

December 18, 2009

MEMO TO: Local Association Presidents
TEA Board of Directors

FROM: Earl Wiman, President
Al Mance, Executive Director

SUBJECT: **Alert!** Race to the Top Moving Ahead Rapidly

Governor Bredesen has announced that he will call a special session of the General Assembly on January 12, 2010 to deal with legislation needed to move Tennessee into a better position to compete for one of the Race to the Top grants and Higher Education. He wants them to complete their RTTT work by the January 19th deadline for submission of the application.

We learned late yesterday that hearings may be held on the pending legislation as early as the week of January 4th. The legislation the governor will propose has not been completed so we have not seen it. In any case, we are ready to participate fully when the legislature convenes.

Earl, Jerry and I have had one meeting with Governor Bredesen, several with his staff and the Commissioner of Education and one with a broader stakeholder group. We clearly articulated TEA teacher positions and interests at every meeting. We now have an idea of the issues that will be addressed.

The core issues are:

1) Use of teacher effect [TVAAS] and other student achievement data as a portion of experienced teacher evaluation, and probationary teacher evaluations prior to the third year of data, subject to proper evaluations

TEA says that if data is used, it must be only one of multiple measures of student achievement and the probationary period must remain at three years. We also believe that there should be a range, rather than a single percentage weight, for student achievement data used in teacher evaluations.

2) Use of data in making decisions about tenure

TEA says TVAAS scores must not be used as the only, or major, criterion for achieving tenure. Further, no teacher should be denied tenure who has a history of positive evaluations or who was not evaluated as required by laws, rules and regulations.

3) Use of student achievement data in promotions and compensation decisions

TEA believes student achievement data should not be the sole or major criterion in decisions about promotions. We believe that incentive compensation must be bargained and must be in addition to the basic salary schedule.

4) Length of the teacher probationary period

TEA believes the current three-year probationary period is long enough and must be continued. We are also working to get a requirement that tenure hearings be conducted by Administrative Law Judges in every school system.

5) Mandate that every teacher be evaluated every year

TEA believes teachers and principals do not object to being evaluated. The issues are fairness and feasibility. There should be not an increase in the frequency of teacher and principal evaluations if the evaluation system is not streamlined. The current evaluation system used by the overwhelming majority of LEA's requires too much teacher and administrator time and provides too little useful feedback. School systems do not have the capacity to evaluate all teachers every year if the current state model for local evaluation is the instrument.

6) Strategies for dealing with struggling schools by creating a Statewide Recovery District

The Commissioner has the authority, under current laws, to remove BOE's, Directors of Schools, and school administrators and to take over schools and school systems. TEA is working to ensure that teachers who are displaced from schools in Restructuring II, under NCLB, continue as employees of the school system. Those who stay must be assured of due process rights.

Immediately after the New Year, we expect things to move fast. We will send you a quick notice after we receive the proposed legislation. As the General Assembly begins its debate additional issues are likely to surface. When they do, we will be there working to ensure that the interests of teachers, students and public education are protected.

It may become necessary for local associations in the legislative districts of members of the House and Senate Education Committees to come to Nashville on short notice to talk to their legislators. Be ready. If we call you, we will need four TEA members for each member of the two Education Committees.

We will communicate with you as frequently as possible during the special session. Look for e-mails, facebook postings, tweets, blogs and Web site postings.

We appreciate your vigilance. If you see or hear anything you think we should know please call, send us an e-mail or comment on TEA's facebook page. Stay tuned.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!