

# Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



## System Report: Hardeman County Schools

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



STATE OF TENNESSEE

**COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY**

John G. Morgan

Comptroller

STATE CAPITOL

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0264

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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.

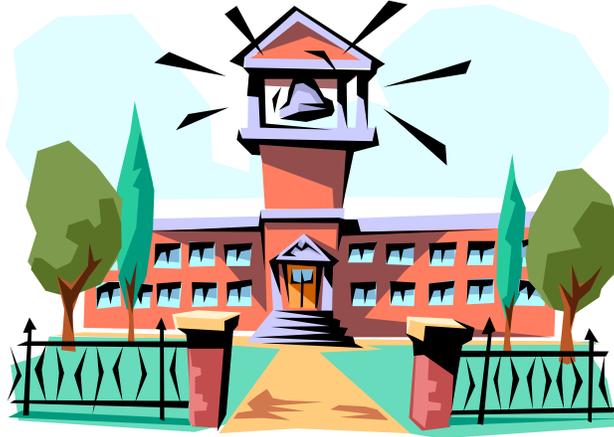
Sincerely,

John G. Morgan

Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Faye Taylor  
Department of Education

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## System Report: Hardeman 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,  
Authorization Number 307296-06, 95 copies, September 2002. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$1.73 per copy.

# HARDEMAN 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. One school in the Hardeman County school system is now on notice:

- Grand Junction Elementary

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 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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:

- Conducted an extensive literature review of school improvement strategies and low performing schools issues.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

- 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 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 Hardeman 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 discipline<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

### **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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

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.<sup>4</sup>

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](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports) or a printed copy may be requested from the Office of Education Accountability at (615)401-7911.

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<sup>4</sup> 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).

## Hardeman County School System Background Characteristics

### System Overview

The Hardeman County school district contains nine schools: Bolivar Elementary (K-5); Grand Junction Elementary (K-6); Hornsby Elementary (K-8); Middleton Elementary (K-6); Toone Elementary (K-8); Whiteville Elementary (K-8); Bolivar Middle (6-8); Middleton High (7-12); and Central High (10-12).

<b>SCHOOLS AND STAFF 2000-01</b>	
Number of schools	9
Number of schools on notice	1
Number of teachers	304
Number of teacher waivers	4
Number of teacher permits	29
Average teacher salary	\$32,180

(Source: Hardeman County Report Card 2001)

<b>FUNDING 2000-01</b>	
Total expenditure	\$26,315,671
Per-pupil expenditure	\$5,797
Federal revenue	14.3%
State revenue	63.3%
<i>includes BEP state share</i>	\$15,093,000
Local revenue	22.4%
<i>includes BEP local share</i>	\$2,625,000

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

<b>HARDEMAN COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM STUDENT POPULATION 2000-01</b>	
Number of students	4,578
African-American	53.9%
Caucasian	44.7%
Asian	0.3%
Hispanic	0.2%
English language learners	0
Special education	18.1%
Free and reduced lunch	67.0%

(Source: Hardeman County Report Card 2001)

**Per Pupil Expenditures and Teacher Salaries**

The following tables compare Hardeman County’s per pupil expenditures and teacher salaries with state averages, maximums, and minimums. Hardeman County’s per pupil expenditure for the 2000-01 school year was \$5,797, less than the statewide average of \$6,055 and less than the national average of \$7,436. The average teacher salary in Hardeman County for the same year was \$32,180, compared to a statewide average of \$37,431. Hardeman County relies more heavily on state funding than many other systems throughout the state at 63.3 percent; the average state contribution to local education agencies is 47 percent.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Per Pupil Expenditures 2000-2001</b>			
<b>Tennessee State Average</b>	<b>Tennessee Maximum System Average</b>	<b>Tennessee Minimum System Average</b>	<b>Hardeman Co. Average</b>
\$6,055	\$8,502 (Oak Ridge City)	\$4,427 (Smith Co.)	\$5,797

*(Source: Basic Education Program Spreadsheet 2000-01; Tennessee Department of Education)*

