

Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



System Report: Fayette County Schools

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability
September 2002



STATE OF TENNESSEE

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

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Comptroller

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September 16, 2002

The Honorable John S. Wilder

Speaker of the Senate

The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh

Speaker of the House of Representatives

and

Members of the House and Senate Education Committees

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-602 requires the Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Department of Education to conduct a joint study of schools and/or systems placed on notice of probation. In September 2001, the Department and the State Board of Education officially placed 98 schools in 11 systems on notice. This system report is one of 11 addressing the affected school systems.

OEA analysts reviewed aspects of each system, other than curriculum and instruction, which current research indicates may affect student achievement, including governance and management, funding and resources, parent and community involvement, and facility condition. Each report provides recommendations for improvement.

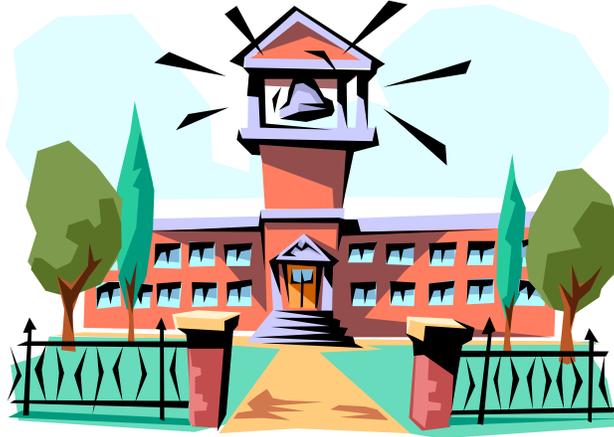
Sincerely,

John G. Morgan

Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Faye Taylor
Department of Education

Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



System Report: Fayette County Schools

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The Office of Education Accountability was created in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury by *Tennessee Code Annotated* 4-3-308 to monitor the performance of school boards, superintendents, school districts, schools, and school personnel in accordance with the performance standards set out in the Education Improvement Act or by regulations of the State Board of Education. The office is to conduct such studies, analyses, or audits as it may determine necessary to evaluate education performance and progress, or as may be assigned to it by the Governor or General Assembly.

Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability,
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FAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Introduction

In 2001, the Tennessee Department of Education identified 98 schools in 11 systems needing to improve student academic performance. The State Board of Education approved the list in September, and the commissioner officially placed the schools on notice. Five schools in the Fayette County school system are now on notice:

- Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
- Jefferson Elementary School
- Northwest Elementary School
- Somerville Elementary School
- Southwest Elementary School

Once schools are on notice, *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-602 requires the Department of Education and the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability to study jointly the schools and/or systems. The study must produce recommendations on how school systems can improve and meet state performance standards. This report is the Office of Education Accountability's portion of the Fayette County school system study.

The Department of Education and the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) determined the two agencies would study schools and systems on notice separately. Each agency designed research protocol to examine areas within its expertise. The department concentrated on curriculum and instruction, and the OEA examined other areas potentially affecting student achievement. The OEA considered the following areas:

- general school, student, and staff information;
- governance and management;
- funding and resources;
- parent, community, and business involvement;
- facilities and climate; and
- class size.

The study addressed individual schools to the extent possible.

The Department of Education contracted with retired educators, referred to as Exemplary Educators, to provide technical assistance to the systems and schools on notice. OEA staff did not meet with Exemplary Educators (EEs) during the joint study because the Department of Education felt interviews with OEA could compromise EEs' relationships with systems and schools. Department of Education staff were also concerned about EEs' time constraints.

Background and Methodology

The 98 Tennessee schools placed on notice failed to meet achievement and growth criteria established by the Tennessee Department of Education under the authority granted in *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-601 – 602, displayed in the following figures. The law states that schools placed on notice must improve student achievement by the end of the first year or be placed on probation. Schools on notice that achieve adequate

yearly progress after one year will remain on notice but will be specified as “improving.”¹ Schools unable to achieve adequate yearly progress can be on probation up to two years before facing sanctions such as reconstitution or alternative governance. The following figures display the criteria developed by the Department of Education to identify schools needing improvement.

K-8 criteria used to place schools on notice:

Achievement criteria

School-wide three-year achievement averages in reading, language arts, and mathematics less than 40 NCE (normal curve equivalent)

Schools on notice have a three-year achievement pattern of 48-73% of their student population in the below average group.

Growth factors (Adequate Yearly Progress)

1. School-wide cumulative three-year value added of 100 percent in reading, language arts, and mathematics
2. Closing the achievement gap by a reduction in the number/percentage of students in the below average group in reading, language arts, mathematics, and writing

Schools on notice failed to meet one or both of the growth factors.

(Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Accountability)

9-12 criteria used to place schools on notice:

Achievement criteria

Achievement levels in Algebra I End of Course, 11th grade writing, and ACT composite

Schools identified as on notice had below average achievement in two or more of these areas.

Growth factors

1. Positive Value Added (meeting predicted targets)
2. Closing the achievement gap by a reduction in the number/percentage of students in below average group
3. Positive trend in reducing dropout rate

Schools on notice failed to meet one or more of the growth factors.

(Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Accountability)

To complete its study, the OEA assigned teams of analysts to the 11 systems with schools on notice. The department provided names of district liaisons who acted as guides through each school system’s administrative structure. At a minimum, staff interviewed the following persons in each system:

- District liaisons designated by Directors of Schools
- Department of Education Regional Directors
- Principals of schools on notice

Other district staff members often participated in the interviews or were interviewed individually. OEA staff also:

¹ With the passage of the 2001 “No Child Left Behind” Act, Tennessee has merged its accountability system with federal law. According to the merged systems, schools must show improvement for two consecutive years to move off notice completely.

- Conducted an extensive literature review of school improvement strategies and low performing schools issues.
- Reviewed audits of systems with schools on notice.
- Participated in staff training focused on school visits.
- Observed training for Exemplary Educators conducted by the Department of Education and Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL) (contractor for Exemplary Educators program).
- Attended school board meetings in some systems with schools on notice.
- Requested and reviewed available documentation from each system.

The OEA's study resulted in 11 system reports. Each system report includes background information, strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations.

See Appendix A for a list of persons interviewed and documents reviewed regarding Fayette County Schools. See Appendix B for the current status of schools on notice. See Appendix C for the system's response to the report.

Common Characteristics of On-notice Schools and State-level Concerns

Common characteristics of low-performing schools

Research indicates that schools with low achievement are disproportionately likely to:

- have a large number of students from low income and minority backgrounds
- be located in communities with significant concentrations of poverty and its associated problems
- have low standards and expectations for their students
- have a weak curriculum
- have limited parental involvement
- employ less experienced and less well-qualified teachers and other instructional staff
- have high staff turnover rates
- have lower morale than in other schools
- have a school environment that lacks order and discipline²

SREB notes that separate studies of school performance in North Carolina and Texas found common characteristics among low-performing schools similar to those listed above: weak leadership, inexperienced teachers, high turnover in faculty, and a lack of focus on state content standards.³

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, January 2001, *School Improvement Report: Executive Order on Actions for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools*, Washington, D.C., p. 4.

³ Jim Watts, *Getting Results with Accountability: Rating Schools, Assisting Schools, Improving Schools*, Southern Regional Education Board, p. 18.

Common characteristics of Tennessee's on-notice schools

OEA staff found that no single system with schools on notice could be characterized by every factor listed above. However, at least some of the factors are true of most of the systems and schools. Several have large numbers of students from low income and minority backgrounds and have large concentrations of poverty in their communities. Most have limited parental involvement, many have high staff turnover rates, and some employ a large number of teachers that are less experienced and less qualified (as shown by the number of teachers with waivers and permits).

In addition, analysts noted two other conditions present among many of Tennessee's on-notice schools: high student mobility and a sense of isolation, even in urban settings. High mobility is shown to lower achievement for individual students, but may also have a general effect of lowering school- and district-wide performance.⁴

Some of the rural on-notice schools are located in extremely geographically isolated areas, with few opportunities for students to experience other settings. Principals at several urban on-notice schools noted that large numbers of their students had limited experiences with opportunities that, in many cases, are geographically near them. Some principals indicated that many Memphis City students had never been in downtown Memphis before, for example, or visited the Memphis Zoo.

State-level findings in Tennessee's systems with schools on notice

An overall analysis of the findings from each of Tennessee's 11 systems with schools on notice during the 2001-02 school year revealed some common issues, which can be grouped into seven major areas:

- student readiness;
- teacher shortages;
- technology;
- school accreditation;
- data challenges;
- funding; and
- placing schools on notice and providing technical assistance.

A separate state-level report provides detailed findings and recommendations regarding these issues. In the 11 system reports, this symbol ★ denotes an area for which a corresponding conclusion and recommendation appear in the state-level report. The state-level report may be accessed at www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports or a printed copy may be requested from the Office of Education Accountability at (615)401-7911.

⁴ David Kerbow, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, "Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform," October 1996, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/Reports/report05entire.html> (accessed March 14, 2002).

