



AMBASSADOR
FOR EDUCATION

Advocacy Toolkit

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TSBA Ambassador for Education Program

Why Advocacy Matters:

Public education continues to face challenges. Despite model programs, studies, and research that demonstrate the value of public education, national education policies and budget constraints continue to overextend the public education system.

Are you tired of hearing negative, unsubstantiated and uniformed comments about public schools?

The TSBA Ambassador for Education Program, a community outreach effort, provides an opportunity for school board members in Tennessee to increase public awareness and understanding of current public issues facing our communities, state and nation.

What Does it Mean to be an Education Advocate?

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, an “advocate” is “one that pleads the cause of another; one that supports or promotes the interests of another.” Public education will become stronger as more individuals actively promote the issues and facts. Ambassadors help make public education’s value and impact understood and supported by all stakeholders - from parents, to community leaders, to school district administrators, to state legislators, federal policy-makers, and many others.

Now more than ever, the challenges facing public education must be met. Ambassadors for Education who work at the community, state, and national levels must act to promote the value of public education for all young people.

Ambassador for Education Toolkit

TSBA has created this Ambassador for Education Toolkit as a resource for those interested in developing the knowledge, skills, and habits to be effective advocates, at whatever level and degree of commitment they are willing to make. The Tool Kit focuses on four major topics:

1. the habits of effective Ambassadors for Education,
2. the power of networking,
3. the components of an effective Ambassador for Education advocacy plan, and
4. the major issues to focus on during your term

Whether you are new to the Ambassador for Education program or have been working for many years to advocate for public education, this Toolkit will help you improve your advocacy skills and provide you with the resources to deliver the issues at hand.

The Habits of Effective Ambassadors for Education

Effective Ambassadors have habits of action that are the foundation for their success. Developing these habits will enhance your ability to influence change.

- Habit 1: Know your Beliefs
- Habit 2: Make Advocacy a Daily Priority
- Habit 3: Gather, Verify and Share Information
- Habit 4: Be Organized and Responsive to All Communications
- Habit 5: Build Long-Term Relationships
- Habit 6: Choose Roles Consistent with Your Knowledge, Skills and Commitment

Habit 1: Know Your Beliefs

Effective Ambassadors know their beliefs and principles. It is impossible to advocate for something unless you know what you believe in and can clearly articulate it.

Knowing your beliefs helps you differentiate between what is sacred and what can be compromised. Ambassadors hold fast to their beliefs and the issues, but recognize that at times they may need to be flexible in their advocacy positions. You can assess the appropriateness of a recommended compromise to see if it is consistent with or contrary to your principles. Your beliefs and the facts should be the guide for your actions.

Habit 2: Make Advocacy a Daily Priority

Effective Ambassadors understand that advocacy is a daily, ongoing responsibility and plan time for it. Although they are busy with their daily responsibilities and duties as a member of their board, they know that every day, some unanticipated issue tends to come up. They make a habit to block out “contingency time” each day, week or month for advocacy activities such as collecting the facts or responding to an call for action.

Habit 3: Gather, Verify, and Share Information

Your advocacy is only as good as your information. Effective Ambassadors gather and verify information and facts on the issues facing the public schools of Tennessee. They keep their antennae raised to identify valuable information from a wide range of resources and share the information widely. Having current information at their fingertips helps

advocates take advantage of spontaneous advocacy opportunities, be alert to potential challenges, and choose appropriate actions.

GATHER INFORMATION

For effective advocates, the news is like air. They can't survive without it. On a daily basis, they gather relevant information from TSBA, TLN Notes, television, State Department of Education, NSBA, Internet news and many other sources.

It is your job to gather, read and listen to the facts and issues. Framing a local matter into a state and national context can help others to see the big picture. It's up to all of us to be informed so we can draw those connections. Develop the habit of collecting facts rather than opinions.

VERIFY INFORMATION

Conducting research and collecting data empower advocates and give credibility and validity to views about public education. You can uncover helpful facts and figures to support your case, but failing to verify them before acting can be embarrassing or even undermine efforts. Rather than accept information at face value, effective advocates approach newspaper articles, polls, surveys and reports with a healthy skepticism - they ask questions and seek clarification.