<b>Teacher Salaries 2000-2001</b>			
<b>Tennessee State Average</b>	<b>Tennessee Maximum System Average</b>	<b>Tennessee Minimum System Average</b>	<b>Hardeman Co. Average</b>
\$37,431	\$46,751 (Alcoa City)	\$30,348 (Bledsoe Co.)	\$32,180

*(Source: Basic Education Program Spreadsheet 2000-01; Tennessee Department of Education)*

**Grants**

In the 2001-02 school year, the Hardeman County school system received several federal grants, including Title I (Grants to Local Education Agencies), Title II (Eisenhower Professional Development State Grant), Title VI (Innovative Education Program Strategies), and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, “Statewide Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 15, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Hardeman County Annual Public School Budget Document FY 2001-02, p. 7.

### **District Administration**

Mr. Charles Johnson is in his fourth year as Director of the Hardeman County school system. Mr. Johnson told OEA staff that his primary objective in accepting the position as director was to raise awareness within the county of the importance of the school system. He was also aware of the need for improvement within specific schools (e.g., Grand Junction Elementary) and he made personnel changes to begin that improvement.

Because all schools in the Hardeman County School System are Title I schools, the Director works closely with the Title I administrator, Mr. Major Wilburn.

### **Professional Development**

Hardeman County operates a Teaching and Learning Center within the Board of Education's facility. The Center distributes a new professional development handbook for teachers annually on July 1, and also distributes a monthly flyer that summarizes the classes offered that month. Five to eight classes are offered each month at the center, some of which are sessions added by request. In addition, Hardeman County distributes a summer in-service class schedule which offers 15 courses.

### **Alternative Placements<sup>7</sup>**

The Hardeman County school system provides Saturday school and after-school detention for students with discipline problems. For children expelled for zero tolerance violations, the system provides home teaching services, usually employing retired teachers. Grand Junction Elementary provides in-school suspension as a disciplinary measure. The school does not provide alternative placements for standard school suspensions or expulsions.

### **Zero Tolerance Data Summary: Hardeman County**

Data from the Tennessee Department of Education indicates that in the 2000-01 school year Hardeman County had a total of seven zero tolerance cases. Of the seven cases, three (43 percent) of the students were Caucasian, and four (57 percent) were African-American. Data analysis indicated several common characteristics: (1) all offenses were committed in 2000; (2) all offenders were male; (3) all committed drug-related offenses; (4) all were in regular education; (5) all were first-time zero tolerance offenders; (6) all were in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the time the incident occurred; and (7) all guardians declined the disciplinary hearing. After the student hearing (or opportunity to have one was declined), two students (29 percent) were expelled for 12 calendar months, and five (71 percent) were remanded to an alternative school for the remainder of the school year. As of the last day of the 2000-01 school year, one student (14 percent) had dropped out of school and six students (86 percent) had been expelled without subsequent placement.

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<sup>7</sup> Information provided in interview with Mr. Charles Johnson, Director of Schools, Hardeman County, January 4, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> "48 targeted schools for assistance," Tennessee Department of Education, July 19, 2000, available at <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/arc/newsrel/nr000721b.htm> (accessed May 8, 2001).

### **Business Partners**

Because Hardeman County is primarily rural, the school system does not rely upon corporate sponsors to the same extent that more urban school systems do. The school system has a corporate partner that provides various types of assistance. Some local businesses also provide supplies to individual schools. The school district and the area Chamber of Commerce are currently collaborating to establish a private foundation.

### **School on Notice Background Characteristics**

<b>GRAND JUNCTION ELEMENTARY 2000-01</b>	
Grades served	K-6
Number of students	282
African American	96.8%
Caucasian	3.2%
English language learners*	0
Special education	18.3%
Free and reduced lunch	96.0%
Number of teachers	20
Number of administrators	1

*(Source: Hardeman County Report Card 2001; \*Principal interview; Tennessee Department of Education School Approval Database)*

### **Status on 2000 List of Heads Up Schools**

Grand Junction Elementary was not on the original list of 48 schools the Department of Education slated for assistance in 2000. Conversely, Bolivar Middle School was on the preliminary list of schools the Department of Education slated for assistance in 2000, but was not on the official on-notice schools list in 2001.<sup>10</sup>

### **Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

Grand Junction Elementary does not provide pre-kindergarten programs. Most Grand Junction Elementary students attend Head Start. The school conducts an orientation and testing session in the summer before children enter kindergarten.

