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First Class Completes Superintendents Academy

The list of qualified individuals ready to assume the demanding position of school superintendent grew by seven names this month with the successful conclusion of the first Prospective Superintendents Academy hosted by the Tennessee Schools Boards Association (TSBA), the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents (TOSS), and the Niswonger Foundation.

Those who successfully completed the 2007-08 Prospective Superintendents Academy are:

Bobby Cox, Director of Instruction, Warren County Schools

Doris Battle, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Haywood County Board of Education

Eugene Johnson Jr., Principal, Miller Perry Elementary School, Sullivan County

Clay Lindsey, Principal, Paris Special School District

James McAdams, Assistant Superintendent, Lexington City Board of Education

Linda Stroud, Assistant Superintendent, Greeneville Board of Education

Zoe Renfro, Principal, REACH Adult High School, Bradley County

“We are extremely pleased with the response we received to the first Prospective Superintendents Academy, and we are even more pleased with the quality of the candidates who completed the course,” said TSBA Executive Director Tammy Grissom. “A dynamic, innovative and highly-skilled superintendent is crucial to the success of any school system, and based on what we have seen over the past year, we believe these seven individuals have the tools to meet that challenge.”

According to TOSS Executive Director Keith Brewer, the Academy plays a vital role in preparing the state’s next generation of superintendents.

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“The superintendency is one of the most demanding jobs in America,” said Brewer. “Too often we expect principals and assistant superintendents to step right into the job without additional training. This intensive academy helps provide the additional tools needed to effectively lead a school system.”

According to TSBA, which conducts more superintendent searches in Tennessee than any other organization, our state faces a shortage of candidates who are prepared to lead school districts. Because Tennessee superintendents’ salaries average nearly 50 percent less than those in other states, it is also difficult to recruit out-of-state talent. As a result, Tennessee has a critical need for a preparatory program for prospective superintendents.

Created to address this need, the Academy provides 16 days of training designed to help those with experience in such fields as education, business, military, government or public service acquire the unique knowledge and skills necessary to manage a school system. Courses were taught by top educational leaders from across Tennessee, and sessions covered subjects including school finance, school law, board relations, technology, personnel, and facilities management.

“The quality of a school system starts with its CEO,” said Niswonger Foundation Executive Director Buzz Thomas. “We want to move Tennessee to the top in educational performance and student achievement. This new academy will help us achieve this goal by ensuring a larger number of highly qualified individuals are ready to step into the role of superintendent of schools.”

Primary support for the Academy comes from tuition and from the Niswonger Foundation. Candidates who are currently Tennessee educators and are recommended by their employing school board are given preference for the annual training, but anyone may apply for admission. Up to 15 candidates will be accepted each year.

Upon successful completion of the program, candidates receive certification from the Academy’s independent review board consisting of educators and business leaders. The review is chaired by a representative of the Niswonger Foundation. Evaluation of candidates was based upon work product, portfolios, class participation, and a final oral presentation.

The Tennessee School Boards Association, a statewide nonprofit organization founded in 1939, is a federation of the state’s school boards. It serves as an advocate for

the interests of Tennessee's public school students and school districts and provides in-service training and technical assistance for the more than 950 board of education members in Tennessee.

The Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents is a leading advocate organization for public education in the State of Tennessee. Since 1975, TOSS has been progressing public education and addressing the needs of the state's school administrators.

The Niswonger Foundation is a catalyst for educational improvement in Tennessee. The primary focus of the Foundation's work is education and its mission is to create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other charitable activities.

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