SHARING INFORMATION

One of the most powerful things advocates do with information is to organize and share it. When public education advocates share the results of their information gathering with others, they become a valued resource for policy-makers and other advocates.

In addition, effective Ambassadors develop the habit of providing individuals and organizations they hope to persuade with easy access to resources they have developed, such as data, reports, quotes and talking points. Advocates organize information in ways that make it easy for others to use.

Habit 4: Be Organized and Responsive to All Communications

Being organized is critical to effective advocacy. Effective Ambassadors have habits that keep information flowing and manageable. They are good information organizers and respond to requests in a timely way.

Effective Ambassadors also make it a habit to save copies of their correspondence as records of their work and refer to it later when the same or similar issues emerge. What may seem to be finished business today may emerge again in some new form. By keeping records of correspondence you will be ready to resume the conversation.

One of the most powerful things Ambassadors do with information is to organize and share it.

Your advocacy is only as good as your information.

Habit 5: Build Long-Term Relationships

Effective Ambassadors continually look for opportunities to solidify relationships and establish new ones that enlarge their sphere of influence. They recognize the critical importance of developing ongoing, meaningful relationships with local, state, and federal decision-makers.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

The job of legislators is to stay in touch with and represent the interests of their community. By determining their priorities and concerns, Ambassadors can explore how messages promoting public education fit into the complex array of competing interests that legislators are trying to serve.

Whether or not there is pending legislation or an issue directly affecting public education, effective Ambassadors take time to develop rapport and lines of communication with key local, state and federal legislators. Habits of establishing or maintaining ongoing relationships help Ambassadors ensure that public education is represented right from the start, whenever important issues are raised for education, such as curriculum, evaluations, vouchers and elected vs. appointed superintendents.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

Developing ongoing relationships with reporters in the local media is a critical habit. Ambassadors for Education must become trusted resources on public education issues that media representatives can turn to when they need a story or an insider perspective.

Find out which media sources the public relies on for information on public education. Cultivate relationships with these reports, writers, radio hosts, bloggers and local TV personalities. Stay in contact and give them information that piques their interests. Invite them to public education programs and events. Connect them to charismatic educators, students, parents, legislators, business and community leaders. Regularly send them information on work being done in your community, pending legislation, the latest research, awards program, etc.

Advocacy efforts are strengthened when we work in collaboration with others to affect policies and programs impacting public education.

Habit 6: Choose Roles Consistent with Your Knowledge, Skills, and Commitment

Effective Ambassadors for Education understand the various roles advocates play as well as the degree of knowledge, skill, and commitment needed to carry out each role. Every person taking action can make a difference. Some individuals are more comfortable working on their own, while others are ready to work as part of a network, and still others are ready to assume leadership positions. Whatever role you choose, you can make a difference.

ADVOCACY - THE POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL

There are many ways individuals can serve as Ambassadors for Education. At its most basic level, advocacy begins when someone speaks to another person about the importance of public education.

Checklist for Individual Advocates

- I stay informed about school, district, state, and national initiatives and conduct research on public education.
- I inform colleagues, parents, neighbors, family members, friends, and others about the importance of public education and local, state, and national initiatives.
- I invite decision-makers, the media, and supporters to attend events and programs.
- I recognize the contributions decision-makers have made to my school or district.
- I send decision-makers copies of newsletters, press releases, and articles about arts education.
- I thank decision-makers for their support.

ADVOCACY - THE POWER OF NETWORKING

When advocates work with other groups, they form alliances. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines an alliance as “an association to further the common interests of the members.” Advocacy efforts are strengthened when we work in collaboration with others to affect policies and programs impacting public education.

Checklist for Advocates Who Network

- I respond to action alerts.
- I gather information about public education and share it with others in my network(s).
- I join others to work on local, state or national initiatives on public education.
- I identify parents, community members, or educators who will also write letters, articles, or make phone calls supporting public education.
- I phone, write, or e-mail decision-makers regarding public education issues.
- I make personal contacts with my legislators, members of the State Board of Education, and policy-makers in my community and state.

ADVOCACY - THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

Ambassadors for Education with knowledge, skills, and a high level of commitment assume leadership roles and accept the responsibility for organizing the efforts of individuals and networks to reach an advocacy goal.