### **Counseling Services**

The school is a site for Project BASIC, which provides counseling for students in grades K-3 and referrals, if necessary. A school nurse provides health referrals on an as-needed basis. The Department of Human Services, a local health clinic, and a mental health clinic are also available to provide assistance. Project BASIC distributes a newsletter at Grand Junction Elementary that lists school announcements, objectives of the month for various grades, and activities parents and children can do together.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sample edition of "The B.A.S.I.C. News: Grand Junction Elementary School" (handout received from Charles Johnson, Director of Schools).

### **Other Programs**

Grand Junction Elementary relies upon several other programs to address specific needs of students. These include: Accelerated Reader (grades 2-6); D.A.R.E. (6<sup>th</sup> grade); speech therapy (grades K-6); 4-H (grades 4-6); America Reads (grades K-3); BETA Club (grades 5-6); After School Tutoring Program (grades 3-6); and Project UP for gifted students (grades K-6).

### **Professional Development**

Grand Junction Elementary teachers received 192 hours of professional development at the Hardeman County Teaching and Learning Center during the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years. During the same time period, teachers received 93.5 hours of on-site training at Grand Junction Elementary. Of 22 teachers on staff, 17 (77.3 percent) have attended professional development training at the Teaching and Learning Center in the past two years.<sup>12</sup>

### **Local Economic and Demographic Characteristics**

Hardeman County has one of Tennessee's highest unemployment rates (10.4 percent, March 2002).<sup>13</sup> The county's economic base is primarily in agriculture, timber and light manufacturing. Although the population of the City of Grand Junction is racially balanced (176 white residents and 122 black residents), the student population of Grand Junction Elementary, which is drawn from rural areas outside the city limits, is primarily black (96.8 percent).<sup>14</sup> Approximately 52 percent of the students come from single-parent homes.<sup>15</sup>

### **School Leadership**

The principal of Grand Junction Elementary, Rickie Graves, was hired specifically to improve performance at the school. Mr. Graves is in his third year serving as principal. He has spent his entire career at the school, having served for many years as a teacher. Graves told OEA staff that his lifelong involvement in the community makes it possible for him to communicate freely with students, parents, and representatives of community organizations.

### **School Safety and Discipline**

Grand Junction Elementary has policies to address crisis management, natural disasters, and the presence of unauthorized personnel in the building. School personnel conduct drills to enforce these policies. The school also uses an eight-camera video system that provides a view of the campus from a central location.

School personnel indicated that discipline is not an issue at Grand Junction Elementary. The school does not have a school resource officer. The only official SRO in Hardeman

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<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence from Hardeman County School System, Carolyn Graham, August 27, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/labor\\_figures/h.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/labor_figures/h.htm) (accessed May 28, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Grand Junction Elementary School Improvement Plan, CSRD Approved Grant 2001-02, p. 6 (document received in interview with Charles Johnson, January 4, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

County works at Bolivar High School. Grand Junction Elementary's 2001 Report Card indicated an exemplary student attendance rate of 95.2 percent.

### **School Facility**

The facility is spacious and includes a large play area outside the school. In addition, the school has a spacious cafeteria and gymnasium. Classes average 17 students, which is below the state average and well within Education Improvement Act requirements. The building was constructed in 1950, and has undergone several improvements, including a library/media center expansion, a wiring and heating system upgrade, and the addition of several new classrooms.<sup>16</sup> The school recently received a new interior paint job. In summer 2002, Grand Junction Elementary is scheduled to receive a new roof, and in fall 2002, the school is scheduled to undergo exterior renovations and receive new computer wiring.

Grand Junction Elementary uses only one portable structure, which houses a music/guidance room and a special education class.

The floor of the school gym is in disrepair.

