is separated from the county seat by a long, narrow, switchback road that is not navigable by a school bus. Officials in both urban and rural school systems offered to accompany OEA analysts on school visits because of various “hazardous” conditions. Students at Kirkpatrick Elementary in Metro Nashville Schools are unable to use the playground because of broken glass, despite efforts by the community to clean the playground and conduct a neighborhood watch.

⁵ David Kerbow, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, “Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform,” October 1996, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/Reports/report05entire.html> (accessed March 14, 2002).

Analysis and Conclusions

An overall analysis of the findings from each of Tennessee's 11 systems with schools on notice during the 2001-02 school year revealed the following common issues at the system and state levels:

System level:

- student readiness;
- teacher shortages;
- technology; and
- school accreditation.

State level:

- placing schools on notice and providing technical assistance;
- funding; and
- data problems.

A caveat is important here: In this first year of study, OEA did not use a control group, which would have been useful for comparing on-notice schools to other schools. Although analysts saw first-hand many of the schools placed on notice, they did not see or analyze data for any schools not placed on the list. Whether schools on the list are very different from or similar to other schools in the state remains an unanswered question, one that OEA may explore in a future study.

In addition, policymakers should be aware that other factors may affect whether a school is placed on notice, none of which OEA can address with absolute certainty: 1) Are the criteria set by the Department of Education and the State Board of Education appropriate? 2) Do the tests Tennessee students take, which are also used in determining on-notice status, adequately reflect what is taught in their classrooms? 3) Are Tennessee teachers adequately equipped to teach the state standards? 4) Has Tennessee adopted quality standards?

System-level conclusions

Student readiness

Educators in the systems with schools on notice report widespread lack of readiness for school among children entering their schools. The Memphis City School System provides the most telling evidence for this claim. The system tests its kindergarten students during their first month of school using a norm-referenced test called Developing Skills Checklist (a product of CTB/McGraw-Hill). The percentiles range from 1-99 with the 50th percentile being average. MCS kindergarten students tested at the following percentiles in the areas noted for the last five years:⁶

⁶ The 'Memory' section tests for these skills: sequencing numbers orally, recalling names, following directions, naming letters, identifying beginning and ending sounds and letters of pictured objects, blending sounds to make words; the 'Auditory' section tests for these skills: identifying same/different words, segmenting sentences, segmenting compound words, segmenting words (identifying syllables, for

Developing Skills Checklist Test Results for Memphis City Kindergarten Students

Test Date	Math	Language	Memory	Auditory
Fall 2001	16	19	27	20
Fall 2000	16	19	23	20
Fall 1999	13	19	23	20
Fall 1998	13	19	23	20
Fall 1997	13	19	19	20

Source: Office of Testing, Memphis City Schools

Though not all systems could supply such clear-cut proof, educators at the central offices and school levels in all the systems with schools on notice frequently noted a widespread lack of student readiness among students at all grade levels.

The first goal listed in the State Board of Education's *Master Plan 2002* reads: "All children will begin school ready to learn." Currently, state-funded early childhood programs serve about 3,000 children. Some local school systems provide additional services using a mixture of funding sources, and the federal Head Start program serves about 15,000 eligible children in Tennessee. The Department of Education estimates that another 16,500 four-year-olds in the state need access to early childhood education.⁷

Authors of a 2001 report by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) reviewed state funded pre-kindergarten programs in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina, and Texas. The authors found that "[i]n each of these five states, participation in the prekindergarten program improved school readiness, raised scores on achievement tests in reading and mathematics, and reduced the likelihood that a child would be required to repeat a grade in elementary school."⁸

Various studies have found that when at-risk children attend high-quality preschool programs, fewer are placed in special education in later grades, fewer are required to repeat a grade, and more graduate from high school. Preschool programs also have been found to contribute to lower juvenile delinquency rates.⁹ In addition, a 2000 RAND study identified pre-kindergarten programs as a significant factor in those states that have shown the greatest academic gains in the last decade.¹⁰ Preliminary data analysis by the Department of Education has indicated the effectiveness of Tennessee's pre-kindergarten

example), rhyming words. E-mail correspondence from Lee McGarity, Office of Testing, Memphis City Schools, dated May 7, 2002.

⁷ E-mail from Jan Bushing, Department of Education, Oct. 4, 2002.

⁸ David R. Denton, *Improving Children's Readiness for School: Preschool Programs Make a Difference, But Quality Counts!*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2001, p. 14.

⁹ Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Social Outcomes and Delinquency," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1995; W. S. Barnett, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1995.

¹⁰ David W. Grissmer, et al., RAND Corporation, *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, July 25, 2000.

program.¹¹ The state would benefit from additional analysis of this program as its pilot students progress through the educational system.

Early Childhood Education in Tennessee

# of children under 5 (Census 2000)	# of children in kindergarten	# of children in state- funded pre-K	# of 3- and 4-year-old children in Head Start
374,880	69,625	3,000	15,795

Source: Tennessee Department of Education

Teacher shortages

Both rural and urban systems with schools on notice report difficulty hiring an adequate number of teachers with the required certifications. Though certain hiring difficulties can be alleviated by effective system-level administrative decisions and teacher placements, this challenge will likely increase across the state with the implementation of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2002. The law requires that all Title I schools employ only “highly qualified” teachers beginning in the fall of 2002, and that all schools do so by the end of the 2005-06 school year. (A majority of the schools on notice are Title I schools.) The ESEA draft regulations interpret “highly qualified” to mean certified teachers, and further provide that “no highly qualified teacher may have his or her certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis.”¹²

Although Tennessee requires that all teachers be certified, when systems have difficulty finding and hiring teachers with the necessary qualifications, the State Board of Education allows certain exceptions through the granting of permits and waivers. One way to document the teacher shortage problem is through the number of permits and waivers within each system. According to the *Annual Report 2001* issued by the Tennessee Department of Education,

- A *permit* is issued when a person the system or school wants to employ does not hold a Tennessee teaching license. This person may be employed only until a licensed teacher can be secured for the position. (According to State Board of Education rules, a permit may be reissued for a given applicant not more than two times. In other words, a person for whom a permit is issued can teach for three consecutive years. All permitted teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree.¹³)
- A *waiver* of employment standards is required when both (a) a person qualified for the assignment is not available and (b) the applicant has a license, but does not have the endorsement required to teach the anticipated assignment. A teacher may teach with an approved waiver for two years (three years for special education teachers).