Checklist for Advocacy Leaders

- I organize networks to advocate for public education.
- I recruit other public education advocates in the community or profession.
- I reach out to the minority group when it comes to public education issues.
- I establish and sustain professional relationships with decision-makers and members of the media.
- I write letters and articles for my local newspaper on a consistent basis.
- I meet with or contact decision-makers on a regular basis.
- I work at the state and national levels on public education policy issues.

How Strong Are Your Advocacy Habits?

How strong are your advocacy habits? Whether you work individually, in a network, or in a leadership position, the habits of action are keys to your success. Use the following checklist to assess your habits:

Self-Assessment of Your Advocacy Habits

- I can articulate my values and beliefs about arts learning.
- I make time each day for my advocacy work.
- I regularly gather and share information relevant to arts education.
- I check that my information sources are reliable.
- I develop and use personal systems for organizing information.
- I respond in a timely way to all communications.
- I prioritize tasks by creating and regularly updating my working agenda.
- I know when to say, "I don't know. Let me find out."
- When candidates are running for office, I know how to maintain a stance of non-partisanship and take advantage of advocacy opportunities.
- I build long-term, meaningful relationships with decision-makers and their staff members.
- I establish long term, helpful relationships with members of the media.
- I accept advocacy responsibilities that are consistent with my knowledge, skills, and level of commitment.

The Power of Networking

Why Networking?

A variety of advocacy strategies are needed depending on whether an issue is singular or systemic.

Extend the Network

In addition to working with natural allies public education advocates benefit by extending their networks to those in other fields with whom they share common interests.

PARENTS

Parents can be natural allies for the cause. In some communities, parents, grandparents, other family members, foster parents, or legal guardians are well organized through associations, school site councils or through informal social networks. These groups can be mobilized, highly visible, and vocal in promoting public education. In other communities where parents are less formally connected, advocates must begin to establish networks.

Quality, access, and equity matter to parents. They are deeply invested in their children's success and care about the quality of education their children receive. Parents want their children to have access to every opportunity to learn and to advance in school, work, and life. No parents want to feel that their child has less access to opportunities or is receiving a lower quality education than other children. By extending the network to parents, the voice for public education is strengthened.

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Business and community leaders are influential people within the community who wield power and have access to valuable resources. When advocates identify business and community leaders who might join public education advocacy efforts, they can cast a wide net across many sectors—health, human, and social services; commerce, tourism and real estate; business and community development; government, law enforcement, parks and recreation; and cultural, philanthropic and religious organizations.

Business and community leaders are usually highly- visible spokespeople actively involved in shaping public opinion. Many have roots deep in the community and can tap into large existing networks, such as Rotary clubs, Chambers of Commerce, associations, employee groups, corporate foundations, and unions. This is a wide-ranging group; they have a vested interest in the growth and well-being of the community and as a result, share a concern about young people and education. The goal is to engage business and community leaders in using their positions to influence decision-makers and become spokespeople and advocates for public education.

Ambassadors for Education benefit by extending their networks to those in other fields with whom they share common interests.

Effective Advocacy Plan

Change doesn't occur by chance. When it does occur, two related conditions are usually present. First, there is a broad-based organized coalition working in conjunction with policy-makers who support change. Second, the actions of the coalition are guided by a strategic plan consisting of an honest and realistic appraisal of the political "lay of the land."

An advocacy plan answers these questions:

- What is the issue?
- What is your goal? What are you trying to achieve?
- What information do you need to make your case?
- Who do you want to influence? Who is your target audience?
- What is your message?
- How will you target the message?
- How will you deliver the message?
- What is your timeline? What resources will you need?
- How will you assess your success?

As you work through this section of the Ambassador for Education Tool Kit, answers to these questions will become clearer, your plan of action more complete and your advocacy more effective.

What is the Issue?

An advocacy plan begins with a focus on the issue. The issue can be overarching (such as the importance of public education for all students in a state) or it can be specific (a loss of an education program in your district). Find out the current policies on the local and state levels relevant to the issue. Keep in mind that an issue is not the same as a message. It is critical to determine the issue before jumping to the message.

What is Your Goal? What are You Trying to Achieve?