Fayette County School System Background Characteristics

SCHOOLS AND STAFF 2000-01	
Number of schools	8
Number of schools on notice	5
Number of teachers	250
Number of teacher waivers	6
Number of teacher permits	27
Average teacher salary	\$31,176

(Source: Fayette County Report Card 2001)

FUNDING 2000-01	
Total expenditures	\$33,268,709
Per-pupil expenditures	\$6,140
Federal revenue	19.7%
State revenue	57.3%
<i>includes BEP state share</i>	<i>\$10,736,000</i>
Local revenue	23.1%
<i>includes BEP local share</i>	<i>\$3,238,000</i>

(Source: Basic Education Program Spreadsheet 2000-01; Tennessee Department of Education Annual Report 2001; Fayette County Report Card 2001)

Fayette County's per pupil expenditure of \$6,140 is more than the statewide average of \$6,055 but less than the national average of \$7,436. The average teacher salary in Fayette County is \$31,176 compared to a statewide average of \$37,431 in the 2000-01 school year. Systems with per pupil expenditures higher than the state average generally pay teacher salaries that exceed the state average. However, Fayette County spent more than the state average in several other cost categories in 2000-01. That school year, the system's special education and vocational education expenditures per ADM exceeded the state average. Fayette County's food service costs were the seventh highest in the state per ADM, and the system's transportation costs were second highest. As well, the system received the third most federal dollars per student (\$1,183) in the state in 2000-01, which significantly affected spending per pupil but not average teacher salary.⁵ Fayette County also relies more heavily on state funding than many other systems throughout the state, whose average state contribution is 47 percent.⁶

The Fayette County school system receives several grants, including Title I, Title II, Title VI, Special Education, and Early Childhood Education grants.⁷ All elementary schools on notice received Reading Excellence Act grants in May 2002.⁸ One Fayette County school

⁵ Internal analysis of school system data

⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, "Statewide Report Card 2001," <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 15, 2002).

⁷ Annual Public School Budget Document, Fayette County, Fiscal Year 2000-01.

⁸ "Federal Reading Excellence Act Grants Awarded to Seventy Tennessee Schools," Tennessee Department of Education Press Release, May 17, 2002, <http://www.state.tn.us/education/nr020517.htm> (accessed May 21, 2002).

on notice, Southwest Elementary, also received a \$100,000 Comprehensive School Reform grant in July 2002.⁹ PepsiCo contributes private money to Fayette County Schools, and each school has business adopters.

School officials noted that the system has several public schools out of compliance with fire codes. On May 14, 2002, the Fayette County School Board approved a \$385,000 project to upgrade three schools, including two on-notice schools – Somerville Elementary and Southwest Elementary.¹⁰ If approved by the county commission, the project is scheduled for summer 2002.

STUDENT POPULATION 2000-01	
Number of students	3,553
African American	69.8%
Caucasian	29.1%
Other	1.1%
English language learners	.7%
Special education	14.8%
Free and reduced lunch	83.5%

(Source: Fayette County Report Card 2001)

Additional System Information

Fayette County in rural west Tennessee borders Shelby County to the west. The county seat, Somerville, is approximately 45 miles east of Memphis and 49 miles southwest of Jackson. Fayette County, home to 28,806 residents, experienced slower population growth between 1990 and 2000 (12.7 percent) than the state (16.7 percent).¹¹ The county has a slightly higher median household income than the state (\$33,062 versus \$32,047) and the same percentage of persons living in poverty as the state (13.6 percent).¹² The system, however, has the third highest percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch in the state.¹³

Fayette County Schools is the only public school system in the county. The system has been under a court order (Civil Action No. C-65-136) to desegregate its schools and faculty since 1970; the court order followed other federal actions to desegregate schools.¹⁴ Students are assigned to public schools by federally-mandated district zoning, though some school principals note they do not receive all the children zoned for the school. Students in the Fayette County school system can transfer schools if it will increase minority representation at the receiving school; however, the system does not

⁹ “21 Schools Receive Federal School Reform Grant,” Tennessee Department of Education News Release, July 11, 2002.

¹⁰ Sherri Osteen, “School Board Will Spend Excess Construction Money On Fire Code Compliance,” *Fayette County Review*, <http://www.fayettecountyreview.com> (accessed May 24, 2002).

¹¹ “Fayette County, Tennessee,” U.S. Census Bureau, State and County *QuickFacts*, February 7, 2002, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/47047.html> (accessed May 28, 2002).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Tennessee Department of Education, *Annual Report 2001*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁴ Phyllis Taylor, Attendance Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, “More Answers for the Schools on Notice Study,” E-mail to the author, May 23, 2002.

provide transportation for out-of-zone attendance.¹⁵ Many other school-age children in Fayette County attend private schools; system officials note that 1,076 school-age children in the county attend private school.¹⁶ At least 14 additional students attended either independent or church-related home schools in the 2000-01 school year.¹⁷

Fayette County operates one Family Resource Center (FRC) and employs a director to oversee daily operations.¹⁸ The FRC opened in 1996 and serves seven schools, four of which are on notice.¹⁹ The center collaborates with various community agencies to provide workshops for parents, school work for parents to help their children complete, parenting classes, one-on-one assistance, and tutoring for students at risk of failure. Fayette County Schools also works with area institutions of higher education to secure consultants, professional development opportunities, and create a pool of teacher candidates.²⁰

Schools on Notice Background Characteristics

FAYETTE-WARE COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	9-12
Number of students	906
African American	79.6%
Caucasian	19.6%
Other	.7%
English language learners*	<1%
Special education**	---**
Free and reduced lunch	73%
Number of teachers employed	81
Number of administrators	4

*(Source: Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School Report Card 2001; TN Department of Education School Approval Database; *Principal interview; **Special education figures on school report cards represent the percentage of students taking the TCAP that were identified as special education students and does not represent students in grades K-2 or 9-12.)*

¹⁵ Phyllis Taylor, Attendance Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, “Re: More Questions for the Schools on Notice Study,” E-mail to the author, May 22, 2002.

¹⁶ Interview with Donna Signiago, K-12 Instruction Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

¹⁷ Number of students includes 12 independent home-schooled 9th through 12th grade students and two church-related home-schooled students. The Department of Education could not provide numbers for K-8 students attending independent home schools. Fretta Bunch, Director of Non-Public Schools, Tennessee Department of Education, voice mail to the author, May 21, 2002.

¹⁸ The General Assembly created a grant program in 1992 to allow local education agencies to establish FRCs to coordinate state and community services to help meet the needs of families with children (T.C.A. 49-2-115).

¹⁹ Family Resource Center survey conducted by Office of Education Accountability, Comptroller of the Treasury, Summer 2001.

²⁰ Interview with Louise Holloway, Assistant Director of Schools and Personnel Director, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High is the only public high school in the county and is currently fed by East Middle School.²¹ Beginning school year 2002-03, the system will operate two middle schools serving students in 7th through 9th grades, and the high school will serve students in 10th through 12th grades. The school's principal, Dr. Dan Shaw, came to Fayette-Ware High at the start of the 2001-02 school year but will not return for the 2002-03 school year.

The high school building was constructed in 1968, and principal stated that there are currently no major maintenance needs. In school year 2001-02, the principal and teachers used school funds and raised additional monies to replace the gymnasium's public address system. The school uses one portable building for GED classes.²²

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School applied for and received a competitive \$100,000 federal Baldrige in Education grant for the 2001-02 school year. The program provides for an improvement consultant, a needs assessment, and a school improvement plan. The school is divided into departments to implement the seven components of the plan. The Ministerial Alliance provides additional assistance to the high school, and area churches, hospitals, and several businesses donate to the vocational department.²³

Fayette-Ware employs three full-time security guards who arrive at 6:40 a.m. each morning. The school operates school cameras and uses metal detectors at entry doors each morning. Students at Fayette-Ware high have access to three guidance counselors, a transition coordinator who takes referrals, a school psychologist, and external social services. When students misbehave, the school follows disciplinary procedures that begin with placing students in in-school suspension. Students then go to the system's alternative school. The principal notes students are expelled as a last resort.²⁴

JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	K-8
Number of students	275
African American	85.7%
Caucasian	12.8%
Other	1.5%
English language learners*	0
Special education**	9.1%
Free and reduced lunch	100%

²¹ Prior to school year 2001-02, the system had no middle schools but operated K-8 schools.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with Dr. Dan Shaw, Principal, Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School, April 4, 2002.

Number of teachers employed	24
Number of administrators	1

*(Source: Jefferson Elementary School Report Card 2001; TN Department of Education School Approval Database; *Principal interview; **Special education figures on school report cards represent the percentage of students taking the TCAP that were identified as special education students and does not represent students in grades K-2 or 9-12.)*

Jefferson Elementary has two pre-kindergarten classes that serve 35 children. Beginning school year 2002-03, students from Jefferson, which will become a pre-K – 6 school, will graduate to attend East Middle School. Jefferson is the only school in the system that was on the Department of Education’s 2000-01 “heads up” list. Dr. Gennie Chandler became school principal in January 2002.