¹¹ Presentation to Senate Education Committee, Jan Bushing, Tennessee Department of Education, May 15, 2002.

¹² U.S. Department of Education, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 34 CFR Part 200, available at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SASA/nprmttitleifinal.pdf>. (Accessed August 30, 2002.)

¹³ State Board of Education Rule 0520-2-4-.03(2).

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, although the percentage of Tennessee teachers with waivers or permits is about four percent of the teacher work force, the percentage varies widely among systems, both urban and rural. The following table shows the number of teachers, number of waivers, number of permits, and the percentage of teachers on waivers or permits in each system with schools on notice for the 2000-01 school year. The highest percentages of waivers and permits are in the largest urban system (Memphis City) and a rural system (Fayette County).

Teachers on Waivers and Permits, by System, 2000-01

System Name	Total # of teachers	Total # of waivers	Total # of permits	% teachers on waivers or permits
Campbell	398	11	4	3.8
Claiborne	339	16	1	5.0
Davidson	4,547	57	148	4.5
Fayette	250	6	27	13.2
Hamilton	2,634	42	91	5.0
Hardeman	304	4	29	10.8
Hawkins	480	1	2	0.6
Knox	3,380	9	2	0.3
Memphis City	6,850	162	1,013	17.1
Perry	82	4	1	6.1
Rutherford	1,651	14	4	1.1

Source: Department of Education, Report Card 2001

In addition, State Board of Education rules allow a teacher to teach up to two sections of one course outside the area of endorsement without being granted a waiver.¹⁴ This means that the number of students taught by teachers who are not technically qualified to teach a particular subject is larger than the number of waivers implies. However, the state board notes that the current rule allowing this (0520-1-2-.03) is not within ESEA requirements for highly qualified teachers, and must be changed.¹⁵

Reasons for teacher hiring difficulties in Tennessee may include the following:

- *Systems that border other states or are close to Tennessee's borders may have difficulty competing with higher pay scales offered to teachers in other states, and, in some cases, in other Tennessee school systems.* For example, Hamilton County, Memphis City, and Fayette County school officials indicate that they must compete with neighboring states in the hiring and retention of teachers. For a system such as Fayette County, nearby Tennessee systems with higher pay scales, such as Memphis City and Shelby County, offer competition as well.

¹⁴ State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-2-.03.

¹⁵ Karen Weeks, State Board of Education, "Re: Tuesday, September 3," E-mail to the author, September 4, 2002.

- *Retired Tennessee teachers who wish to return to the classroom may find it more lucrative to teach in another state.* T.C.A. 8-36-821 provides that retired teachers must wait one year before returning to the classroom in Tennessee, at which time they are ineligible to accrue additional retirement benefits, accrue leave, or receive medical insurance coverage. In addition, they can receive no more than 85 percent of the salary set by the system for teachers with comparable training and years of experience filling similar positions. Memphis City Schools notes in its brochure titled *2002 Legislative Agenda* that: “Many of our most experienced and qualified employees retire and then choose to teach/work in another state, allowing them to continue to receive a full salary as well as their full retirement benefits.”

(In 2002, the Select Oversight Committee on Education will consider a bill allowing LEAs to rehire immediately retired public schoolteachers. Both the Senate and House Education Committees of the 102nd General Assembly considered HB2411/SB2468, but the House Education Committee referred the bill to joint oversight because of increased costs associated with implementation.)

- *Many students who earn a teaching degree ultimately do not choose to teach, and many teachers choose to leave the profession after teaching for a relatively short period of time.* Although the percentage of graduates from both Tennessee’s public and private institutions who enter a Tennessee classroom increased during the 1990s, many prepared graduates never choose to teach.¹⁶

Among newly hired teachers (with no previous experience), the most recent data indicate that 36 percent exit during the first four years and 42 percent exit during the first five years.¹⁷ Data also indicate that unless they return within a year, most never return to teaching at all.¹⁸ Some point to a lack of support by administrators and other teachers. Others cite a lack of adequate preparation.

- *Some subject areas of study do not attract an adequate number of students pursuing a teaching degree.* The SREB report notes that few graduates of Tennessee’s teacher education programs are prepared to teach subject areas in secondary schools. In certain subjects, very small numbers of graduates are prepared and hired to teach. For example, in the 1990s the state’s public colleges and universities prepared 11 chemistry majors for Tennessee classrooms and six entered teaching. Of 38 science education majors, 17 began teaching. Of 72 mathematics education majors, 50 percent began teaching. Of the 171 mathematics majors seeking licensure, 63 percent began teaching.¹⁹
- *Some systems may have difficulty attracting quality teachers because of the inherent problems (whether perceived or actual) in urban and rural systems.*

¹⁶ Lynn Cornett, SREB, *Teacher Supply and Demand in Tennessee*, 2001, p. 6. Available: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/faesupademexecsum2001.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2002).

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

Technology

Some on-notice schools may benefit from enhanced use of technology for both student learning and teacher professional development. Some of the schools on notice are located in rural areas and in some cases are extremely geographically isolated. Some have small student populations and serve multiple grade levels. Often they are unable to provide students with a variety of classes, particularly in middle and high school grades. In addition, the schools' locations can make it difficult to hire teachers with the needed certifications and provide teachers with quality professional development.

All of the more isolated on-notice schools have at least some computers that are connected to the Internet, but some report connection problems. Some principals also indicate that teachers lack adequate training to use technology effectively in the classroom.

SREB notes that “[p]roviding quality instruction is a pressing issue when teachers are teaching multiple grade levels and multiple subjects at the same time...With Web-based courses now available, the answer to the dilemma changes. Courses can be available to students without having to employ quality full-time teachers in each subject in each school.”²⁰

According to SREB, more than half of the states nationally have created “virtual schools” that use Web-based courses to increase student access to educational services. Kentucky, West Virginia, Florida, and Maryland, for example, have all developed virtual schools in the last few years. Virtual schools may: allow students to access courses (including advanced placement courses and electives) that their schools are unable to offer; offset teacher shortages in some subject areas (such as foreign languages); and reduce costs of providing specific courses to small numbers of students.