### **Grants**

This year, Grand Junction Elementary received a Comprehensive School Reform Design (CSRD) grant for \$110,000.<sup>17</sup> This grant paid for Grand Junction Elementary's implementation of the Modern Red Schoolhouse model and school improvement supplies. Grand Junction Elementary also received an Accountability Grant of \$58,000 to improve its reading program.<sup>18</sup>

Grand Junction Elementary uses Title I funds to employ four teachers and one teacher assistant.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Title I funds pay for general supplies, parent involvement materials, professional development, and technology/equipment.

### **Business Partnerships**

Several businesses provide supplies and sponsor individuals who donate time to Grand Junction Elementary. A regional WalMart funds some school activities and donates supplies. The New Hope Health Clinic is attempting to establish several official community and corporate partners for the school. The local post office has assisted with a volunteer reading program. In addition, a local church group called The Sisterhood comes to the school to read to children.

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<sup>16</sup> TACIR Existing School Facility Survey Form and Verification Data, project status as of July 1, 2002 (handout received from Charles Johnson, Director of Schools).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Rickie Graves.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## Analysis and Conclusions

★ **Seven of the nine schools in the district, including Grand Junction Elementary, are SACS-accredited.**<sup>20</sup> The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) runs an accreditation program for elementary and secondary schools. The SACS accreditation process increases accountability for standards and demonstrates “a commitment to quality education.”<sup>21</sup> Although accreditation does not ensure quality education, it does require the administration and staff of a school to examine its standards and methods of operation. Grand Junction Elementary has maintained its SACS-accredited status since its initial accreditation in the 1996-97 school year.<sup>22</sup> At the time of the meeting with OEA staff, Grand Junction Elementary had submitted an application for continuing accreditation for the 2001-02 school year.

**The district administration emphasizes a team approach to operating schools.** The Director of Schools told staff that he has a good working relationship with the county commission, with the school board, and with principals throughout the system. The principal at Grand Junction Elementary corroborated this view. District personnel and school principals pursue grants as a team.

**Hardeman County School System policy requires an equitable distribution of resources.** “All classrooms and learning centers shall be equipped with an evenly-proportioned, wide assortment of teaching tools, textbooks, workbooks, [and] audio-visual equipment selected to meet the students’ needs.”<sup>23</sup> Grand Junction Elementary school personnel indicated the school receives a fair distribution of general funds. All schools in the Hardeman County School System qualify as Title I schools. Grand Junction Elementary is free to use Title I funds for whole-school programs, rather than for certain segments of the school population.

**Professional development opportunities are available for teachers in Hardeman County.** A review of the handbooks for the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years indicates there are several options for professional development for Hardeman County teachers. Each month features approximately five to 12 separate opportunities for teachers to secure additional training. With prior central office approval, teachers may attend workshops that are not listed in the handbook. The system has increased the number of days of independent teacher in-service training from one to two. Teachers also may attend sessions outside of regular school hours to receive in-service credit. The day OEA staff met with district personnel, the system conducted training sessions for substitute teachers.

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<sup>20</sup> Hardeman County Report Card 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools web site, available at <http://www.sacs.org/info/accred/acc.html> (accessed May 21, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Grand Junction Elementary Application for Continuing or Initial Accreditation or Candidacy 2001-02, 2000-01, 1999-2000, 1998-99, 1997-98 (handouts received at interview with Charles Johnson, Director of Schools, January 4, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Hardeman County Board of Education policy document, descriptor code 4.400, issue date 12/16/99.