The school building was completed in 1968 with a gymnasium added in 1996. The school has four portables for special education, early childhood, and music and needs another for pre-kindergarten. School officials note several problems with the school building, including permanent classrooms only accessible from the outdoors, a lack of safety rails, and no covered walkway for portables. Officials also note the need for additional restrooms, hot water, paint, and window screens. In school year 2001-02, the principal improved the school stage in the cafeteria by replacing carpet and stabilizing the structure.²⁵

Jefferson received a Reading Excellence Act grant in May 2002. The school sponsors one fundraising activity a year; this year, the school will host a May Festival. Jefferson also receives services and donations through area churches. Officials note Fred’s Pharmacy was once the school’s adopter, and the principal is actively seeking additional business and community sponsorship.²⁶

The school employs a full-time security guard who is a teaching assistant part of the school day but is on call to handle problems. The principal maintains a video surveillance system and procedures to ensure consistent disciplinary action. After a child is referred for discipline, he or she attends counseling. If unable to improve his or her behavior, the child attends a series of alternative placements: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, then alternative school.²⁷

NORTHWEST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	K-8
Number of students	240
African American	82.2%
Caucasian	16%
Other	1.9%

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Dr. Gennie Chandler, Principal, Jefferson Elementary School, April 17, 2002.

English language learners*	0
Special education**	8%
Free and reduced lunch	92.4%
Number of teachers employed	23
Number of administrators	1

*(Source: Northwest Elementary School Report Card 2001; TN Department of Education School Approval Database; *Principal interview; **Special education figures on school report cards represent the percentage of students taking the TCAP that were identified as special education students and does not represent students in grades K-2 or 9-12.)*

Northwest Elementary School has a pre-kindergarten class that serves 15 students. After completing the 7th grade (in 2001-02, Northwest served grades K-7), Northwest students currently attend East Middle School. Beginning next year, students from Northwest, which will become a pre-K – 6 school, will be divided between East Middle School and West Middle School. Ida Marshall has been the principal at Northwest since 1995.

Northwest was constructed in the 1920's with renovations in 1935 and 1960. The building has adequate space to house the students. The school has three portable classrooms but will use only one next year to house the pre-kindergarten program.²⁸

In school year 2001-02, the school received a Title I Accountability grant in the amount of \$57,711 and used the funds for a computer lab. Additionally, six of the school's teachers received individual technology grants in the amount of \$1,000. The school received a Reading Excellence Act grant in May 2002. The Vollrath Corporation in Gallaway, Tennessee, is the school's corporate adopter and provides the school with donations and volunteers for after-school tutoring.²⁹

Northwest has after-school detention for disruptive students. Additionally, the system has an alternative school, but on average, Northwest refers very few students to the alternative school (this year no students have been sent to alternative school).³⁰

SOMERVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	K-8
Number of students	343
African American	50.3%
Caucasian	47.6%
Other	2.1%
English language learners*	0
Special education**	17.1%

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Ida Marshall, Principal, Northwest Elementary School, April 5, 2002.

Free and reduced lunch	88.5%
Number of teachers employed	27
Number of administrators	1

*(Source: Somerville Elementary School Report Card 2001; TN Department of Education School Approval Database; *Principal interview; **Special education figures on school report cards represent the percentage of students taking the TCAP that were identified as special education students and does not represent students in grades K-2 or 9-12.)*

Somerville Elementary School does not have a pre-kindergarten program because of space and building conditions, but the system is planning to have a program at the school for 2002-03, depending on funding availability. In school year 2001-02, Somerville served students in kindergarten through 7th grade. Beginning 2002-03, the school's 7th grade students will attend East Middle School, and Somerville will become a K-6 school. David Edmonds has been the principal of Somerville Elementary since August 2001.

The school building was constructed in 1940 with additions and renovations to the building in 1961, 1968, and in 1984 because of increases in student enrollment and to meet fire codes. Since 1994, several improvements have been made, including dropped ceilings and fluorescent lighting, and the school was painted (both inside and outside). In 2001-02, several parents repainted the interior of the school and added character illustrations to the walls. The school has two portable classrooms but uses only one for a computer lab. Next year, the portable will serve as the music classroom or the pre-kindergarten classroom, depending on funding for the development of a pre-kindergarten program at Somerville.³¹ Contingent upon county commission approval, the school building will undergo renovations in summer 2002 to meet fire codes.³²

In school year 2001-02, Somerville received a Title I Accountability grant for \$63,000, which will be used to build a new computer lab. PepsiCo also donated \$1,000 to the school that year. In the 2001-02 school year, Somerville applied for and received a Reading Excellence Act grant. Somerville Bank and Trust is the school's corporate adopter and provides the school with donations and sponsors the Channel 3 Weather Net, a school-based weather station broadcast on Channel 3 News.³³

SOUTHWEST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	K-8
Number of students	255
African American	94.9%
Caucasian	3.3%
Other	1.8%
English language learners*	0
Special education**	9.3%

³¹ Interview with David Edmonds, Principal, Somerville Elementary School, April 3, 2002.

³² Osteen.

³³ Ibid.

Free and reduced lunch	92.3%
Number of teachers employed	23
Number of administrators	1

*(Source: Southwest Elementary School Report Card 2001; TN Department of Education School Approval Database; *Principal interview; **Special education figures on school report cards represent the percentage of students taking the TCAP that were identified as special education students and does not represent students in grades K-2 or 9-12.)*

Southwest Elementary School has a pre-kindergarten class that serves 15 students. Southwest was a K-7 school in 2001-02, but the school's 7th graders will attend West Middle School beginning in 2002-03. Southwest Elementary will become a pre-K – 6 school. Mr. Allen Yancey has been the principal of Southwest Elementary since 1985.

The school building was constructed in 1968. School officials note there are no major problems. The Fire Marshal requires a few changes to the interior of the building, and the school board has approved construction in summer 2002 to bring the school into compliance.³⁴ School officials say the facility provides ample space with no need for portable classrooms.³⁵

In 2001-02, Southwest applied for and received a Reading Excellence Act grant and a \$100,000 Comprehensive School Reform grant. Though the school does not do a great deal of fundraising, activity funds are collected through basketball games, school pictures, and other school-level fundraisers. The school also receives services and donations from area churches and businesses. Officials note several school sponsors: a Collierville chemical company, Rossville Bank, and Kellogg's.

The school operates an in-school detention program and does not send many students to the system's alternative school. The school also maintains policies and procedures for student discipline and safety.³⁶

³⁴ Osteen.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview with Allen Yancey, Jr., Principal, Southwest Elementary School, April 4, 2002.

Analysis and Conclusions

Note that the symbol ★ denotes an area for which a corresponding conclusion and recommendation appear in the state-level report.

Strengths

★ **The Fayette County school system and schools on notice are focused on improvement and are using state-level assistance. Further, the school system is implementing several local strategies to support schools on notice.** Though system and school officials noted initial shock at the placement of five schools on notice, all express a focus on improvement to move off the list.

The director of schools noted that communication from the state department during the on-notice process has been good, and staff at the central office and schools on notice say the state's assistance has been helpful to school-level improvement. The department's Southwest Regional Office assigned a consultant to the school system who visits the central office almost weekly. The consultant has worked with the system since the department released the "heads up" list in 2000 and introduced state-assigned Exemplary Educators (EEs) to Fayette County schools on notice in 2001. EEs maintained contact with the central office while performing multiple in-school tasks including planning, staff development, school grant-writing, and data analysis. Most principals noted that EE assistance was relevant to school-level problems, and central office staff remarked that EEs were highly qualified to provide assistance. Fayette County Schools also integrated direct state department assistance in the areas of grant-writing and district improvement planning.

The central office exhibits a focus on assistance to schools and is implementing local strategies to improve student achievement. The new superintendent encourages principals to focus on test data and apply for external grants. Each school on notice in Fayette County recently received a Reading Excellence Act grant award. The school system also focuses staff development on improving student achievement and is completing system-wide curriculum mapping. Several principals also noted additional time they and teachers spent working with individual students before and after school to raise standardized test scores.

★ **The Fayette County school system uses multiple funding sources to provide pre-kindergarten programs and resources for early childhood education; however, more Fayette County Schools students need access to pre-K.** High quality early childhood education is associated with increased student achievement and graduation rates and several other quality of life factors. In addition, a 2000 RAND study identified pre-kindergarten programs as a significant factor in those states that have shown the greatest academic gains in the last decade.³⁷ A state priority, the 2002 State Board Master Plan promotes the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs.³⁸

³⁷ David W. Grissmer, et al., RAND Corporation, *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, July 25, 2000, p. xxvi.

³⁸ Tennessee State Board of Education, Key Result Area 1: Early Childhood Education, *Master Plan 2002*, p. 5.

