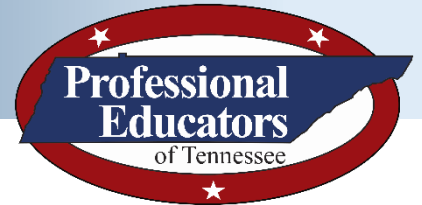


# PRESS RELEASE



December 17, 2021 Online at [www.proedtn.org](http://www.proedtn.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## WHAT IS NEXT IN EDUCATION FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 2022?

Unless there is an unforeseen called special session, the Tennessee General Assembly will formally reconvene at noon on Tuesday, January 11, 2022. There will be a special focus on drawing electoral district boundaries by the statehouse. This is called redistricting. Redistricting is the way they change the districts that determine who represent us. Therefore, it is of significant importance to every citizen in Tennessee.

Created in 1992, the Basic Education Program (BEP) has been the main source of K-12 education funding. The BEP, or a new funding formula, will likely be front and center at the Tennessee General Assembly in education. We must pay close attention to the upcoming education funding debate in Tennessee leading up to the upcoming legislative session. We must spend funding more efficiently and modernize the system. Using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars for school counselors and school nurses is something we support.

We must also remind ourselves that the quality of public education improves the personal growth and social development of children and makes a community a more attractive place to live. If we harm our schools irreparably, we hurt our future. Getting funding right, and not rushing it through the Tennessee General Assembly under a specific time frame should be the priority, as should be teacher salaries.

Legislation may be on the horizon that a future Commissioner of Education goes through legislative approval. We should see a push to require the state to create an annual strategic plan in K-12 education, just like LEA's currently do. We may see legislation requiring the commissioner to present the plan for the state. In addition, appointments to the State Board of Education may need nomination input from the General Assembly.

It is also likely there will be legislation clarifying how the state can take over low-performing school districts. The state has recognized that the state-run Achievement School District (ASD) model was deeply flawed. The state created the ASD using a chunk of its \$500 million Race To The Top grant, secured under former Gov. Phil Bredesen. Updating the process will allow for the Commissioner of Education to take over school districts. In Nashville, we know the state has already done this once. The state partially took over Metro Nashville Public Schools in 2008 when Phil Bredesen was governor. The interim superintendent fired more than 60 principals and assistant principals after five years of underachieving test scores. Some of the districts that are the highest per-pupil funding are among the lowest-performing. Those districts should be prepared to answer that question.

Today in Tennessee over 7,000 teachers are already eligible to retire and by 2024 that number will add another 3,300 teachers. We already have a teacher shortage in special education. We have a teacher shortage in math and science. We are seeing other teachers walking away, some in elementary and other key subject areas, as well. That is why we must embrace multiple pathways to teaching in our classrooms. There is a teacher shortage. We must figure out how to retain our current teachers while recruiting new teachers. There must be more options available to districts to meet this challenge.

### SUMMARY

*We will have an active 2022 in the Tennessee General Assembly. We must focus on what unites us, listen to all voices, focus on the challenges together, and create alliances where there is support on attainable solutions.*

Vacant teaching positions lead to increased class sizes, student behavioral problems, and the lowering of standards for hiring both permanent and substitute teachers. There are also huge shortages of bus drivers and substitute teachers. If you throw that all on top of a global pandemic, maternity leaves, and natural disasters, our schools are stretched way beyond the classroom walls of any school.

Our Colleges of Education simply cannot meet this demand as the number of applicants to become teachers is inadequate. Fewer students are choosing to go into the education field while schools across America are seeing an increased need for new teachers. Colleges of Education must also address how to serve Career & Technical Education (CTE). Areas such as business, agriculture, health, automotive, and mechatronics programs also need high-quality teachers.

Additionally, we should consider how to better build the skills of paraprofessionals who work alongside teachers in classrooms in critical roles. We need to work with Colleges of Education and others to help the process.

Educators have often told policymakers we do too much too early, especially in K-8. We have too many standards. Our teachers tell us regularly they have too many standards to teach, and yet when we have “experts” look at it, we end up with more. We may see legislation directed in this area. Addressing the use of supplemental materials in our schools, by making sure the curriculum used in our schools aligns with our state standards may be on the legislative agenda.

The testing culture has killed the enthusiasm of many educators. We must work to ensure our assessments and subsequent results are empowering and informing without being a time drain. Assessments should not inhibit quality instruction but provide accurate feedback for educators, parents, and students. We need to know what our kids know, not how fast they can take a state. Therefore, legislation to give students more time to complete tests is possible. Testing will be done last 20 days of the end of the school year is probable. Testing should be paper testing which gives better results. If a wish list existed, TNReady goes away for grades 9-12 and is replaced with the ACT. Colleges and universities don’t care about TNReady.

We will have an active 2022 in the Tennessee General Assembly. We must focus on what unites us, listen to all voices, focus on the challenges together, and create alliances where there is support on attainable solutions. Programs will not work, no matter how well intentioned, without personnel. Tennessee’s economy and future are dependent on educating our children effectively.

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