★ **The school's teacher turnover rate has decreased significantly over the past three years.** Research has shown that it is difficult for rural schools to recruit and retain qualified teachers.<sup>24</sup> Rural school administrators must seek teachers who come from rural areas, or are otherwise suited to a rural lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> In addition, to retain teachers in a rural setting, the administration must encourage the teacher's involvement in the community.<sup>26</sup> In past years, Grand Junction Elementary's staff turnover rate was nearly 30 percent. The school loses teachers to the systems that pay higher salaries (e.g., Memphis City, Shelby County, and Madison County). However, the turnover rate for the past two years was below the system average. The school turnover rate has dropped from 10 percent two years ago, with the loss of two teachers, to five percent last year, with only one teacher's departure. The Hardeman County School System experienced a 14 percent teacher turnover rate in 2000-2001.<sup>27</sup>

**Parental involvement has increased significantly in the last three years.** Parental involvement in student learning is positively linked to achievement.<sup>28</sup> In a 1996 submittal for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a self-evaluation by Grand Junction Elementary staff indicated that parental involvement needed to increase. The plan to improve includes several elements. First, the school holds monthly PTO meetings. Though their annual budget is small, the PTO provides transportation to its meetings and gives financial assistance for the costs of displays in local businesses. At its first meeting of the school year in September 2001, school personnel reported to the district that 21 parents and 16 teachers attended the meeting.<sup>29</sup> For the October PTO meeting, school personnel estimated that over 60 adults were in attendance.<sup>30</sup> The school also has a Parent Committee, comprised of teachers and parents, that meets each month. It provides input on the school's reform program and makes quarterly reports to the PTO and faculty.

Second, the school provides a monthly lunch for children to dine with parents and/or grandparents. Third, Grand Junction Elementary holds an assembly each month in which students perform.

Fourth, the school welcomes and expects visitors. Parents can visit Grand Junction Elementary without advance notice to observe their children's classes after signing in at the school office.

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy Collins, "Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Areas," ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, EDO-RC-99-7 (December 1999), p. 1, available at <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc997.htm> (accessed May 20, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence, Hardeman County Director of Schools, July 17, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Hoachlander, Martha Alt, and Renee Beltranena, Southern Regional Education Board, *Leading School Improvement: What Research Says: A Review of the Literature*, March 2001, p. 34, [http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/pubs/LeadingSchool\\_Improvement.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/pubs/LeadingSchool_Improvement.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Memo from Rickie Graves to Major Wilburn, dated September 7, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Memo from Rickie Graves to Major Wilburn, dated October 16, 2001.

**The school does not appear to have student discipline problems.** The school uses in-school suspension when necessary, as there are no alternative placement facilities available for expelled students. The principal was not aware of any gang activity in the school or the community. There were no expulsions in 2001; there were 32 suspensions.<sup>31</sup> The suspension rate for the past two years has averaged 11.5 percent.

**The school building appears to have adequate space to accommodate the student population and classes are organized to meet EIA class size requirements.** Class size at Grand Junction Elementary is approximately 17 students per teacher, compared to an Education Improvement Act (EIA) K-3 requirement of 20 students per class and a 4-6 requirement of 25 students per class. All Hardeman County schools, including Grand Junction Elementary, met EIA class size requirements for the 2001-02 school year. A review of the TACIR school facility survey form revealed that all components of the facility were rated “good” or “excellent.” Three permanent classrooms were rated “excellent” and 12 permanent classrooms were rated “good.”<sup>32</sup> The two portable classrooms were rated “good,” as were the school’s cafeteria, library/media center, and gymnasium.<sup>33</sup>

★ **The number of teachers at Grand Junction Elementary with three or fewer years of experience may indicate that the school’s at-risk students are being underserved.** The demographics of the student body at Grand Junction Elementary (rural, African-American, low household income) are those of an “at-risk” population. These students usually require more resources, including more teacher experience, per pupil to make the same yearly progress as students who are not “at risk.” In 2001-02, 11 teachers had less than three years of experience; four teachers had from four to 10 years of experience; and eight teachers had more than 10 years of experience.

★ **The district’s efforts to recruit qualified teachers who reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body have had little effect at Grand Junction Elementary.** Although the Hardeman County School Board has a policy to recruit and retain African-American teachers, the racial mix at Grand Junction Elementary has not changed significantly in the past two years. The current ethnic makeup of the teachers in Grand Junction Elementary is primarily split between African-American and Caucasian, with a smaller number of American Indian teachers; the student body is 96 percent African-American. In 2000-01 there were seven African-American teachers and 13 Caucasian teachers; in 2001-02 there were seven African-American teachers and 16 Caucasian teachers. Two people actively recruit teachers at Tennessee colleges and surrounding states as part of their job duties.