Research has shown that pre-kindergarten programs especially benefit students educationally “at risk” because of poverty or other factors.³⁹ Fayette County Schools, which has an 83.5 percent free and reduced lunch population, combined state, Title I, and special education funds to serve approximately 144 children in 10 pre-K classes in school year 2001-02.⁴⁰

Three of four elementary schools on notice in Fayette County provide at least one pre-kindergarten classroom. The system selects children for these programs by screening three- and four-year-olds and identifying those most educationally at risk. School improvement plans for schools on notice with pre-K classes contain specific action plans for young children. The school improvement plan for the elementary school on notice without a pre-K program reveals that parents and staff would like an on-site program for young children. According to the central office, Somerville Elementary does not have a pre-K class because of space and building conditions; however, contingent upon funding, Fayette County Schools plans to extend early learning programs to each elementary school in the system. Students in Fayette County pre-K programs get the same services as older students: art, music, computer, and library access.⁴¹

The Fayette County school system uses various fund sources to provide professional growth opportunities for its educators. Quality professional growth for educators is crucial to increasing student achievement. A recent longitudinal study of Title I schools found that students improved in reading and mathematics when “teachers gave high ratings to their professional development” in both subjects.⁴² According to two school improvement plans, “The Fayette County Board of Education believes that all school district employees should have a plan of professional growth designed to bring about better academic results for students.”⁴³ System officials note that recent changes in staff development include more Saturday workshops, staff development linked to test scores, and more focused planning.

School improvement plans for Fayette County schools on notice emphasize staff development. The plans describe the link between student academic achievement and quality professional development and contain staff development plans targeted to meet school needs. The central office plans staff development based on school improvement plans and test scores and tries to make opportunities school-specific. The system uses

³⁹ Office of Education Accountability, *Why pre-k?: A Legislative Staff Briefing Paper*, Comptroller of the Treasury and Tennessee Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations, March 2001, p. 2.

⁴⁰ One pre-K class was open but unfilled. Interview with Art Garrett, Title I Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002; Tennessee Department of Education, “Fayette County Schools Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/system.asp>, (accessed May 20, 2002).

⁴¹ Interview with Art Garrett, Title I Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁴² Planning and Evaluation Service, U.S. Department of Education Office of the Deputy Secretary, *The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools Final Report*, “Volume 1: Executive Summary,” 2001, pp. 1-2., <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PED/esecl/escp-vol1.pdf> (accessed May 2, 2002).

⁴³ Southwest Elementary School Improvement Plan 2001 and Northwest Elementary School Improvement Plan 2001.

Title I, Title II, Title VI, and Special Education funds to provide professional growth opportunities and in the 2000-01 school year received a special state grant of \$275,000 for professional development. Professional development is open to certified and non-certified personnel, substitutes, and principals. Central office staff notes that teachers are receptive to development opportunities and that some parents and grandparents have attended workshops.⁴⁴

Several schools on notice in Fayette County make efforts to expose students to experiences outside the classroom to enhance their overall learning. Studies have shown that “isolation restricts rural schools and communities from making use of urban-based resources that might enhance educational programs – museums, research libraries, and colleges and universities.”⁴⁵ Many children in Fayette County schools have less regular exposure to cultural experiences than other students in more prosperous areas. To combat the effects of isolation, principals of schools on notice noted special efforts to increase cultural activities.

Jefferson Elementary students participated in “May Day: The Multicultural Way” in 2002 with local Hispanic families preparing food and a Mariachi band providing music. Other 2001-02 activities at Jefferson included Black History Assembly and Dr. Seuss Read Across America. Students from Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School compete in vocational events and hold offices in national student organizations. The high school also sponsored limited Evening Institutes in 2001-02 with themed, interest-area tutoring in subjects like theatre and hotel management. Northwest Elementary students set out to “Survive the TCAP,” and the school adopted the popular television show *Survivor* as a theme to promote high performance on state tests. Each classroom was a “tribe” with an African name. The students learned their tribal name and its English meaning, and the school used posters and other items to promote the theme.

★ Schools on notice in Fayette County have ample technological resources available for students; however, the system needs additional technical support staff.

Specifically, the Fayette County school system has approximately 1,770 computers available for student use, including: computers in the library for research; computers in vocational education classrooms; a computer lab for personal computing instruction; a diversified technology lab; and computers dispersed in regular education and special education classrooms for teacher and student enrichment programs.⁴⁶

In 1999-2000, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) developed a technology model for a well-equipped school.⁴⁷ Specifically, SREB recommends that schools have a minimum of one computer per five students, late model computers, and a high level of

⁴⁴ Interview with Donna Signaigo, K-12 Instruction Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁴⁵ Maynard and Howley, p. 1, referring to Capper, C.A. (1993), “Rural community influences on effective school practices,” *Journal of Educational Administration*.

⁴⁶ Interview with Nabil Loutfi, Technology Coordinator, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁴⁷ Lou Parker and William R. Thomas, “Guidelines for Technology Equipment Selection and Use: An SREB Model for Schools and Campuses,” Southern Regional Education Board, June 1999, <http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/techselectguidelines/EdTechGuidelines.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2002).

Internet connectivity.⁴⁸ The Fayette County school system has one computer for every two students, which is better than the SREB-recommended student-computer ratio⁴⁹ and Tennessee's average student-computer ratio of 5.4 students for every computer.⁵⁰ Additionally, most equipment is modern, and most computers are connected to the Internet. To develop technological resources, Fayette County system staff applied for and received several grants, which were divided among all schools in the system. Additionally, individual schools applied for and received various technology grants. The system recently purchased several new computers using grant funds.⁵¹

In its technology model, the SREB also stated that availability of training and technical support is critical for successful technology programs.⁵² The report does not provide explicit recommendations but suggests schools and systems should have access to consulting and "trouble-shooting" services that are familiar with the educational environment.⁵³ The Fayette County school system employs one technology coordinator to maintain 1,770 computers in the system's eight schools. The system needs additional support to ensure the success of the system's technology program.

Some of the schools on notice are housed in older buildings; however, each appears to be well-maintained. In 2002, the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations performed a survey to assess the condition of existing school facilities.⁵⁴ The survey also indicates the number of additional classrooms each facility needs to comply with Education Improvement Act (EIA) class size requirements. The system's maintenance supervisor completed surveys for schools in Fayette County.

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School was built in 1984. TACIR's survey indicates that the high school is in "good" condition, meaning "the structural integrity is sound and the facility can meet building code and functional requirements with only routine or preventive maintenance or minor repairs that do not hinder its use."⁵⁵ Jefferson Elementary was completed in 1922, with subsequent renovations; it also received a "good" score.⁵⁶ Northwest Elementary School opened in the 1920's with renovations in 1935 and 1960 and received a score of "good" on the TACIR survey.⁵⁷

Somerville Elementary School was built in 1940, with major renovations in 1961, 1968, and in 1984 because of increases in enrollment and to meet fire codes. The school

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ Interview with Nabil Loutfi, Technology Coordinator, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁵⁰ "Technology Counts, 2001," *Education Week*, May 10, 2001, pp. 70-105.

⁵¹ Interview with Nabil Loutfi, Technology Coordinator, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁵² Lou Parker and William R. Thomas, "Guidelines for Technology Equipment Selection and Use: An SREB Model for Schools and Campuses," Southern Regional Education Board, June 1999, <http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/techselectguidelines/EdTechGuidelines.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2002).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Existing School Facility Survey Form and Verification Data, 2002.

⁵⁵ Ibid, Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School.

⁵⁶ Ibid, Jefferson Elementary School.

⁵⁷ Ibid, Northwest Elementary School.

received a “fair” score, indicating that the building’s “structural integrity is sound, but the maintenance or repairs required to insure [sic] that it meets building code or functional requirements hinder – but do not disrupt – the facility’s use.”⁵⁸ Finally, Southwest Elementary School was built in 1968. Like Somerville Elementary, the school received a “fair” score on the TACIR survey.⁵⁹

The TACIR surveys indicate that all five schools on notice in Fayette County have enough classrooms to accommodate EIA class size requirements. Although the buildings are older, each appears to be well maintained. All principals of schools on notice further indicated that the schools have adequate custodial staff and the system provides adequate maintenance staff.

In 2001-02, Fayette County Schools achieved the EIA requirements for maximum class sizes and class size averages.⁶⁰ In 2000-01, the year schools were placed on notice, some classes and schools in Fayette County did not meet state-mandated grade level averages and class size maximums.⁶¹ The system had four vocational classes and one 4-6 class exceed maximums. Two schools exceeded the K-3 average, and two exceeded the 4-6 average. Of these schools not in compliance in school year 2000-01, two schools on notice (Fayette Ware Comprehensive High and Somerville Elementary) contributed to these figures. However, systems were not required to meet the EIA class size requirements until the 2001-02 school year. (TCA 49-1-104 requires that by the 2001-02 school year, no class shall exceed the prescribed maximum size and no school will be allowed to exceed the required average class size for its grade level.)

The Fayette County school system requires schools to develop and implement school improvement plans in compliance with State Board of Education policy. Further, the system requires each school to incorporate district-level planning documents into its SIP. In addition to requiring district-level planning, the State Board of Education requires every school to “develop, maintain, and implement a school improvement plan” to be updated every two years.⁶² Each Fayette County school on notice developed a SIP in compliance with this rule and updated its SIP every two years.

