

Dear Friends:

I thought the below weekly wrap would be of interest to you.

Sincerely,

Donna Rowland

## The Tennessee General Assembly



House of Representatives

# CAPITOL HILL REVIEW

A weekly wrap-up of legislative news

January 11<sup>th</sup> - January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Contact: Kara Watkins, 615-741-1975 / [kara.watkins@capitol.tn.gov](mailto:kara.watkins@capitol.tn.gov)

## General Assembly overwhelmingly passes

### “First to the Top” legislation late Friday

The General Assembly passed the Governor’s “First to the Top” legislation late Friday night, in time for the state to meet the deadline to apply for the federal grant funding. Passing 84-9, the legislation was only slightly amended from what the Governor originally proposed. The main components of the bill include utilizing Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) data in teacher evaluations, creating a committee to oversee implementation of reforms and develop certain standards, and implementing an Alternative School District in which failing schools will be placed.

**Governor addresses legislature**

Governor Bredesen opened the Extraordinary Session on education with an address to the General Assembly on Tuesday evening, urging swift passage of the K-12 and higher education proposals presented to the legislature. He stressed the need for a bold plan so that Tennessee could fairly compete for the federal government's Race to the Top program.

Race to the Top, a portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, provides \$4.35 billion in competitive grants designed to encourage and reward states that are moving forward with bold initiatives in four education reform areas:

1. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
2. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
3. Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most.
4. Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

Tennessee already has one of the most comprehensive data compiling systems in the country, but does not use the data to determine teachers' success. The key component of the Governor's plan is to use the information to improve the quality of education and to ensure that student performance is improving.

The second part of the plan to overhaul education would improve higher education institutions. The Governor emphasized the need for increasing the college completion rates, retooling the higher education funding process, and encouraging more students to enroll in community colleges and technology centers.

The Governor proposed making higher education institutions operate as "a much more tightly organized system," that made it easier for students to apply, dual enroll, and transfer credit.

He concluded by calling on the legislature to make Tennessee "First to the Top" in education reform by putting in place common sense strategies and taking bold steps in reforming education laws.

### **Teacher Evaluations**

Originally the most controversial part of the bill, proponents hope the utilization of TVAAS data will improve student performance year over year as principals, directors of schools, and boards of education across the state will have a better snapshot of student performance and teacher effectiveness. TVAAS data can now be used for up to 35 percent of a teacher's evaluation, with another 15 percent of the criteria to be determined in part by an independent committee. This part of the bill also requires

that the teacher and principal mutually agree with the person(s) performing the evaluation and on the evaluation measures being used. The bill also calls for teacher evaluations to be done once a year, and gives teacher training programs access to TVAAS data on their graduates to help identify strengths and weaknesses of training programs.

### **Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee (TEAC)**

The legislation also creates the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee, which will be comprised of 15 members. The Commissioner of Education will sit on the committee and serve as its chair, and the Executive Director of the State Board of Education shall also serve on the committee.

Other members are as follows:

- One member of the House Education Committee, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- One member of the Senate Education Committee, appointed by the Speaker of the Senate;
- Two members shall be K-12 public school teachers, appointed by the House and Senate Speakers;
- Three public school teachers, two public school principals, one director of a school district, and three members representing other stake-holder interests, all appointed by the Governor.

TEAC must be a reflection of the racial and geographic diversity of the state, and at least one of the appointees must be a parent of a currently enrolled public school student. Fifteen percent of the teacher evaluation criteria will be determined by the committee, and TEAC is also charged with streamlining the evaluation process, making it easier for schools to submit data.

Many believe that unlocking the TVAAS data will allow principals and school districts to have a true understanding of student performance, and assist teachers in improving their skills.

### **Achievement School District**

The bill creates an Achievement School District (ASD) that will be managed by the state. Schools who are deemed “failing” will be moved into the Achievement School District, in an effort to help under-performing schools get back on track. The Commissioner of Education has the authority to move any public school into the newly created Achievement School District if the school is in the fifth year of improvement status, or at any time if a Title I school meets the federal definition of “persistently lowest achieving schools.” The school would remain in the special district until it

begins to achieve adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. At that time, the Commissioner of Education would be required to create and implement a transition plan to return the school to its local school district.

Lawmakers believe the Achievement School District will aide those students who are forced to attend consistently failing schools. The commissioner can contract with outside entities to manage day-to-day operations of any or all schools within the district. The ASD will focus on student performance, and increase accountability of teachers and students.

Republicans have, for many years, advocated these types of education reforms on the state level, and were glad to see a step forward being made for our children and our schools.

## **STEM**

In addition to the K-12 reform legislation, the state plans to enhance its Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program, which will be included in the Race to the Top application. The state is partnering with Battelle, which manages the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, to provide an extensive network of STEM programs across the state. This includes building new science labs, adding new technology, and creating new curricula to inspire and create new interest in science and math. Tennessee students must be proficient in these subject areas to compete in a changing global economy, and having graduates trained science and math is an important factor in helping recruit more business to locate in Tennessee.

Tennessee has compelling criteria to place it at the top of the list for Race to the Top funds. Finalists in the competition will be invited to Washington to present their plans to the U.S. Department of Education in March. The winners will be announced in April. If successful, Tennessee can expect to begin receiving funds in September 2010 which will continue in equal increments over four years.

## **Lawmakers discuss worker's compensation law delay**

The General Assembly approved legislation calling for the immediate suspension of a new law to require sole proprietors and partners engaged in the construction industry to carry workers' compensation coverage on themselves due to unintended effects of the act. The law will be suspended until March 28, 2010. In the meantime, the legislature will discuss alternative ways to address gaps in coverage for workers in construction companies of all without harming small business owners.

###