**Grand Junction Elementary makes efforts to expose its 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

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<sup>31</sup> State Department of Education, 2001 Report Card.

<sup>32</sup> TACIR survey.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

colleges and universities.”<sup>34</sup> Many children in the school have less regular exposure to cultural experiences than other students in more prosperous areas. Principal Graves has arranged field trips to Memphis and supports attempts to expose the children to learning experiences.

**Grand Junction Elementary’s science laboratory is a positive, interactive experience for the students.** Research has shown that museums, zoos, and other “informal classrooms” help children learn the practical elements of subjects that teachers present in the classroom.<sup>35</sup> Grand Junction Elementary is in a rural area without access to these types of experiences. However, Grand Junction Elementary staff has fashioned an on-site mini-zoo and laboratory with various types of animals, including a snake, rats, and an iguana. The laboratory is organized around a “food chain” theme, which the children study as they care for and interact with the animals.

**Hardeman County schools have safety and security measures in place.** Research shows that supervising access to school, increasing visibility of adults, and working with local law enforcement agencies help create a safe school environment.<sup>36</sup> The school board has policies to address safety, fire drills, and fire inspections. Grand Junction Elementary has eight security cameras on campus. School resource officers work at Bolivar High School. District personnel indicated a desire to get school resource officers for all district schools. In the meantime, the system has a working relationship with all area law enforcement agencies, and officers patrol school grounds periodically. In addition, the Director encourages principals to increase their visibility in their schools as an extra security measure. The employment contract between Mr. Johnson and the Hardeman County Board of Education requires that he “be visible in all schools and... present the Board quarterly with a log of school visits and the purpose of each visit.”<sup>37</sup> The Director reported that he spends approximately 60 percent of his time visiting district schools.<sup>38</sup>

★ **Although the student promotion rate at Grand Junction Elementary is low, the principal has placed an emphasis on learning preparedness.** Social promotion, or the process of allowing a student who has not met achievement standards to continue to the next grade, is common throughout the United States. However, as the U.S. Department of Education stated in a publication on the topic, “passing students on to the next grade when they are unprepared neither increases student achievement nor properly prepares

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<sup>34</sup> Maynard and Howley, p. 1, referring to Capper, C.A. (1993), “Rural community influences on effective school practices,” *Journal of Educational Administration*.

<sup>35</sup> Dennis M. Bartels, “On-Site Science,” *Education Week*, September 19, 2001, available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=03bartels.h21> (accessed May 21, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, *Early Warning, Early Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (2000), p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Contract of Employment between Charles J. Johnson and the Hardeman County Board of Education (valid July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Charles Johnson.

students for college and future employment.”<sup>39</sup> The study also noted that many teachers succumb to pressure from parents, principals, and administrators to lower the failure rate.<sup>40</sup> Graves indicated to OEA staff that he has placed an emphasis on learning preparedness, particularly in grades K-3. He encourages teachers not to promote students to the next grade level until they have demonstrated adequate ability in core areas such as reading and math.

## **Recommendations**

**The Hardeman County School system and Grand Junction Elementary should begin planning for the possible implementation of sanctions under the federal *No Child Left Behind* policy, particularly in regard to setting aside Title I funds.**<sup>41</sup> The *No Child Left Behind* policy requires schools to adopt “improvement options” if students fail to make adequate yearly progress.<sup>42</sup> A review of TCAP scores for Grand Junction Elementary shows improvement in almost all grades and subject areas from 2001 to 2002. However, scores from 1999 through 2000 showed a steady decline. Scores for 2002, even though improved, remain below the state average and below the Hardeman County average. If Grand Junction Elementary fails to continue to make adequate yearly progress it may be necessary to set aside Title I funds to comply with various school choice and educational services provisions of the federal policy.