In the advocacy plan, goals—what you hope to achieve—are articulated. You may have substantive goals (e.g., secure a policy change) or process goals (e.g., introduce a bill for purposes of organizing support and solidifying the cohesiveness of a newly-formed coalition).

Identifying the goal gets the advocacy campaign started, unifies the members of the existing network, forms the basis for expanding the network, helps guide the coalition on the appropriateness of a given strategy or tactic, and serves as the basis for judging success. It is essential that the coalition identify and reach consensus on the "prize." At the end of the advocacy campaign, what does the coalition hope to accomplish?

For example, is the "prize" an incremental step that lays the foundation for subsequent action; a new or expanded program; increased funding for an existing program; a more informed and supportive community; a bill or a public law; a policy change; securing enactment of an existing policy; getting the issue on the policy radar screen; or ensuring implementation of a law?

An issue is not the same as a message. It is critical to determine the issue before jumping to the message.

What Information do You Need to Make Your Case?

The next step in the advocacy plan is to gather objective information that will help make the case. Collect specific data (e.g., numbers of students affected, costs) and results from studies and research. The information should be evidence-based as opposed to opinion-based. Collect relevant information about the current status and past history of policies as well as the likely opposition to your goal.

Who Do You Want to Influence? Who is Your Target Audience?

An advocacy plan identifies the policy-makers that have the power to make decisions about your issue. The potential audience of local, state, and federal decision makers is broad. The plan identifies key power brokers who have the respect of and can influence the policy-makers for or against your position, as well as influential public figures and members of the media.

What is Your Message?

Advocates can cite countless reasons why a quality public education is essential for every young person. The challenge is to select which information is the most appropriate to support each advocacy message.

All messages should be crafted with the following principles in mind:

- **Messages must be simple and direct and state what you want.** The message must be easy to understand and remember, and communicate what you are asking for.
- **Messages should personalize the issue.** Messages should inspire audiences by using personal profiles that help advance the goal. By including authentic voices and real life stories, you can personalize the issue and mobilize target audiences to take action.

- **Messages should communicate that the change is do-able and reasonable.** Be clear that the desired outcome is reasonable (not radical), viable, and can be implemented.
- **Messages must reflect current priorities.** Ensure your message reflects current values, concerns, priorities, and trends. This enables advocates to frame and deliver public education messages more effectively in a larger context.

How Will You Target Your Message?

Each audience requires a message that is targeted for their interests and needs. Your research, planning, and preparation are critical. Invest the time to know and understand each distinct audience. Speak from where your audience is listening, tapping into key priorities, interests, opinions or needs to make your case. You must know what information—data, quotes from influential people, personal stories, images, research, etc.—will be convincing and memorable to a particular audience.

TARGETING MESSAGES

Consider these guiding questions when you begin to target your message:

- Who is the target audience?
- What matters most to this audience?
- What do they care about?
- What messages will be most important to them?
- What supporting information do they need to hear?

How Will You Deliver Your Message?

There are many ways to deliver a message. Some delivery mechanisms reach a wide audience while others are more targeted. Some messages are strongest when they are delivered face-to-face; other messages are best delivered in print, on the Web, or on film. Many times, messages are strongest when multiple delivery mechanisms are planned. Your challenge is to select the most appropriate, powerful, and effective delivery method.

or writes to thank them. Express your gratitude. Remember, even if you didn't get what you asked for, you educated people, made connections, and found opportunities to promote public education. Consider helping others by sharing what you've learned from your experiences.

Information provided by Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network, Advocacy Tool Kit, 2009. Pat Boyd, Donna Collins, Lauren Hess, Leslie Johnson, Carol Trimble, and Lynne Silverstein.

What is Your Timeline? What Resources Will You Need?

To get an advocacy plan up and running, three factors must be taken into account:

- the timeline for message delivery
- the timeline for local, state or federal decisions
- the resources—financial, personnel, range of expertise—needed to implement the strategies

Developing a timeline and gathering resources will vary from community to community and state to state. In planning your timeline, refer to the information available on the TSBA web site under the Capitol Watch button or contact TSBA staff for further information.

How Will You Assess Your Success?