States develop and implement virtual schools differently. For example, some states may develop their own Web-based courses, while others may review and approve courses created by outside vendors, such as distance learning companies, organizations, and K-12 and higher education institutions. An important part of the approval process requires ensuring that courses align with state standards. Additionally, some states use distance learning to increase professional development opportunities for teachers.

During the 2002-03 school year, select schools in three Tennessee school systems—Hawkins, Macon, and Knox—will have access to some courses developed through the Florida Virtual School. According to the Tennessee Department of Education’s Office of Curriculum and Instruction, this is a “pilot” year to learn more about Web-based learning for Tennessee’s high school students. Office of Curriculum and Instruction staff have reviewed and approved the courses that Tennessee students will be able to access through its special course approval process. One of the schools accessing the Web-based courses

²⁰ William R. Thomas, Director for Educational Technology, *Funding Web-based Courses for K-12 Students to Meet State Educational Goals*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2002, p. 5.

is Clinch School in Hawkins County, an on-notice K-12 school located in an isolated, rural East Tennessee community.

School accreditation

Most of the schools on notice (84.7 percent) are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Sixteen of the 98 schools on notice are not SACS-accredited. In Tennessee, SACS accredits approximately 68 percent of public schools.²¹ Accreditation ensures that schools have created a school plan and met a minimum number of standards for school operation; however, accreditation does not necessarily ensure a particular level of student academic achievement. According to state officials, SACS school improvement plans are less data-driven than state plans. A higher percentage of SACS schools are on notice compared to non-accredited and total schools.

SACS Accredited vs. Non-Accredited Schools on Notice in Tennessee

	SACS-Accredited	Non-Accredited	TOTAL
Number of Schools	1,110	513	1,623
Number on Notice	82	16	98
Percentage on Notice	7.38%	3.11%	6.03%

Tennessee Department of Education Statewide Report Card 2001, SACS Directory

Many schools on notice for low performance have been accredited for several years. Some systems with schools on notice that are not accredited plan to begin the SACS accreditation process. According to an official, SACS can place schools that are not meeting state standards in a “warning” status and remove accreditation after a few years of no improvement; however, SACS tends to reprimand schools only after state action.²²

State-level conclusions

Placing schools on notice and providing technical assistance

The criteria the Department of Education and State Board of Education used for placing schools on notice are not widely understood among school officials. The process for placing schools on notice has been law since 1992, and department officials note that school officials should have been aware for several years that the state was tightening its accountability system. System and school officials noted, though, that the criteria changed from those used to designate “heads-up” schools in 2000, something they were not expecting. Several believe the department should have informed them of the criteria well before the announcement of identified schools.

Also, OEA analysts found during the report interview process that some officials in the systems and schools on notice still did not fully understand the criteria, even though they indicated that they understood it. The increasing state and national emphasis on improvement in addition to achievement may have contributed to the lack of

²¹ SACS accredited 1,110 of 1,623 schools in the state in school year 2000-01 according to the 2001 Statewide Report Card.

²² Telephone interview with Dr. Steve Baker, Executive Director, Commission on SACS Elementary and Middle Schools, July 5, 2002.

understanding. Department officials express confidence that school principals now understand the criteria more fully as a result of focused technical assistance by Exemplary Educators.

The department's criteria for determining Title I School Improvement schools is also different from the criteria used to place schools on the state's on-notice list. As these two sets of criteria will merge into one accountability system for school year 2002-03, the criteria for placing schools on notice may change again.

The Department of Education's method for projecting cumulative school dropout rates from school-level data exaggerates the effects of recent changes. School-level dropout rates used to place schools on notice are projections rather than actual data. The Department of Education's projection method takes into account only the most recent year's average dropout rate for all four grades ("event rate") in calculating the cumulative, four-year dropout rate ("cohort rate") for the graduating class.²³ Thus, high schools have different actual cohort rates than the projection suggests. Moreover, school-level cohort rates are not comparable with district-level cohort rates, for which the Department of Education uses actual data, as opposed to projections.

The recent reauthorization of the ESEA requires states to measure the dropout rate with the event rate, rather than the cohort rate.²⁴ The apparent rationale for using event rates is that the accountability system is an annual process, and therefore the measure of performance ought to be annual rather than cumulative over four years. In contrast, Tennessee's use of cohort dropout rates bases present accountability decisions on conditions in past years.

Although the Department of Education acted quickly to provide additional technical assistance to failing schools, some of the assistance has not been available uniformly in all on-notice systems. This includes both the Exemplary Educator (EE) program and assistance from the department's regional offices. For example, Memphis City Schools, the system with the largest number of schools on notice, was assigned relatively few EEs. As of late April 2002, 50 of the system's 64 on notice schools shared 18 EEs, five of whom only began working near the end of the school year. In contrast, the only on-notice school in Campbell County, which has fewer than 50 students, was assigned three EEs. A department press release dated September 22, 2000, describing the EE program, indicated that EEs would serve up to two schools. In Memphis, several EEs serve three schools.

Further, on-notice school and system officials noted varying levels of contact with regional office staff ranging from no help to weekly assistance.

²³ The actual cohort rate is the total dropouts from the current year's graduating class (over four years) divided by the ninth grade net enrollment for that class (i.e., four years earlier). The event rate is the total number of dropouts in a given year divided by the net enrollment for that year. The Tennessee Department of Education's projected cohort rate is calculated by the following formula: $1 - (1 - \text{event rate})^4$.

²⁴ 20 USC 6561h (or see the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Title I, Part H, Section 1829).

The Department of Education's Division of Accountability oversees the Exemplary Educators Program, which was modeled after a similar program in Kentucky. The department, in collaboration with AEL, Inc., selects and provides training to recently retired educators to conduct school improvement activities for on notice schools. (AEL, Inc. is one of 10 federally supported regional education laboratories across the country.) Exemplary Educators work as independent contractors for the department and assist schools by modeling teaching strategies, serving as mentors to principals and teachers, analyzing student performance data, connecting schools with professional development providers, and building capacity for continuous school improvement.