**The Hardeman County School system and Grand Junction Elementary should begin planning for grant competition.** The reading initiative portion of the *No Child Left Behind* policy calls for reading grants to be made to states. However, the policy requires that states distribute the grants competitively. LEAs will be required to apply “scientifically based reading research” to ensure development in reading ability.<sup>43</sup> Because the grants must be awarded competitively, it is likely that LEAs will be more likely to receive grants if, first, they employ staff knowledgeable in reading research, and second, are able to devote staff resources to the grant competition process.

**Grand Junction Elementary should continue efforts to increase parent involvement, and should expand efforts to increase community involvement in the school.** The school reports that attendance at parent functions has increased steadily over the past three years. The Director of Schools and the principal might wish to consider establishing a discussion group within the community to help determine what changes would be necessary to enable Grand Junction Elementary to increase collaboration between parents, the community, and the school.

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<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion: A Guide for Educators and State and Local Leaders,” May 1999, Introduction, p. 1, available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/socialpromotion/intro.html> (accessed May 21, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> See previous section on state funding for a description of possible effects of the No Child Left Behind Program.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www.ed.gov/News/Letters/020724.html>. Accessed July 31, 2002. This is the text of a letter from Secretary of Education Paige to education officials. The letter contains summary descriptions of the various sanctions, along with a timetable for their implementation.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/exec-summ.html>. Accessed July 31, 2002.

★ **Grand Junction Elementary should seek funding increases for pre-kindergarten programs, reading specialists, and tutors.** The demographics of the student body at Grand Junction Elementary (rural, low household income) indicate that students would benefit substantially from these programs.

**Grand Junction Elementary should continue to expose students to learning outside the classroom.** Because the students who attend Grand Junction Elementary do not have ready access to museums, zoos, or other similar cultural amenities, the school should attempt to organize field trips to neighboring cities with such facilities, or to organize substitute experiences within the community. The school might also consider expanded extra-curricular activities within the school. Performing groups, such as dance ensembles, concert bands, and drama groups, might serve not only as a form of cultural enrichment for students but also as a method of increasing student, parent, and community involvement in the school.

**Grand Junction Elementary should repair the gymnasium floor.** The gymnasium is a valuable asset to the school; however, the condition of the floor significantly reduces its usefulness.

## **Appendix A**

### **Individuals Interviewed and Documents Reviewed**

#### **Interviews**

Charles Johnson, Director of Schools, Hardeman County School System (also serves as District Liaison)

Major Wilburn, Director of Federal Projects, Hardeman County School System

Rickie Graves, Principal, Grand Junction Elementary School

Ralph Barnett, West Tennessee Regional Director, Tennessee Department of Education

H. Danny Johnson, Consultant, Tennessee Department of Education

Nathan Boyd, Field Services Director, Southwest Regional Office, Tennessee Department of Education

#### **Documents**

Hardeman County School System Report Card 2001

Grand Junction Elementary School Report Card 2001

Hardeman County School Board Policies

District budget and funding formula

Title I Information: Plan for Improving Schools Not Making Adequate Annual Progress for 2 Years, Title I Parent Involvement Plan

Past School Improvement Plans

School Improvement Plan, CSRD Approved Grant 2001-02

Facilities Improvement Plan

SACS Improvement Plan

Permanence Contracts for Superintendent and Principal

Technology Improvement Plans

Newsletters and/or Communication Tools

Sample Staff/Teacher Professional Development Plan

Professional Development Records

Zero Tolerance and other School Safety Reports

**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**

<b>School system</b>	<b>Schools in good standing</b>
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**

<b>School system</b>	<b>Schools making adequate progress</b>
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

<b>School system</b>	<b>Schools making adequate progress</b>
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**

<b>School System</b>	<b>Probation</b>
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.



# HARDEMAN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

P.O. BOX 112 -- 10815 OLD HWY. 64  
BOLIVAR, TENNESSEE 38008

Charles J. Johnson, Director of Schools

**DATE RECEIVED**

**AUG 20 2002**

OFFICES OF  
RESEARCH & EDUCATION  
ACCOUNTABILITY

(731) 658-2510  
FAX (731) 658-2061

August 16, 2002

Ethel R. Detch  
Director, Office of Education Accountability  
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0268

Dear Ethel R. Detch:

We appreciate the visit from Phil Doss and Karen Tolbert to Grand Junction Elementary School. The information shared about our district and Grand Junction is being brought to the attention of the appropriate district and school officials. This information will be used as we move forward in enhancing student academic achievement.