Throughout the course of any advocacy effort, it is necessary to continually review the effectiveness of strategies and tactics in relationship to the overall principles and goals.

Remember that success does not always come in a neatly wrapped package. In fact, it often comes with a new set of issues to be resolved. Before you begin on the next task, take some time to strengthen the relationships that have been built. Remember to say thank you to those who helped with the work—the advocates, the behind-the-scene workers, and the policy-makers. Many times after the passage of legislation, legislators report that no one calls

AMBASSADOR
FOR EDUCATION

Policy &
Reporting Form



Tennessee School Boards Association

Descriptor Term:

Ambassador For Education Program

Descriptor Code:

1900

Revised:

06/10/11

Rescinds:

1900

Previous Issued/
Revised Date:

02/24/09

PURPOSE

The TSBA Ambassador For Education Program is developed by the Tennessee School Boards Association to build greater public confidence in Tennessee's public schools and better educate the public about public education. The program is established as a community outreach program assisting local school board members in increasing public awareness and understanding of issues facing our communities, state and nation.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Must complete application form and send to TSBA.
2. Ambassadors shall have served on their local boards of education for at least one (1) year.

SELECTION OF AMBASSADORS

Ambassadors shall be appointed by the President to one (1) year terms.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF AMBASSADORS

1. Ambassadors must complete five presentations and submit documentation of such to the TSBA Director of Communications prior to Oct. 1 of each year in order to be invited to the November Ambassador Training Session. Attendance at this session is required to retain Ambassador status for the following year.
2. All Ambassadors completing at least five presentations during the year will be recognized with a Silver Pin at the TSBA Annual Convention and be designated Certified Ambassadors for the following year. This pin may be earned annually.
3. All Ambassadors who complete at least 10 presentations during a year will receive a Gold Pin at the TSBA Annual Convention and be designated Master Ambassadors for the following year. This pin may be earned annually.
4. The Ambassador who completes the highest number of verified presentations during the year from October 1 through September 30 each year will be recognized with a plaque at the annual TSBA Convention for their efforts to promote public education. This honor will be known as the Premier Ambassador Award.
5. Ambassadors who conduct a cumulative total of 25 presentations during their career in the Ambassador Program shall be recognized with a Platinum Pin denoting their achievement at the TSBA Annual Convention following the reaching of this level. The title of Platinum Ambassador is continuing as long as the individual meets minimum annual requirements for serving as an Ambassador. This pin may be earned once.
6. Ambassadors who conduct a cumulative total of 50 presentations during their career in the Ambassador Program shall be recognized with a Diamond Pin denoting their achievement at the TSBA Annual Convention following the reaching of this level. The title of Diamond Ambassador is continuing as long as the individual meets minimum annual requirements for serving as an Ambassador. This pin may be earned once.

APPROVED COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Acceptable community outreach activities include, but are not limited to, presentations to community groups, participation in radio, television or other media programs; and published editorials/letters to the editor.



AMBASSADOR Presentation Report

Ambassador _____

Group presenting to _____

Date and duration of presentation _____

Topic discussed _____

Audience comments/reaction _____

Were there any questions you weren't prepared for? If so, what were they? _____

Would you recommend that other Ambassadors speak to similar groups in their communities? _____

Any comments in general about presentation. _____

Mail, e-mail, or fax form to:
Lindsay Campbell
TSBA Ambassador Program
525 Brick Church Park Drive
Nashville, TN 37207
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AMBASSADOR FOR EDUCATION

Resources:
Resolutions
Talking Points
PowerPoints

Anti School Start Dates

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the _____ Board of Education is responsible for providing a local system of public education; and

WHEREAS, local boards of education currently have the ability to establish school calendars and do so after considering the needs of parents, teachers, students, and communities ; and

WHEREAS, in addition to Tennessee, 35 other states around the country allow local school boards to set school calendars; and

WHEREAS, there are 136 school districts in Tennessee, and each has its own unique needs and circumstances that must be evaluated in developing an academic calendar; and

WHEREAS, there is a movement in the Tennessee General Assembly to postpone the start dates for schools until the fourth Monday in August; and

WHEREAS, proponents of this movement point to the costs of utilities and the potential influx of revenue through tourism as reasons for the legislation; and