Exemplary Educators receive \$300 per day plus travel expenses consistent with state travel regulations. The department estimates that a 100-day contract will provide the services of an Exemplary Educator for two schools during an academic year. The department indicates that its screening process for applicants is rigorous, perhaps one reason the program has been unable to accommodate all on notice schools and has had to assign EEs to multiple schools in some areas.

The department's requirements for EEs are:

- Tennessee certification
- Minimum of five years experience as an educator
- Experience as an educator within the last five years
- Knowledge of current educational practice in Tennessee
- Ability to work with peers
- Personal integrity
- Good judgment
- Ability to solve problems
- Ability to provide leadership
- Commitment to accept a two year assignment
- Readiness to model lessons in classrooms
- Willingness to travel
- Expertise with Instructional Technology

Many school administrators interviewed by OEA analysts were complimentary of the EEs assigned to their schools. Principals noted that EEs assisted with various school improvement initiatives, including planning, data analysis, and training.

Some systems provide their own technical assistance to the schools on notice. This is particularly true for larger systems, which typically have more available resources. For example, both Hamilton County and Memphis City have developed team-based approaches, and have included Exemplary Educators as members of the assistance teams.

Though generally more dependent on state assistance, smaller systems have assisted schools on notice by providing more professional development opportunities, encouraging grant writing, and targeting available resources to on-notice schools.

State Funding for K-12 Education

In 2000-2001, the state average per pupil expenditure of \$6,055 was below the national average of \$7,436.²⁵ The Department of Education Report Card gave the state a grade of “F” for per pupil expenditures. In the Quality Counts 2001 and 2002 reports from *Education Week*, Tennessee received a grade of D+ for its per pupil funding adequacy and equity.

Per pupil expenditures were below the national average in all 11 systems with schools on notice, and were below the state average in five of those systems; six systems, however, were at or above the state average. The table on page 17 shows the per pupil expenditures for each system with schools on notice.

**Per Pupil Expenditures (PPE) and
Average Daily Attendance (ADA)
2001-02²⁶**

System	ADA	PPE	% of State Avg.
Campbell County	5,863	\$ 5,690	89.6
Claiborne County	4,301	\$ 6,632	104.5
Davidson County	64,133	\$ 7,630	120.2
Fayette County	3,154	\$ 7,000	110.3
Hamilton County	37,932	\$ 7,034	110.8
Hardeman County	4,292	\$ 6,072	95.6
Hawkins County	6,703	\$ 5,872	92.5
Knox County	49,097	\$ 6,324	99.6
Memphis City	107,716	\$ 7,368	116.0
Perry County	1,091	\$ 6,046	95.2
Rutherford County	25,561	\$ 5,748	90.5
STATE	848,508	\$ 6,349	

In 2001, the state average teacher salary of \$37,431 was below the national average of \$42,436.²⁷ The Department of Education Report Card gave the state a grade of “D” for teacher salaries. Teacher salaries were below the national average in ten of the 11 systems with schools on notice, and were significantly below the state average in six of those systems, as indicated in the following table.

Average Teacher Salary as Percentage of State and National Averages, 2000-01

System	Average Teacher Salary	% of State Average	% of National Average
Campbell	\$32,127	85.8	75.7
Claiborne	\$32,736	87.5	77.1

²⁵ <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01>.

²⁶ Updated per Tennessee Department of Education memo, Melissa Hinton, 9/29/2002.

²⁷ <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01>

Davidson	\$41,700	111.4	98.3
Fayette	\$31,176	83.3	73.5
Hamilton	\$39,320	105.0	92.7
Hardeman	\$32,180	86.0	75.8
Hawkins	\$31,994	85.5	75.4
Knox	\$37,547	100.3	88.5
Memphis City	\$43,143	115.3	101.7
Perry	\$32,878	87.8	77.5
Rutherford	\$37,284	99.6	87.9

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, System Report Cards

Teacher salary averages vary from \$30,348 in Bledsoe County to \$46,751 in Alcoa City. Tennessee ranked 32nd nationally in teacher salaries paid in 2000-01, down from 27th in 1997-98.²⁸ Tennessee ranked 21st nationally in average beginning salaries for teachers with a B.A. degree.²⁹

The cost differential factor in the Basic Education Program (BEP) formula is not based on the actual cost of operations in those counties that benefit from this additional state funding. Generally, the BEP assumes uniform costs across the state. However, TCA §49-3-351(a) requires that the BEP include a “cost of operations adjustment.” Tennessee has chosen to make this adjustment by means of a county-level wage index weighted by population. The effect is that counties with above-average wages according to this index receive additional state funding for salaries, TCRS contributions, and FICA contributions. Counties with average or below-average wages do not receive this additional state funding.

In the 2001-02 BEP, 15 school systems in nine counties received additional state funds as a result of the cost adjustment.³⁰ The adjustments ranged from a low of 0.18 percent in Hamilton County to a high of 21.35 percent in Williamson County. Thus, as a specific example, for FY 2002 the BEP funded salaries generated for Williamson County at a level that is 21.35 percent above the BEP-generated level that most (123) school systems received.

The practice of basing the CDF on wages does not adequately reflect the economics of teacher recruitment and retention. A cost adjustment based on wages alone:

- may make recruiting teachers more difficult for school systems in counties without a CDF adjustment (e.g., Hardeman and Fayette Counties, which do not receive CDF adjustments, indicated that they regularly lose teachers to Shelby County, which does receive a CDF adjustment);
- may artificially inflate the BEP by funding adjustments in counties where salary incentives are not necessary for teacher recruitment and retention; and

²⁸ American Federation of Teachers, “Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2001.” Table I-1.

²⁹ Ibid, Table III-1. Beginning salaries were averaged for years 1999-2001.

³⁰ These are: Anderson, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Maury, Roane, Rutherford, Shelby, and Williamson.