The system trains principals and teachers on interpreting test data (such as value-added scores) and ways to improve targeted areas of need. These areas are specified in planning documents, particularly SIPs, and incorporated into goals and objectives. Additionally, the district provides training for school staff on how to write improvement plans. Teams of stakeholders develop and implement the SIPs.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid, Somerville Elementary School.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Southwest Elementary School.

⁶⁰ Tennessee Department of Education, School Approval, Class size spreadsheet, 2001-02.

⁶¹ Tennessee Department of Education, School Approval, Class size and teacher information spreadsheet, 2000-01.

⁶² State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(b).

⁶³ Principal interviews; Interview with Donna Signiago, K-12 Instruction Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

Concerning the implementation of the SIP, system officials stated that central office staff monitors implementation to ensure consistency with system-level planning documents. Principals also indicated that SIPs are “working documents” used frequently.⁶⁴

The schools on notice in Fayette County are also using state assistance in the form of EEs for school improvement. Most principals stated that EEs were helpful in the development and implementation of SIPs.⁶⁵

The Fayette County school system has a high level of community support through the corporate adopter program. In 2002, *Education Week* reported that “collaborations with local businesses, universities, medical and religious centers, foundations, and other community-based organizations intend to enhance both academic and nonacademic skills for schoolchildren.”⁶⁶ Each school on notice has corporate adopters that provide varied assistance. According to the principals of on-notice schools, corporate adopters’ assistance and involvement include: making monetary donations, purchasing supplies the schools need, providing rewards for students, providing after-school tutoring services, and providing medical care to students.

Some schools on notice in Fayette County also receive support from community churches. For example, the United Methodist Church in Somerville sponsors the DREAM tutoring program at Somerville Elementary School. Also, the Marah Garden Church of God in Christ provides Saturday tutoring, piano lessons, and a sewing class for Jefferson Elementary students. The church also sponsors “MENtoring through Marah,” in which successful men talk to boys.

All Fayette County schools on notice offer after-school tutorial programs; however, the lack of transportation limits program attendance. In its 2000 report “21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America's Families,” the United States Department of Education reported that the after-school hours can be dangerous for students, particularly “latchkey kids” whose parents are working.⁶⁷

Instead of being a time for growth and opportunity for these children, the hours immediately following the school day are their most dangerous, for these are the hours when children are most likely to commit or be the victim of crime. For many others, the afternoon hours are simply a period of idle and wasted time, when opportunities to be mentored and academically challenged are squandered.⁶⁸

The Fayette County schools on notice have after-school programs including targeted tutoring for students identified as low performing, tutoring for “latchkey students,” and

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Principal interviews.

⁶⁶ “Community Partnerships,” *Education Week on the Web*, May 2, 2002, <http://www.edweek.com/context/topics/issuespage.cfm?id=46> (accessed May 14, 2002).

⁶⁷ United States Department of Education, “Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America's Families,” September 2000, http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Providing_Quality_Afterschool_Learning/title.html (accessed May 14, 2002).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

HAP (High Achievers Program) programs. However, principals at several of the schools stated that schools cannot fund or provide transportation for the students. Therefore, many of the neediest students are unable to attend the programs because they lack transportation.⁶⁹

Fayette County Schools is implementing a middle school model. Until 2001-02, the system contained seven K-8 schools and one comprehensive 9-12 high school. In fall 2001, the system opened its first middle school and will open another middle school in fall 2002. The two new middle schools in Fayette County, East and West Middle Schools, will eventually serve all public school students in 7th through 9th grades. Principals of elementary schools on notice indicate that moving the upper grades to middle school will likely reduce disciplinary problems. One principal said his school will get the space it needs for other programming, including computer and pre-kindergarten classes.

Middle schools have become a primary means to educate adolescents in the United States. In 2000, there were 16,000 middle schools and 2,000 junior highs.⁷⁰ Multiple sources, however, document the mixed success of middle schools models over the past thirty-five years, citing lack of academic focus and weak curricula as potential problems. The 1996 release of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study results revealed poor middle school scores, and NAEP scores show similar patterns.⁷¹

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School addressed particular school safety concerns in a timely and effective manner. School officials described growing tension between students from different parts of the county that culminated in a gang-related incident in September 2001 in which 10 to 15 students had a fight at school. The principal reacted by expanding the school improvement plan to include school pride. He then met with parents, planned behavior modification sessions with trained experts, and offered the sessions to students involved in the conflict. The principal and central office staff note the workshops, which have served 64 total students (30 students attended each session), have been productive. A system official who attended a session said students took the chance to observe their lives and make changes. The principal has since witnessed a decrease in school fights.

Fayette-Ware High School's action regarding the school violence incident is aligned with research on gang prevention. One research review found family involvement, strong education, and conflict resolution programs are effective gang-prevention strategies.⁷²

★ **Each school in the Fayette County school system is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).** The state-mandated school improvement

⁶⁹ Principal interviews.

⁷⁰ Ann Bradley and Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, "The Weak Link," *Education Week on the Web*, October 4, 2000, <http://www.edweek.com> (accessed May 13, 2002).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Mary H. Lees, Mary Deen, and Louise Parker, "Research Review: Gang Violence and Prevention," Washington State University, Issue #4, Winter 1994, <http://www.cahe.wsu.edu/~sherfey/issue4c.htm> (accessed May 15, 2002).

planning process in which the schools participate is similar to the SACS accreditation planning process. As reported on the 2001 Tennessee Statewide Report Card, 1,110 out of 1,623, or approximately 68 percent of Tennessee schools are accredited.⁷³

SACS accreditation ensures that schools meet a minimum set of standards, though it does not ensure any particular level of student performance. According to SACS, the accreditation process “provides a school with the tools to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, analyze data associated with student performance, assess the instructional and organizational effectiveness of a school, establish specific goals for student learning, and create meaningful action plans focused on improving student performance.”⁷⁴ In addition, department staff note that SACS provides an outside team to assist with school level planning and make recommendations for improvement.⁷⁵

Areas for Improvement

★ **More than 10 percent of Fayette County school teachers are not licensed to teach.** In school year 2000-01, the system employed 250 teachers, 27 of which were on permits to teach.⁷⁶ The state department issues teacher permits to school systems unable to hire qualified personnel; a permit allows the system to hire an individual with a Bachelor’s degree to teach for one year. A system can renew a permit up to two years, though it can only retain the “permitted teacher” until it can secure a licensed teacher.

Because of its high number of teachers on permits, many educators in Fayette County may not have the experience necessary to teach or manage classrooms effectively. The prevalence of permits in Fayette County Schools is also a concern in light of the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA requires new teachers in Title I schools to be “highly qualified” by school year 2002-03. To be “highly qualified,” teachers must have full state certification with no certification requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis. Each school in Fayette County receives Title I funds, making the system subject to loss of funds if unable to comply with the ESEA. By school year 2005-06, *all* teachers must meet this definition.

Fayette County’s reliance on permits may be linked to statewide teacher shortages in certain subject areas. West Tennessee also has fewer higher education institution programs that produce teachers than either middle or east Tennessee. The 2001 report *Teacher Supply and Demand in Tennessee* by the Southern Regional Education Board found that graduates of teacher education programs tend to work in school systems near their home colleges and universities. While 12 teacher education programs serve the middle Tennessee area (including three at public universities), and 15 serve the east

⁷³ Tennessee Department of Education, “Statewide Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 14, 2002).

⁷⁴ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools web site, <http://www.sacs.org/pub/elem/csip/qsip/page3.html> (accessed May 29, 2002).

⁷⁵ Telephone interview with Connie Smith, Director of Accountability, Tennessee Department of Education, February 26, 2002.

⁷⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, “Fayette County Schools Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/system.asp>, (accessed May 20, 2002).

Tennessee area (also including three at public universities), seven programs are accessible to Fayette County, and only one is at a public university.

★ **Fayette County Schools experiences a high rate of teacher turnover, and teacher retention rates at schools on notice have worsened for the last two years.** System-wide, central office staff notes that 30 to 35 teachers leave Fayette County Schools annually.⁷⁷ Schools on notice experience varying degrees of teacher turnover, and two principals noted the loss of teachers as specific problems. Principals of schools on notice gave various reasons for teacher turnover, including the on-notice status, poor economic status of the area, and higher salaries elsewhere. The following chart represents staff retention at each school on notice over three school years. Columns headed with school years contain the number of educators (minus principal) in each school that year. Columns marked “SAME” include the percentage of educators (minus principals) remaining at the school between school years. As the data show, retention rates at each school have worsened over the last two school years.

Teacher Retention Rates for Fayette County Schools on Notice

	<i>1998-99</i>	<i>SAME</i>	<i>1999-2000</i>	<i>SAME</i>	<i>2000-01</i>
Fayette-Ware High	67	82.1%	62	71%	57
Jefferson Elementary	20	90%	20	70%	21
Northwest Elementary	21	76.2%	20	55%	19
Somerville Elementary	24	79.2%	23	60.9%	23
Southwest Elementary	19	78.9%	18	77.8%	20

(Source: Staff Lists for each school on notice, received from Fayette County Schools April 25, 2002.)