WHEREAS, as with every decision, school board members must consider the best interests of students and the advancement of student achievement above these and other factors; and

WHEREAS, a mandatory start date of the fourth Monday in August would greatly hinder a school system's ability to ensure a sufficient number of days of instruction for students prior to the administration of state mandated examinations; and

WHEREAS, a mandatory start date of the fourth Monday in August would require local school boards to reduce or eliminate breaks throughout the year, including but not limited to fall break, spring break, and Christmas break; and

WHEREAS, a later start date would almost certainly postpone the end dates for schools and not result in additional days for summer vacation between academic years; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE _____ BOARD OF EDUCATION AS FOLLOWS:

The _____ Board of Education opposes any legislation or other similar effort to alter or impair a local board of education's ability to establish an academic calendar as it works best for its students, teachers, parents, and community.

Anti Vouchers

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the _____ Board of Education is responsible for providing a local system of public education; and

WHEREAS, there is pending legislation before the Tennessee General Assembly that would create a voucher program allowing students to use public education funds to pay for private school tuition; and

WHEREAS, more than 50 years have passed since private school vouchers were first proposed, and during that time proponents have spent millions of dollars attempting to convince the public and lawmakers of the concept's efficacy, and yet, five decades later, vouchers still remain controversial, unproven and unpopular; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the State of Tennessee requires that the Tennessee General Assembly "provide for the maintenance, support and eligibility standards of a system of free *public* schools", with no mention of the maintenance or support of private schools; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee, through work of the Tennessee General Assembly, the Tennessee Department of Education, the State Board of Education and local school boards, has established nationally recognized standards and measures for accountability in public education; and

WHEREAS, vouchers eliminate public accountability by channeling tax dollars into private schools that do not face state-approved academic standards, do not make budgets public, do not adhere to open meetings and records laws, do not publicly report on student achievement, and do not face the public accountability requirements contained in major federal laws, including special education; and

WHEREAS, vouchers have not been effective at improving student achievement or closing the achievement gap, with the most credible research finding little or no difference in voucher and public school students' performance; and

WHEREAS, vouchers leave many students behind, including those with the greatest needs, because vouchers channel tax dollars into private schools that are not required to accept all students, nor offer the special services they may need; and

WHEREAS, vouchers give choices to private schools, not students and parents, since private schools decide if they want to accept vouchers, how many and which students they want to admit, and the potentially arbitrary reasons for which they might later dismiss a student; and

WHEREAS, many proponents argue for these programs to increase options, but several options currently exist within public school systems. Through federal and state laws, students have the options of charter or magnet schools, and in the event of failing schools, students may attend other traditional public schools within the district.

WHEREAS, voucher programs divert critical dollars and commitment from public schools to pay private school tuition for a few students, including many who already attend private schools; and

WHEREAS, vouchers are an inefficient use of tax payer money because they compel taxpayers to support two school systems: one public and one private, the latter of which is not accountable to all the taxpayers supporting it; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE _____ BOARD OF EDUCATION AS FOLLOWS:

The _____ Board of Education opposes any legislation or other similar effort to create a voucher program in Tennessee that would divert money intended for public education to private schools.

Support Appointed Directors

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the _____ Board of Education is responsible for providing a local system of public education; and

WHEREAS, the appointment of school superintendents was the cornerstone of the Education Improvement Act of 1992, patterning school governance after the business model, with elected school boards responsible for setting policy and board-appointed chief executive officers in charge of day-to-day administration of schools; and

WHEREAS, the Education Improvement Act and the appointment of superintendents have provided greater flexibility at the local level to operate schools and made school systems more accountable for results; and

WHEREAS, the appointment of superintendents provides a broader pool of qualified candidates and removes residency limitations, allowing the selection to be based solely on professional qualifications and leadership skills rather than the political savvy of only those individuals living in a particular district and willing to run for office; and

WHEREAS, the appointed superintendent is accountable to the board of education and may be replaced for failure to achieve the standards and goals established by the local board and the state; and

WHEREAS, the appointment of the superintendent ensures cooperation and a common vision with the board of education to improve student achievement and overall school performance; and