- may be inefficiently distributed because it does not reflect the actual cost of operating schools (a market basket of educational goods and services would more accurately reflect this cost).

Data Problems

An increased emphasis on accountability necessitates greater data collection and analysis at all levels. As Tennessee intensifies its education accountability system, officials must ensure data required and used to evaluate schools are available and correct. As well, researchers attempting to understand why schools are not meeting performance standards need current and accurate data to analyze relevant trends. OEA analysts encountered the following education data-related issues while examining the state's schools on notice.

The Department of Education does not collect some data that will likely be needed for ongoing evaluation of schools. Some other department data sets were not comparable or contained inconsistencies and inaccuracies

To ensure consistent sources and to avoid burdening principals and system officials, researchers requested school- and system-level data from the state department. Examples of reports the department did not collect include numbers of teachers on permits at the school level and numbers of special education students by school. As a result, OEA staff did not report some figures for each school or system and relied on many documents received directly from systems and schools.

Some state department data sets and widely-used documents contain inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The following problems complicated OEA researchers' attempts to place systems and schools on notice in a state context.

Student counts:

- The 2001 Statewide Report Card contains different totals of public education students.
 - For number of students, the report card contains the "average daily count of students enrolled," or the ADM.
 - The report card also breaks down students by ethnic group, and the sum of students in these categories (906,118) is quite different than the ADM number (896,566). The report card terminology sheet does not explain the collection of "ethnic composition of students," but the 2001 *Annual Report* notes that these data are "based on an annual count of students enrolled on the 20th day of the school year."
- The 2001 *Annual Report* and the 2001 Statewide Report Card show different figures for one ethnic category. The Report Card reports a 0.2 percent figure for the state's Native American students, but the *Annual Report* states that the Native American population comprises two percent of students. The percentages for ethnic groups in the *Annual Report* sum to 101.8 percent.

Special education:

- The 2001 *Annual Report* and the 2001 Statewide Report Card report different raw numbers of special education students in the state: (148,649 vs. 148,567, respectively), though both report a 16.6 percent special education population.

- The 2001 individual school report cards do not reflect the total number of students in a school who receive special education services. School report cards report “special education tested,” the percentage of a school’s students taking the TCAP who were identified and served as special education students. Only students in grades 3-8 are required by the state to take the TCAP; therefore, “special education tested” percentages are not available for high schools serving only grades 9-12. The figures also do not represent special education students in grades K-2 in a school. A fact sheet of report card terminology does not explain special education figures listed on school report cards.

Other problems:

- Though state funding for LEAs is based on ADM, the 2001 *Annual Report* and 2001 Statewide Report Card report total expenditures per pupil by ADA, a lower number. If the department reported this figure by ADM, it would be \$352 less per student (\$5,703) than the reported \$6,055. Because attendance is lower than membership, reported expenditures per pupil are higher than if reported by enrollment.
- Researchers could not use the state’s 2001 Zero Tolerance database because some incidents are reported by student social security number rather than school number. It also appears that some incidents are reported multiple times.

These data problems complicated the examination of schools and systems on notice and, if unattended, could undermine future attempts to report accurately the status of education in Tennessee.

Recommendations

Legislative Recommendations

The General Assembly may wish to consider expanding funding for the State Board of Education's Early Childhood Education Plan. Many sources indicate that children who have quality preschool experiences learn to read and adapt to school better, are less likely to become juvenile delinquents, and are more likely to attend college and be successfully employed as adults. Research indicates that quality preschool could especially benefit many of the students in schools on notice, i.e., children from low income backgrounds.

The General Assembly may wish to consider a variety of state-level initiatives to help school systems retain and attract highly qualified teachers, such as:

- Pay incentives for qualified teachers who agree to teach for a specified number of years in systems with low-performing schools.
- A one-step raise for teachers who have taught for 30 years or more and who agree to continue teaching for another year rather than retire. Alternatively, the one-step raise could be contingent on the local system picking up a portion of the cost. This could help school systems retain experienced, qualified teachers in the classroom and could help teachers improve their retirement benefits.
- Requiring or encouraging the development of teacher academies (sometimes called pre-teaching academies) throughout the state, which would encourage high school students to pursue teaching as a career. Like other vocational academies, teacher academies include student internships, specialized coursework for participating students, and a mentoring system between teachers and enrollees.

The General Assembly, especially members of the Select Oversight Committee on Education and the House and Senate Education Committees, may wish to consider visiting the state's on-notice schools. Such visits might inform legislators about the disparity of educational opportunities among public schools in Tennessee. State officials' greater first-hand knowledge of these schools' achievements and challenges could help lead to more focused state intervention. Most principals indicated state legislators had never visited their schools, and that they would welcome such visits.

Administrative Recommendations

The Department of Education should expand its evaluation of the state's early childhood education pilot program in spring 2003 using TCAP data available for program participants and present its findings to the House and Senate Education Committees and the Select Oversight Committee on Education. The state started its early childhood education pilot program with 300 students in 1998-99. In spring 2003, the first pilot students, now in 3rd grade, will participate in state-mandated TCAP tests. During the 2002 legislative session, the department presented data from Haywood County to the Senate Education Committee. Haywood County Schools voluntarily tests students in the 2nd grade, and its state pre-kindergarten students outscored their peers. The department should continue its analysis and present similar comparisons for all program participants.

The Department of Education should continue to explore ways to improve the educational experiences of students and teachers in rural, isolated areas, with particular consideration toward technology. Partly through a federal grant and in conjunction with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the department has been working to increase opportunities for underserved, low-income high school students. For example, Clinch School in Hawkins County, which is on notice, is accessing web-based courses for its high school students through the Florida Virtual School during the 2002-03 school year, for which the department has granted special course approval. The school also received the AP Nexus grant, which provides student tuition for advanced placement courses provided online, course materials, laptop computers (on loan) for students' use at home, and a facilitator at the school.

The SREB notes that web-based courses may be used to serve students who are: failing a course or grade; will drop out of school without quality intervention; need one course to graduate from high school, but cannot take the needed course because of scheduling reasons; are assigned to alternative education programs because of academic or behavior problems; or cannot attend school for health reasons.³¹ Such courses may also reduce the costs of delivering specific courses to small numbers of students and offset teacher shortages in critical areas.