Current research highlights the increased fiscal burden of districts and schools with high teacher turnover rates.⁷⁸ High turnover also contributes to discontinuity in the educational system and is linked to lowered student performance on standardized tests.⁷⁹ Increased teacher experience positively affects student achievement and is undermined by high turnover.⁸⁰ Teachers who leave remove their growing levels of experience from classrooms; less experienced teachers often fill the open slots.

Teacher turnover is linked to many factors. One report finds that, excluding retirement, most teachers voluntarily change jobs or leave the profession for personal reasons, job

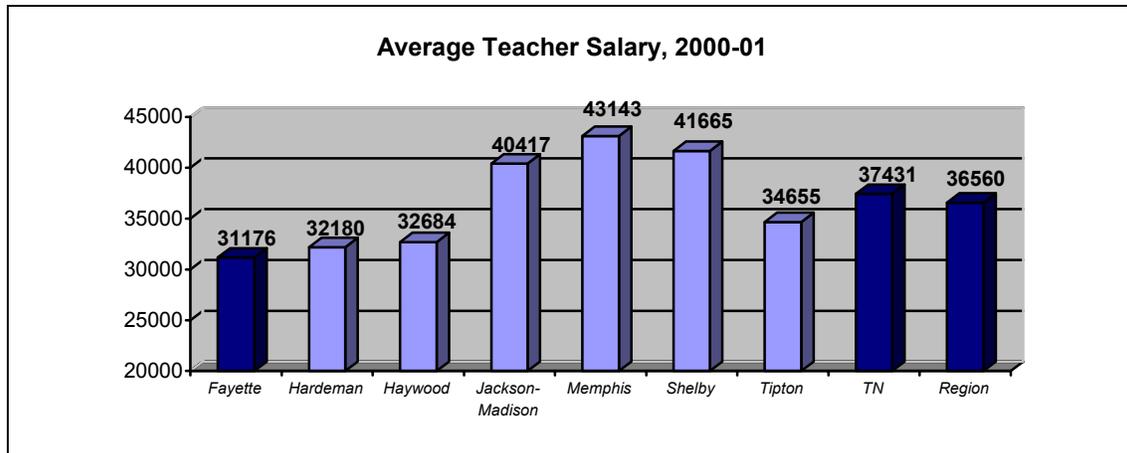
⁷⁷ Interview with Myles Wilson, Director of Schools, Fayette County Schools, January 4, 2002; Interview with Louise Holloway, Assistant Director of Schools, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

⁷⁸ Texas Center for Educational Research, *The Cost of Teacher Turnover*, TCER, November 2000, p. 1, <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/txbess/turnoverrpt.pdf> (accessed: March 14, 2002).

⁷⁹ David W. Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, Jennifer Kawata, and Stephanie Williamson, *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Scores Tell Us*, RAND Corporation, 2000, <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR924/> (accessed: March 14, 2002).

⁸⁰ Daniel P. Mayer, John E. Mullens, and Mary T. Moore, *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report*, U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2001-030, December 2000, p. 13.

dissatisfaction, or to pursue a different job.⁸¹ In Fayette County, school and system officials note the perception that entering teachers come to the system to get tenure then leave to accept higher-paying jobs. Officials also note difficulty retaining teachers in the midst of surrounding systems offering higher teacher salaries, represented in the following graph. Fayette County’s average teacher salary of \$31,176 is below the regional average pay of \$36,560 and the state average pay of \$37,431; one system in close proximity to Fayette County is Memphis City, which pays an average teacher salary of \$43,143.⁸² Fayette County also borders and competes with Mississippi for teachers, which pays a higher statewide average salary (\$31,954) than Fayette County.⁸³



(Source: System Report Cards 2001; Tennessee Statewide Report Card 2001; Mississippi Department of Education 2002 Annual Report, School Year 2000-2001)

In addition to teacher turnover, three schools have experienced principal changes in the last year. System officials note that principal turnover was not significant until the past year, in which several administrative changes took place. Myles Wilson became Director of Schools beginning school year 2001-02, leaving his former position of many years as principal of Fayette-Ware High School. The new director hired the head of Somerville Elementary at the central office, leaving another administrative vacancy. The long-time principal of Jefferson Elementary also left at the end of school year 2000-01.

The Fayette County school system employs only two elementary guidance counselors to serve seven schools. In school year 2000-01, two elementary counselors served 2,646 students in seven schools.⁸⁴ Each school is SACS accredited, and officials say the low number of elementary guidance counselors is an annual SACS deficiency.

⁸¹ Richard M. Ingersoll, University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools*, pp. 3, <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Turnover-Ing-01-2001.pdf> (accessed: March 14, 2002).

⁸² Regional average includes teacher salary for systems in Tennessee located near Fayette County: Hardeman County, Haywood County, Jackson County, Memphis City, Shelby County, and Tipton County. Tennessee Department of Education, “Statewide Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 15, 2002).

⁸³ Mississippi Department of Education, “2002 Annual Report, School Year 2000-2001, Public School Personnel,” <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/2002report/PubPer02.htm> (accessed May 13, 2002).

⁸⁴ Interview with Donna Signaigo, K-12 Instruction Supervisor, Fayette County Schools, April 18, 2002.

The SACS Checklist of Standards for the Accreditation of Elementary Schools dictates one full time guidance counselor for each 500 – 749 students.⁸⁵ Principals of elementary schools on notice also described needs for additional guidance counseling, especially given the number of educationally “at risk” students each school serves.

The Fayette County school system has a high dropout rate. In 2001, Fayette Schools’ average cohort dropout rate was 24.2 percent, well above the state average of 13.9 percent and the state goal of not more than 10 percent.⁸⁶ The system’s only high school is on notice. The dropout *cohort* rate is defined as the percentage of an entering 9th grade class that has dropped out by the end of 12th grade. It is calculated by dividing the number of students in a graduating class who dropped out over the four years they were in high school by the class’s 9th grade net enrollment.⁸⁷ The cohort rate is one of the variables the Department of Education and the State Board of Education use to determine whether a Tennessee high school is achieving the state’s performance goals. The cohort dropout rate also appears on the State Report Card for each system and school.

The system’s *event* dropout rate is also higher than the state average. According to the *2001 Annual Report* by the Department of Education, Fayette County’s event dropout rate for 2000-01 was seven percent, compared to the state average of 3.8 percent.⁸⁸ The event dropout rate is the number of students in grades 9-12 who drop out of school during a given year divided by the net enrollment in grades 9-12 for the same year.⁸⁹ It represents the percentage of grade 9-12 students who dropped out in one school year. The following table shows the event and cohort dropout rates for Fayette County Schools as calculated by the Tennessee Department of Education for the years from 1995-96 through 2000-01, as well as the state averages for those years.

Event and Cohort Dropout Rates, Fayette County Schools and State Averages

Year	FCS Event Dropout Rate	State Average Event Rate	FCS Cohort Dropout Rate	State Average Cohort Rate
1995-96	8.1%	4.5%	22.6%	16.4%
1996-97	10.9%	4.6%	20.5%	15.6%
1997-98	8.8%	4.5%	21.0%	15.2%
1998-99	14.4%	4.2%	30.9%	14.8%
1999-2000	10.3%	3.9%	31.9%	14.4%
2000-01	7.0 %	3.8%	24.2%	13.9%

(Source: Annual Reports and School Report Cards, Tennessee Department of Education)

In fall 2001, the district received a competitive state grant of \$6,000 to address dropout. The central office uses funds to target and serve 6th through 8th graders most at risk of

⁸⁵ “Checklist of Standards for the Accreditation of Elementary Schools: 2001-2001 School Year,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools, <http://www.sacs.org/elem/standards/elem.pdf> (May 20, 2002).

⁸⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, *State of Tennessee Report Card 2001*, How to Interpret the Report Card, available 4/30/02 at <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/rptcrd.htm>.

⁸⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, *Annual Report 2001*, p. 39.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

dropping out by pairing them with trained community mentors.⁹⁰ The system provides incentives for those students to attend a summer program to prepare for their next school year; a system official notes 9th grade dropout rate contributes most to the system's overall rate. The high school and the system have also worked together to address dropout rates.⁹¹ Fayette-Ware High also implements in-school prevention strategies.