WHEREAS, history in Tennessee has shown that most elected superintendents are voted out of office after one term – just around the time school systems, students and the community can begin to benefit from their increased knowledge and experience; and

WHEREAS, only three states in the entire country (Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi) continue to participate in the outdated practice of electing school superintendents, electing less than one percent of the nearly 15,000 superintendents in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee General Assembly will undoubtedly continue to face pressure to revert to elected superintendents, particularly from some local funding bodies reluctant to increase education funding and improve school system budgets and frustrated with the lead advocacy roles of appointed superintendents;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE _____ Board of Education encourages the Tennessee General Assembly to place the interest of students above any other by recognizing the value of appointed superintendents and rejecting any attempt to revert to superintendent elections.



Ambassador for Education – Uniform School Start Dates

Background

For the past several years, there has been a growing movement across the state to push back the date on which schools start. Proponents assert several reasons for the initiative:

- the utility costs in August are among the highest of the year
- students are not receiving a full summer “to be kids”
- kids need summer jobs
- longer summers would generate additional tourism dollars for the state

This past legislative session, this movement’s progress was apparent by the legislation passing both the full Senate and House of Representatives. However, each body passed very different versions of the bill, and the matter was tabled for the year. Both versions, though, would have prohibited a school from starting prior to the fourth Monday in August. In light of the legislation’s relative success this year, it is certain that the issue will be revisited next year.

TSBA Position

Local school boards should maintain the ability to set school calendars. Boards may seek input from teachers, parents, and citizens before making the final decision to ensure that the community approves of the calendar. Boards may also make these decisions while considering the unique events and circumstances of particular districts. For example, Bedford County takes a week off during its annual Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. This tradition is of great importance to this community, its citizens, and its revenues.

Talking Points

- None of the proponents’ arguments mention students or student achievement. It is the responsibility of school boards to consider these issues above all else.
- Students need as many instructional days as possible prior to taking mandated examinations.
- School board members are accountable to their constituents. If the community is unhappy with the school calendars, the ballot box will reflect that.
- Teachers, administrators, and students enjoy the breaks. Beginning school so late in the year will most likely result in shortening and/or eliminating fall breaks, Christmas breaks, and spring breaks since there must be a minimum of 150 instructional days prior to the examinations.
- Proponents assume that later start dates will mean longer summers. If a system still wishes to build a calendar around local events and provide breaks, the school year will move into June, and the summer will be the same length.



Ambassador for Education – Vouchers

TOP EIGHT CONCERNS ABOUT VOUCHERS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

- 1) Tennessee has spent five years and will spend \$500+ million in Federal Race to the Top funds creating the national gold standard in accountability for public education – vouchers for private schools abandon these efforts. Private schools and private school teachers are not held to the same high standards Tennessee requires of public schools and public school teachers.
- 2) Tennessee has been on the forefront with education reform, e.g. Race to the Top, revamping tenure, eliminating collective bargaining, increasing standards, and increasing the rigor of curriculum. All of these changes need time to be implemented, and diverting money to private schools will only cause our reforms to stall.
- 3) After changes approved by the General Assembly during 2009, 2010 and 2011, Tennessee now has one of the most expansive laws for charter schools – we should give this opportunity for school choice time to produce results before making such a radical change in education policy in Tennessee.
- 4) While proponents claim that voucher programs create another avenue for school choice, the choice lies with the private schools, not parents or students. Private schools determine who is accepted or not.
- 5) Enrollment in religious schools has dropped dramatically in the last ten years, primarily due to the economy and parents' inability to pay for private school tuition. One reason vouchers are being proposed is to help religious schools stem their losses and reclaim their lost enrollment.
- 6) A voucher program in Tennessee would be unconstitutional: the Constitution of the State of Tennessee (as amended in 1978) requires that the Tennessee General Assembly “provide for the maintenance, support and eligibility standards of a system of free *public* schools,” with no mention of the maintenance or support of private schools.
- 7) Vouchers are politically unpopular. Since 1972, voucher proposals have been overwhelmingly rejected or repealed by voters in the following states: California, Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, Oregon, Washington and Utah.
- 8) Tennessee is 49th in per pupil funding compared to other states. Since we are already at the bottom in funding public education, how can we afford to begin spending public money on private tuition?