The department should examine the relationship between SACS accreditation and student performance. Most Tennessee public schools are accredited. Schools and systems seeking and maintaining accreditation must commit time and money to the process, but the benefits are not clear. The state may want to consider creating and implementing its own performance-based accreditation process that is more clearly aligned with state standards and more data-driven.

As of 1998, over half the states accredited public K-12 schools.³² A growing number of states, including several in the SREB, are tying performance measures to state accreditation. For example, the Virginia State Board of Education regulates the state's accreditation system (Standards of Accreditation), which uses measures of student achievement as its primary criterion. The board annually reviews the status of each school for placement in an accreditation category. Local boards are required to maintain state-accredited schools and submit corrective action plans for those that do not meet the standards. The state's department of education provides technical assistance to schools that do not meet the criteria.³³

³¹ William R. Thomas, Director for Educational Technology, *Funding Web-based Courses for K-12 Students to Meet State Educational Goals*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2002.

³² ECS StateNotes, Accountability, "State-level Policies Regarding Accreditation in Public Schools," ECS Information Clearinghouse, 1998, Available: <http://www.exs.org/clearinghouse/14/38/1438.htm> (accessed November 13, 2002).

³³ Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Public Affairs, "Highlights of the Standards of Quality," Virginia Board of Education Briefing, March 26, 2002, Available: http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/VA_Board/Standards/SOQPrimer.pdf (accessed November 13, 2002).

The Department of Education should continue to facilitate school officials' understanding of the accountability system and should ensure on-notice schools and systems have equal access to technical assistance opportunities. Regional staff and EEs have aided the department's efforts to raise school and system-level awareness about student performance and school improvement. The department should continue to provide opportunities for educators to learn about these state and federal requirements and has hired additional EEs for the 2002-03 school year. In addition, systems have access to regional department and federal programs staff, equipped to answer relevant questions.

The Department of Education should consider using the event dropout rate to place high schools on notice. The newly reauthorized ESEA requires Tennessee to measure dropout using the event rate. Further, using the event rate would base annual accountability decisions on present conditions.

The Department of Education should evaluate the Exemplary Educator program in addition to other technical assistance approaches developed by LEAs to determine the strategies' effectiveness in improving student achievement. Where LEA-developed approaches are found to be effective, the department should encourage other systems to adopt similar practices. In addition, if the Exemplary Educator program appears to be effective, the department may want to consider extending it to work with schools in danger of future state identification.

The department should continue to improve data collection, management, and reporting and recommend changes to related statutes to the General Assembly, if necessary. As the state strengthens its accountability system, the education data system is becoming increasingly important. The department should examine its reporting requirements and consider the long term needs for data used to evaluate schools. The department should then consider what it collects from schools and systems and make adjustments in the context of accountability and in observance of state and federal laws and regulations. If certain statutory provisions related to data collection require an update in light of increased accountability, the department should recommend those changes to the state legislature. The department must also remain focused on improving accuracy to ensure the data collected and used to evaluate schools and systems are correct.

The state's accountability system and financial integrity depend on reliable and relevant education data. The department should continually review the reports it collects and reporting deadlines to ensure it has information pertinent to tracking student outcomes and school management. Some information the department has for school districts should be available at the school level since schools are accountable for student performance. For example, the department may wish to collect school-level financial information. The department may also wish to standardize and gather information on school characteristics linked to student performance (i.e., teacher turnover rates and/or student mobility rates). Doing so would allow the department to identify model, high-performing schools that also have challenges. In its analysis, the department may also find it collects some unnecessary information.

The department should improve internal checks and balances for validating data it releases to the public and uses to hold schools accountable. Student data could benefit from established internal control systems that would target numbers that appear to be incorrect. The department should assign responsibilities for checking data by position and follow procedures with appropriate documentation that checks have occurred. Such responsibilities and procedures might include year-to-year, system-to-system, and total-to-total comparisons between the report cards and *Annual Reports*, including built-in computer procedures to target any differences.

Staff should also explain reporting methods clearly in documents released to the public. The department should include an accurate description of each item on the Report Card on the accompanying terminology fact sheet and on each data description in the *Annual Report*. For example, the department should explain that special education tested figures on school report cards do not accurately represent the total percentage of special education students in a school. The department should consider adding to report cards and the *Annual Report* contact information for state department officials who can answer questions.

Department staff should ensure school systems complete zero tolerance and other state reporting forms correctly before compiling and releasing state reports. The department should check the systems in place to validate LEA student data as part of the recommended internal checks and balances for accuracy. Each employee responsible for data should make adjustments, including asking LEAs to re-submit reports, before completing data analysis. For example, some problems with the Zero Tolerance database may have been caused by faulty reporting from certain school systems. The department should also ensure it issues proper and standard instructions with reports and provides ongoing training for district staff to complete state reports correctly.

Officials in each system with schools on notice should determine if those schools receive different treatment than others by comparing student demographic and other qualities of identified schools to system-wide figures. Specific analysis should include teacher turnover and teacher credentials in on-notice schools, particularly the number of teacher waivers and permits. Where inconsistencies appear—e.g., a greater percentage of minority students are served in on-notice schools or more permitted teachers are assigned to the on-notice schools—education and other community officials should explore the reasons and consider solutions.