Attached are responses to the recommendations noted in the draft review and analysis of the school district and Grand Junction Elementary.

I hope that this information will be useful to you in completing your review of the district and school on notice, but if I can be of further assistance, please contact me again.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Johnson  
Director of Schools  
Hardeman County Schools

cc: Phil Doss  
Karen Tolbert

Attachment

**1. The Hardeman County School System and Grand Junction Elementary should begin planning for the possible implementation of sanctions under the federal *No Child Left Behind* policy, particularly in regard to setting aside Title I funds.**

Grand Junction Elementary School was proud of the fact that our test scores showed improvement in almost all grades and subjects areas from 2001 to 2002. We are not where we want or need to be but progress is being made. Expectations are high that our progress will be even better in 2002-2003. Ten per cent of our Title I budget for 2002-2003 has been designated for intensive staff development in the areas of reading, language arts, and math.

**2. The Hardeman County School System and Grand Junction Elementary should begin planning for grant competition.**

Grand Junction Elementary was in the third year of the CSRD grant process in 2001-2002. An additional Accountability Grant was applied for and received in May of 2002. Grant funding is being used in 2002-2003 to secure the services of a recognized reading specialist. These funds will also be used to provide materials, supplies, and staff development in reading. Other grant opportunities will be reviewed to determine their applicability to Grand Junction Elementary.

**3. Grand Junction Elementary should continue efforts to increase parent involvement, and should expand efforts to increase community involvement in the school.**

Plans are being made to expand current parent and community involvement. Additional activities such as open houses or back-to-school nights, PTO meetings, academic exhibitions, parent-teacher conferences, fine arts performances, etc. are being scheduled. A school-business group has begun work to bring the limited number of businesses located in Grand Junction into a working/supporting relationship with the school. A parent advisory group has been established to assist the school in increasing parental involvement. In addition, items are being added to the Parent Center in the school library. Included are books, videos, pamphlets, training tapes, cassettes, CDs, Library privileges, and computer access. These items will assist parents on methods of helping their children. All of these activities will increase public awareness about the importance of parent, business, and community involvement in children's education.

**4. Grand Junction Elementary should seek funding increases for pre-kindergarten programs, reading specialists, and tutors.**

Grand Junction Elementary currently has a pre-kindergarten summer orientation program in place. Grand Junction Elementary will continue the extended day tutoring program for 2002-2003. Plans are to investigate additional opportunities for pre-kindergarten and tutoring programs. The District continually advertises and searches for reading specialists. The school is receiving the services of a reading specialist through the Title I Accountability Grant and Title I funds.

**5. Grand Junction Elementary should continue to expose students to learning outside the classroom.**

Extra curricular activities will continue to be used to expose students to learning outside the classroom. These activities will be theatrical and varied musical performances by professional groups and individuals. Students will attend educationally focused field trips to regional cultural events. Students will also participate in school plays. A chorus is being planned for implementation this school year.

**6. The Hardeman County School System should track and report attendance and usage for the teaching and learning center.**

An attendance and reporting system is in place for the teaching and learning center. Copies of attendance logs will be forwarded to Grand Junction Elementary so the Principal can be aware of the professional development activities being attended by staff members. Over the past three school years, the staff of Grand Junction Elementary has received 60 days of training as part of our CSR model (Modern Red Schoolhouse). Additional professional development has been and will continue to be provided by the Principal, outside consultants, and lead staff members.

**7. Grand Junction Elementary should repair the gymnasium floor.**

The problem with the floor of the gymnasium was that tar would leak through seams of the roof during the summer. The roof has been totally sealed with a new roof. A summer was allowed to pass after the installation so that any remaining tar could drip. Plans were to have the floor replaced during the summer of 2002. However, due to state budget delays, plans for floor replacement were postponed.