Prior to school year 2000-01, Fayette-Ware High School implemented dropout prevention strategies by working with guidance services to increase communication with parents.⁹² In school year 2001-02, the high school used its Baldrige in Education grant to increase efforts by implementing:

- A first semester Baldrige After-School Institute to focus on raising test scores, which met with limited success;
- An in-school series of five behavior modification classes pairing students at risk of dropping out because of truancy, scores, or low self esteem with teachers, counselors, and other students;
- An after-school career exploration program for at risk students; and
- An in-school tutorial program focused on improving tests scores through the University of Memphis to supplement the behavior modification and mediation class.⁹³

Schools on notice in Fayette County implement policies and procedures for safety and security, but the system and several schools on notice have high suspension rates. Though limited, educational research supports the common assumption that disorder (i.e., high rates of student delinquent behavior) negatively affects student achievement.⁹⁴ Schools on notice in Fayette County implement a variety of methods to promote safety and security, and school improvement plans for each school on notice reference safety; however, three schools on notice and the system have higher suspension rates than the state. In school year 2000-01, the high school had eight zero tolerance violations for drugs, and one elementary school had a zero tolerance violation for a handgun.⁹⁵ The following chart contains suspension rates for the state, system, and schools on notice.

SUSPENSION RATES	
State of Tennessee	10.6%
Fayette County Schools	24%
Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High	26.2%

⁹⁰ Jan Bushing, Program Director, Tennessee Department of Education, "Re: Fayette County Dropout Prevention Grant," E-mail to author, May 29, 2002.

⁹¹ Telephone interview with Louise Holloway, Assistant Director of Schools, Fayette County Schools, May

⁹² Telephone interview with Dr. Dan Shaw, Principal, Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High Schools, May 21, 2002.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Paul E. Barton, Richard J. Coley, and Harold Wenglinsky, "Order in the Classroom: Violence, Discipline, and Student Achievement," ETS Policy Information Center, October 1998, <ftp://ftp.ets.org/pub/res/order.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2002).

⁹⁵ Tennessee Department of Education, "Zero Tolerance 2000-01 Data and Stats," Excel Spreadsheet.

Jefferson Elementary	9.1%
Northwest Elementary	38.8%
Somerville Elementary	36.4%
Southwest Elementary	8.2%

(Source: School Report Cards 2001, System Report Cards 2001, Statewide Report Card, 2001; Rate determined by dividing absolute number of suspensions by ADM).

While the system recently updated the district-level five-year strategic plan, the plan is not updated as frequently as State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(a) requires. The Fayette County school system’s district-level improvement plan was recently updated for the first time since 1996. This violates State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(a), which states that the plan be updated every two years.⁹⁶ The policy states:

- (a) Each local board of education shall develop, maintain, and implement a long-range strategic plan which addresses at least a five-year period of time. The plan shall be updated every two years and include a mission statement, goals, objectives and strategies, and address the State Board of Education master plan.

By not updating its plan, the system may focus on outdated problems and issues raised during the district improvement process. Updating the district-level improvement plan regularly would emphasize current problems and issues.

Although the system has not updated its strategic plan every two years, it requires each school to incorporate the district-level planning document into individual SIPs. The district additionally follows up with schools on a regular basis to enforce the implementation of the district-level planning document and the SIPs.

⁹⁶ Tennessee State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(a).

Recommendations

Note that any conclusions in the previous section that are preceded by this symbol ★ have a related recommendation in the state-level report.

★ **The Fayette County school system should continue to expand its pre-kindergarten services and facilitate school-level and community understanding regarding the selection process.** If the system can secure funds and space, Fayette County Schools should implement its plan to expand pre-K to all elementary schools in the system. The system should also ensure school staff understands selection for the classes. Principals of several schools on notice could not provide information about the pre-kindergarten programs and noted confusion in the community regarding which students are eligible for services. A system official noted that the system will provide more screening opportunities for school year 2002-03. Prior to the screening, the system will host a dinner for prospective students and parents and will encourage parents to make screening appointments for children. The system may also wish to present a brief information session to school principals regarding all elements of the pre-kindergarten program.

★ **To meet 2002-03 ESEA requirements and to lower the number of system-wide teacher permits, the Fayette County school system should extend recruitment beyond west Tennessee. Contingent upon state policy and funding, Fayette County should also consider alternative preparation programs as they become more available to school systems.** Fayette County currently establishes a pool of teacher applicants by recruiting from surrounding teacher preparation programs, including those at the University of Memphis, Freed-Hardeman University, and Union University. Staff also posts openings at the central office, with placement agencies, and online. The director of schools also notes that limited recruiting from Mississippi has met with some success. Though the system currently uses the Internet to post vacancies, the state's partnership with an online recruitment site (www.teachers-teachers.com/tennessee) and the operation of a Tennessee-specific site (www.k-12.state.tn.us/teachtn) should aid Fayette County Schools' ability to recruit outside the geographic area. Fayette County officials should also recruit at more teacher job fairs held outside the Fayette County area.

Tennessee operates limited alternative licensure programs in Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, but federal grant programs through the ESEA may provide an avenue for expansion. With Title II monies, systems and consortia of systems may be eligible to pair with teacher preparation colleges and provide alternative licensure programs. Fayette County should explore such programs as the state establishes policies and provides guidance for the use of federal dollars.

★ **Fayette County Schools should strengthen teacher orientation practices and design new strategies to curb its high teacher turnover rate. Further, the system should prevent principal turnover from becoming a concern in the future.** Individual schools on notice and system officials note current strategies designed to increase teacher retention. Several schools on notice implement teacher mentoring programs, and the central office holds new teacher orientation each year before school begins. For

orientation, central office supervisors provide a half day of training in attendance, policies, instruction, special services, Title I, payroll, benefits, and management. New teachers spend another half day in schools learning procedures. The high school improvement plan, however, notes “limited training in place for new and part-time faculty/staff” and recommends “new-hire orientation for faculty/staff needs...be developed and provided consistently throughout the year.”

The system may wish to consider more in-depth orientation and develop a system-wide teacher mentoring program. The system could strengthen its method of orienting new teachers by requiring periodic meetings between new teachers and administrators and by including the development of targeted professional development plans in the first-year teacher evaluation process. Schools on notice might explore the use of team teaching between new and experienced teachers in subject areas. School administrators may also be able to curb voluntary teacher turnover by providing more opportunities for teacher input in school decision-making.⁹⁷

High schools across the country have also begun implementing teacher academies to increase teacher retention. Like other vocational academies, teacher academies include student internships, specialized coursework for participating students, and a mentoring system between teachers and enrollees. Fayette County is relatively near the University of Memphis, and Fayette-Ware High could create possible co-enrollment of academy students in electronic postsecondary coursework.

Further, the system should consider strategies to stabilize its principal force. Principal turnover was not a concern in Fayette County before school year 2001-02; however, since that time, three schools have experienced changes in leadership. One of these schools, Jefferson Elementary, experienced another principal change during school year 2001-02, and Fayette-Ware High School’s new principal will leave following school year 2001-02. Central office staff should consider additional ways to support principals of schools on notice and design specific strategies to encourage principal retention.

Contingent upon funding, Fayette County should budget for and recruit additional qualified elementary guidance counselors. To be within the SACS standard, the system should hire an additional 1.5 to 3.5 more elementary guidance counselors. Making counseling services available to all students could also affect schools’ student suspension rates. System officials note that the system budgeted for another elementary guidance counselor one year but was unable to fill the position for lack of qualified applicants. If positions are open, the system should recruit qualified counselors both inside and outside its geographic area.

Fayette County Schools should continue to implement, strengthen, and evaluate strategies to decrease student aberrant behavior and suspension rates at schools on notice. Each school implements safety and discipline policies and procedures. Schools on notice employ security personnel, use metal detectors, provide in-school suspension programs, and operate security cameras. Three of the four school improvement plans for

⁹⁷ Ingersoll, p. 24.

elementary schools on notice note that parents feel the schools provide safe and orderly environments for students to learn; Jefferson Elementary and Fayette-Ware High plans note strategies employed to increase student safety. Fayette County Schools also operates an alternative school for students over age 12.

Lowering the suspension rate is a central office priority. Director of Schools Myles Wilson stated he is discussing suspension rates and alternative disciplinary methods with principals. One principal noted that the director promotes standardization of disciplinary procedures and documentation among schools. In addition, the system should consider training teachers to use standardized classroom management to stem student referrals. Fayette County system officials should also analyze school-level disciplinary data to identify any special needs and implement strategies to address them. The system may also explore how to offer in-school suspension or other alternative placement for older children in lower grades, a system-identified need.

The system may wish to consult research-based practices as it implements strategies to increase school safety. The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice developed an action guide to help schools “develop and implement and comprehensive violence prevention plan,” which recommends prevention, early intervention, and intensive services to reduce behavior problems. The guide notes schools with comprehensive plans report improved academics and reduced suspensions.⁹⁸

Fayette County Schools should continue to provide professional development for its educators and explore additional training opportunities. Though principals of most on-notice schools noted the system’s efforts to provide staff development, some mentioned teacher quality as an area affecting student achievement. As stated above, the system has implemented Saturday training with stipends to attract more teachers. The system may wish to consider online professional development opportunities to develop further its teaching force.

Fayette County Schools should continue to implement, strengthen, and evaluate strategies to decrease its dropout rate. According to the state’s *Annual Report*, the system’s rate improved between 1999-2000 and 2000-01. The system should evaluate, improve, and continue to implement strategies begun in school year 2001-02 to address dropout. The system and high school should also continue to seek additional funding sources like the state grant described above to fund such initiatives. The system may also wish to provide preventive services such as counseling and parent involvement to all students assigned to in-school suspension and alternative school and who are on out-of-school suspension.