Appendix A: List of On-Notice Systems and Schools 2000-01

Campbell Stony Fork*

Claiborne Clairfield Elementary*

Davidson East Middle*+ Kirkpatrick Elementary* Maplewood High+ Pearl Cohn High+ Shwab Elementary*+ Stratford High+ Warner Elementary*+ West End Middle + Whites Creek Comprehensive High

Fayette Fayette Ware High*+ Jefferson Elementary*+ Northwest Elementary*+ Somerville Elementary*+ Southwest Elementary*+

Hamilton Calvin Donaldson Elementary* Chattanooga Middle* Dalewood Middle* East Lake Elementary* Hardy Elementary*+ Howard Elementary*+ Howard School Academics & Technology*+ John P. Franklin Middle* Orchard Knob Elementary*+ Orchard Knob Middle* Woodmore Elementary*

Hardeman Grand Junction Elementary*+

Hawkins Clinch School*

Knox Lonsdale Elementary* Maynard Elementary* Sarah M. Greene Elementary*

Memphis City Airways Middle*+ Booker T. Washington High*+ Brookmeade Elementary*+ Carver High*+ Chickasaw Junior High*+ Corning Elementary*+ Cypress Middle School*+ Denver Elementary*+ Dunbar Elementary*+ East High+ Fairley Elementary*+ Fairley High*+ Fairview Junior High*+ Frayser Elementary*+ Frayser High*+ Geeter Middle*+ Georgian Hills Elementary*+ Georgian Hills Junior High*+ Graceland Elementary*+ Hamilton High*+ Hamilton Middle*+ Hawkins Mill Elementary*+ Hillcrest High*+ Hollywood Elementary*+ Humes Middle*+ Kingsbury High*+ Lanier Junior High*+

Larose Elementary*+ Lester Elementary*+ Levi Elementary*+ Lincoln Elementary*+ Locke Elementary*+ Longview Middle*+ Manassas High*+ Melrose High*+ Middle College High*+ Mitchell Road High*+ Northside High*+ Oakhaven High*+ Orleans Elementary*+ Raineshaven Elementary*+ Raleigh Egypt High+ Raleigh Egypt Middle*+ Riverview Middle*+ Shannon Elementary*+ Sharpe Elementary*+ Sheffield Elementary*+ Sheffield High*+ Sherwood Middle*+ South Side High*+ Spring Hill Elementary*+ Springdale Elementary*+ Treadwell Elementary*+ Treadwell High*+ Trezevant High+ Vance Middle*+ Westhaven Elementary*+ Westside High*+ Westwood Elementary*+ Westwood High*+ Whitehaven High+ Whitney Elementary*+ Winchester Elementary*+ Wooddale High+

Perry Perry County High

Rutherford Holloway High+

Title I schools are marked with *.
SACS accredited schools are marked with +.

Appendix B
Status of Schools On Notice 2002-03
as reported by the Department of Education³⁴

(Note: This list includes Title I schools in School Improvement that were not on notice in 2001-02.)

**Achieved good standing by showing two years of adequate progress,
 2000-01 and 2001-02**

School system	Schools in good standing
Anderson County	Grand Oaks
Campbell County	West Lafollette
Cocke County	Grassy Fork Northwest
Cumberland County	Pine View
Fayette County	Central Elementary LaGrange Moscow
Humboldt City	East End Elementary Main Street Elementary
Henderson County	Scotts Hill School
Morgan County	Oakdale Petros Joyner
Harriman City	Central Intermediate
Memphis City	Cherokee Elementary Douglass Elementary Evans Elementary Pyramid Academy

Schools making adequate progress 2001-02

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Blount County	Eagleton Elementary
Campbell County	Stony Fork
Carter County	Range Elementary
Claiborne County	Powell Valley Elementary
Cleveland City	Arnold Elementary Blythe-Bower Elementary
Davidson County	Shwab Elementary West End Middle Pearl Cohn High School Whites Creek High School
Fayette County	Jefferson Elementary Southwest Elementary Fayette Ware High School Somerville Elementary

³⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, "State Announces School Status 2002-03," News Release, August 23, 2002.

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Grainger County	Joppa Elementary Washburn Elementary
Grundy County	Tracy Elementary
Hamblen County	Lincoln Heights Elementary
Hamilton County	Calvin Donaldson Howard Elementary Howard School of Academics and Technology
Hawkins County	Clinch School
Kingsport City	Roosevelt Elementary
Knox County	Sarah M. Greene Elementary
Lawrence County	Ingram Sowell Elementary
Maury County	James Woody/Mt. Pleasant Elementary
Perry County	Perry County High School
Putnam County	Uffleman Elementary
Rutherford County	Holloway High School
Union County	Luttrell Elementary Maynardville Elementary
Wayne County	Frank Hughes
Memphis City	Berclair Elementary Bethel Grove Elementary Coleman Elementary Cummings Elementary Dunn Avenue Elementary Egypt Elementary Kingsbury Elementary Klondike Elementary Lauderdale Elementary Oakshire Elementary Raleigh- Bartlett Scenic Hills Brookmeade Elementary Corning Elementary Fairley Elementary Frayser Elementary Graceland Elementary Levi Elementary Lincoln Elementary Locke Elementary

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Memphis City (continued)	Orleans Elementary Raineshaven Elementary Raleigh Egypt Middle School Shannon Elementary Sharpe Elementary Sheffield Elementary Trezevant High School Whitney Elementary Melrose High School Northside High School Oakhaven High School Whitehaven High School

**Schools failing to make adequate improvement 2001-02
Recommended for probation 2002-03**

School System	Probation
Claiborne County	Clairfield Elementary
Davidson County	Kirkpatrick Elementary Warner Elementary Maplewood High School Stratford High School
Fayette County	Northwest Elementary
Hamilton County	Chattanooga Middle School Dalewood Middle School East Lake Elementary John P. Franklin Middle School Hardy Elementary Orchard Knob Elementary Orchard Knob Middle School Woodmore Elementary
Hardeman County	Grand Junction Elementary
Knox County	Maynard Elementary Lonsdale Elementary
Memphis City	Airways Middle School Carver High School Chickasaw Junior High Cypress Junior High Denver Elementary

School System	Probation
Memphis City (continued)	Dunbar Elementary Fairview Junior High Frayser High School Geeter Middle School Georgian Hills Elementary Georgian Hills Junior High Hamilton Middle School Hawkins Mill Elementary Hillcrest High School Hollywood Elementary Humes Middle School Lanier Junior High Larose Lester Elementary Longview Middle School Oakhaven High School Riverview Middle School Sheffield High School Sherwood Middle School Spring Hill Elementary Springdale Treadwell Elementary Treadwell High School Trezevant High School Vance Middle School Westhaven Elementary Westside High School Westwood Elementary Westwood High School Winchester Elementary Booker T. Washington High School East High School Fairley High School Hamilton High School Kingsbury High School Manassas High School Middle College High School Mitchell Road High School Raleigh Egypt High School South Side High School Wooddale High School

Appendix C: Department of Education's response to the report

NOTE FROM OFFICE OF EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY: The Department of Education did not provide an official response to this report but submitted the following specific comments electronically.

Executive Summary, page ii, second paragraph

The DOE offers the following response to the questions posed for policymakers by OEA:

1. *Are the criteria appropriate?* The DOE established its criteria based upon the guidance of the USDOE as well as the legislative intent of the Education Improvement Act. The same criteria were used for all schools that were placed on notice. Utilizing a specific data driven system eliminated subjectivity. The criteria were presented to and approved by the USDOE with regard to meeting the intent of the "No Child Left Behind" before being presented for approval to the State Board of Education.
2. *Do the tests reflect what is taught?* The DOE has contracted with a respected external evaluator (Achieve) to study the alignment of both the current and the proposed future (2003, 2004) assessments. Achieve has concluded that the current test and the curriculum are sufficiently aligned in the areas of reading, language, and mathematics. In addition, the current test is appropriately aligned with national, research-based content in these areas. Achieve particularly noted the strong alignment in reading. Future reports will be issued with respect to the 2003 and 2004 assessments.

The DOE recognizes this alignment is not as complete in the areas of science and social studies because of the global nature of the current contracted assessment. For this reason, specific achievement levels in these content areas were not used to identify low performing schools in 2001 or 2002.

3. *Are teachers equipped?* Professional development of teachers and provision of adequate resources are often identified as needs for school improvement statewide. The DOE acknowledges this need and continually works with a limited budget for resources to ensure that any professional development and DOE recommended resources are clearly aligned with curriculum and assessment. The DOE is also working to include online delivery as an option for teachers to access quality professional development.
4. *Does Tennessee have quality standards?* As with the assessment alignment, the DOE contracted with a respected external facilitator (CCSSO) for the evaluation of the Tennessee standards. The broad-based field of evaluators concluded that Tennessee standards are rigorous, sequenced, specific, and developmentally appropriate for all students.

The following response is intended for clarity and further explanation within the document.

Teacher shortages, page iii

The ESEA of 2002 requires that all schools employ and assign “highly qualified” teachers in the core academic subjects by the end of the 2005-06 school year. The core academic subjects are English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography, and arts.

Administrative recommendations, page vi and page 21

- The DOE plans to continue the on-going evaluation of the state’s early childhood education pilot program including the use of TCAP results from 2003 assessment of 3rd grade students who participated in the pilot programs.
- The DOE is committed to using technology as a tool to enhance the educational opportunities of all students including those in rural areas.
- SACS accreditation is intended to “represent a set of rigorous academic standards that are designed to preserve the integrity of the schooling process for children.” The SACS self study is not intended as a tool for evaluating student performance. For this reason, a component of the School Improvement Plan requires schools to submit supporting achievement data, along with the SACS report, in order to have an approved state plan. Considering the fact that the state currently has an accountability system that is based on student performance and satisfies both the EIA and NCLB, the DOE would have a difficult time justifying the additional expense associated with implementing a state operated accreditation process.
- The DOE was handicapped in communicating the criteria used to place schools on notice in 2001 because the federal government’s final action on “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) did not take place until January 2002. The goal of the DOE was to ensure the criteria used to place schools on notice in 2001 would meet both the mandates of Tennessee’s Education Improvement Act and NCLB. The Department felt it impractical to force schools to meet two separate accountability criteria, the “heads up” used to identify schools in 2000 and the new criteria required under NCLB.
- Recognizing the public’s desire to have more data available at the school level, the Department recently required school level dropout information to be reported. Prior to this new requirement, dropout data was only reported to the state at the system level. As of the 2002 reporting cycle, the Department has a full four years of data from each school eliminating the need to project the cumulative dropout rate for the graduating class. The four-year dropout rate for each graduating class from 2002 forward will be based on actual data reported at the school level.

Section 200.19 of the ESEA identifies the graduation rate (dropout rate) as a required indicator in determining adequate yearly progress for accountability purposes. This section further defines the graduation rate to mean “the percentage of students, measured from the beginning of high school, who graduate from high school with a

regular diploma.” The DOE feels the definition is specific and requires a cohort of students from a graduating class be used in determining the graduation rate.

- The DOE has initiated two evaluative systems similar to the OEA recommendations to evaluate the Exemplary Educator program and to share effective practice. AEL, Inc. is completing a two-year evaluation of the Exemplary Educator program (December 2000 – December 2002). In addition, Tennessee State University in conjunction with “Just for the Kids” has undertaken a study of best practices with a focus on achievement levels of schools with similar size, demographics, and community composition.
- The DOE agrees that accurate and timely data are crucial to an accountability system designed to improve the academic experience for all students. The department plans to increase its use of technology to ensure the accuracy of data and has imposed a financial penalty on systems failing to submit data timely in order for the state to meet reporting requirements in state statute or federal law.
- The DOE will continue to closely monitor the zero tolerance reporting process to insure that reports are received on a timely basis and that adequate safeguards are in place to insure accuracy. The existing instructions and training for district staff will be reviewed to insure that they are effective and appropriate.
- The DOE agrees that a comparative analysis of data from similar schools is necessary as the state challenges local school systems to raise the academic achievement of all students. Many specific comparisons are required as part of NCLB.

Offices of Research and Education Accountability Staff

Director

◆Ethel Detch

Assistant Director (Research)

Douglas Wright

Assistant Director (Education Accountability)

◆Katie Cour

Principal Legislative Research Analysts

◆Dan Cohen-Vogel

◆Kim Potts

Senior Legislative Research Analysts

Denise Denton

◆Phil Doss

◆Margaret Rose

◆Greg Spradley

Associate Legislative Research Analysts

◆Bonnie Adamson

Brian Doss

◆Richard Gurley

◆Emily Ogden

◆Melissa Jo Smith

◆Karen Tolbert

◆Emily Wilson

Executive Secretary

◆Sherrill Murrell

◆indicates staff who assisted with this project