The Fayette County school system should continue to encourage the use of after-school tutorial programs and should consider providing transportation for the programs. Transportation would allow more children, especially those most “at risk,” to

⁹⁸ “Chapter 1: Introduction,” *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, 2000, http://cecp.air.org/guide/actionguide/Chapter_1.htm, (accessed May 20, 2002).

benefit from after-school tutorial programs. However, this would require additional funds.

Because community support enhances students' educational experiences, the Fayette County school system should continue to encourage positive community relationships through its corporate adopter program. The system may wish to ensure each school has active corporate adopters of which the principal is aware.

★ **The Fayette County school system should hire additional technical support staff to assist the current technology coordinator.** In its technology model, the SREB stated that the availability of training and technical support is critical for successful technology programs.⁹⁹ While the report does not provide explicit recommendations, it suggests that schools and systems should have access to consulting and “trouble-shooting” services familiar with the educational environment.¹⁰⁰

The Fayette County school system should update the district-level improvement plan every two years, as prescribed by State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(a). The policy specifically states:

- (a) Each local board of education shall develop, maintain, and implement a long-range strategic plan which addresses at least a five-year period of time. The plan shall be updated every two years and include a mission statement, goals, objectives and strategies, and address the State Board of Education master plan.

As it implements a middle school model, Fayette County Schools should attempt to prevent historical middle school problems by learning from current research and reform practices. The system and its two new middle schools should use national sources to remain informed of middle school reform practices, such as:

- Providing targeted professional development for middle school educators,
- Teaching a rigorous curriculum with standards for student learning, and
- Maintaining a focus on preparing students for success in high school.¹⁰¹

The Fayette County school system will complete curriculum mapping in summer 2002, which should provide a strong curricular basis for the operation of middle schools. Curriculum mapping is a process of examining what is taught in each grade level to reduce overlap, increase consistency, and maximize efficiency in teaching and learning. Fayette County has used curriculum mapping exercises to align system curricula with state standards. Central office staff should ensure each new school uses the system standards and evaluates resulting student achievement.

⁹⁹ Parker and Thomas.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Appendix A

Individuals Interviewed and Documents Reviewed

Interviews

Central Office Staff

Myles Wilson, Director of Schools
Louise Holloway, Assistant Director of Schools, Personnel Director
Donna Signaigo, K-12 Instruction Supervisor
Brenda Woods, Family Resource Center and Adult Literacy Coordinator
Nabil Loutfi, Technology Coordinator
Phyllis Taylor, Attendance Supervisor
James Teague, Title I Director
Euretta Crowe, Special Services Director
Art Garrett, Title I Supervisor

School Personnel

Dr. Dan Shaw, Principal, Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
Dr. Gennie Chandler, Principal, Jefferson Elementary School
Ida Marshall, Principal, Northwest Elementary School
David Edmonds, Principal, Somerville Elementary School
Allen Yancey, Jr., Principal, Southwest Elementary School

State Personnel

Ralph Barnett, Regional Director, Tennessee Department of Education
Danny Johnson, Regional Consultant, Tennessee Department of Education

Documents

Audit Documents:

Fayette County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 2000-01
Fayette County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 1999-2000

Fayette County School System Report Card, 2000-01

TACIR School Facility Survey, 2002

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
Jefferson Elementary School
Northwest Elementary School
Somerville Elementary School
Southwest Elementary School

School Report Cards, 2000-01

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
Jefferson Elementary School
Northwest Elementary School
Somerville Elementary School
Southwest Elementary School

School Improvement Plans

Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
Jefferson Elementary School
Northwest Elementary School

Somerville Elementary School
Southwest Elementary School
Fayette County Board of Education Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning, 2001
District Budgets 2000-01 and 2001-02
Fayette County School Board Policy
Zero Tolerance Documents
School Approval Database
Title I documents
Fayette County School System Website
Fayette County Education Task Force Report, June 2001
Fayette County Technology Plan
Performance Contract Document for Principals
Fayette County Schools Emergency Procedures

**Appendix B
Current Status of Schools On Notice
as reported by the Department of Education**

(Note: This list includes Title I schools in School Improvement that were not on notice in 2001-02.)

**Achieved good standing by showing two years of adequate progress
2000-01 and 2001-02**

School system	Schools in good standing
Anderson County	Grand Oaks
Campbell County	West Lafollette
Cocke County	Grassy Fork Northwest
Cumberland County	Pine View
Fayette County	Central Elementary LaGrange Moscow
Humboldt City	East End Elementary Main Street Elementary
Henderson County	Scotts Hill School
Morgan County	Oakdale Petros Joyner
Harriman City	Central Intermediate
Memphis City	Cherokee Elementary Douglass Elementary Evans Elementary Pyramid Academy

**Schools making adequate progress
2001-02**

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Blount County	Eagleton Elementary
Campbell County	Stony Fork
Carter County	Range Elementary
Claiborne County	Powell Valley Elementary
Cleveland City	Arnold Elementary Blythe-Bower Elementary
Davidson County	Shwab Elementary West End Middle Pearl Cohn High School Whites Creek High School
Fayette County	Jefferson Elementary Southwest Elementary Fayette Ware High School Somerville Elementary

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Grainger County	Joppa Elementary Washburn Elementary
Grundy County	Tracy Elementary
Hamblen County	Lincoln Heights Elementary
Hamilton County	Calvin Donaldson Howard Elementary Howard School of Academics and Technology
Hawkins County	Clinch School
Kingsport City	Roosevelt Elementary
Knox County	Sarah M. Greene Elementary
Lawrence County	Ingram Sowell Elementary
Maury County	James Woody/Mt. Pleasant Elementary
Perry County	Perry County High School
Putnam County	Uffleman Elementary
Rutherford County	Holloway High School
Union County	Luttrell Elementary Maynardville Elementary
Wayne County	Frank Hughes
Memphis City	Berclair Elementary Bethel Grove Elementary Coleman Elementary Cummings Elementary Dunn Avenue Elementary Egypt Elementary Kingsbury Elementary Klondike Elementary Lauderdale Elementary Oakshire Elementary Raleigh-Bartlett Scenic Hills Brookmeade Elementary Corning Elementary Fairley Elementary Frayser Elementary Graceland Elementary Levi Elementary Lincoln Elementary Locke Elementary

School system	Schools making adequate progress
Memphis City (continued)	Orleans Elementary Raineshaven Elementary Raleigh Egypt Middle School Shannon Elementary Sharpe Elementary Sheffield Elementary Trezevant High School Whitney Elementary Melrose High School Northside High School Oakhaven High School Whitehaven High School

**Schools failing to make adequate improvement 2001-02
Recommended for probation 2002-03**

School System	Probation
Claiborne County	Clairfield Elementary
Davidson County	Kirkpatrick Elementary Warner Elementary Maplewood High School Stratford High School
Fayette County	Northwest Elementary
Hamilton County	Chattanooga Middle School Dalewood Middle School East Lake Elementary John P. Franklin Middle School Hardy Elementary Orchard Knob Elementary Orchard Knob Middle School Woodmore Elementary
Hardeman County	Grand Junction Elementary
Knox County	Maynard Elementary Lonsdale Elementary
Memphis City	Airways Middle School Carver High School Chickasaw Junior High Cypress Junior High Denver Elementary

School System	Probation
Memphis City (continued)	Dunbar Elementary Fairview Junior High Frayser High School Geeter Middle School Georgian Hills Elementary Georgian Hills Junior High Hamilton Middle School Hawkins Mill Elementary Hillcrest High School Hollywood Elementary Humes Middle School Lanier Junior High Larose Lester Elementary Longview Middle School Oakhaven High School Riverview Middle School Sheffield High School Sherwood Middle School Spring Hill Elementary Springdale Treadwell Elementary Treadwell High School Trezevant High School Vance Middle School Westhaven Elementary Westside High School Westwood Elementary Westwood High School Winchester Elementary Booker T. Washington High School East High School Fairley High School Hamilton High School Kingsbury High School Manassas High School Middle College High School Mitchell Road High School Raleigh Egypt High School South Side High School Wooddale High School

Appendix C

System Response

Each system was given an opportunity to review and respond to the report. A copy of the system's written response begins on the next page.

**FAYETTE
COUNTY
SCHOOLS**



Myles Wilson, Director of Schools

**P.O Box 9, 126 W. Market Street
Somerville, Tennessee 38068
(901) 465-5260
Fax (901) 465-5269**

August 15, 2002

Ms. Emily Wilson
Comptroller Office Of Education Accountability
505 Deaderick Street
James K. Polk Building
Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243

DATE RECEIVED

AUG 23 2002

OFFICES OF
RESEARCH & EDUCATION
ACCOUNTABILITY

Dear Ms. Wilson:

Please be informed that we concur with your findings and recommendations.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Myles Wilson".

Myles Wilson
Superintendent