

Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



System Report: Memphis City 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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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: Memphis City 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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MEMPHIS CITY 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. Of the 165 Memphis City schools that were open in 2000-01, 64 are now on notice:

- Airways Middle
- Booker T. Washington High
- Brookmeade Elementary
- Carver High
- Chickasaw Junior High
- Corning Elementary
- Cypress Middle School
- Denver Elementary
- Dunbar Elementary
- East High
- Fairley Elementary
- Fairley High
- Fairview Junior High
- Frayser Elementary
- Frayser High
- Geeter Middle
- Georgian Hills Elementary
- Georgian Hills Junior High
- Graceland Elementary
- Hamilton High
- Hamilton Middle
- Hawkins Mill Elementary
- Hillcrest High
- Hollywood Elementary
- Humes Middle
- Kingsbury High
- Lanier Junior High
- Larose Elementary
- Lester Elementary
- Levi Elementary
- Lincoln Elementary
- Locke Elementary
- Longview Middle
- Manassas High
- Melrose High
- Middle College High
- Mitchell Road High
- Northside High
- Oakhaven High
- Orleans Elementary
- Raineshaven Elementary
- Raleigh Egypt High
- Raleigh Egypt Middle
- Riverview Middle
- Shannon Elementary
- Sharpe Elementary
- Sheffield Elementary
- Sheffield High
- Sherwood Middle
- South Side High
- Spring Hill Elementary
- Springdale Elementary
- Treadwell Elementary
- Treadwell High
- Trezevant High
- Vance Middle
- Westhaven Elementary
- Westside High
- Westwood Elementary
- Westwood High
- Whitehaven High
- Whitney Elementary
- Winchester Elementary
- Wooddale High

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 Memphis City 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.

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.

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.
- 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 Memphis City 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

The Southern Regional Education Board (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

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.

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.

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).

Memphis City School System Background Characteristics

| SCHOOLS AND STAFF 2000-01 | |
|--|----------|
| Number of schools | 165 |
| Number of schools on notice | 64 |
| Number of administrators | 405 |
| Number of teachers | 6,850 |
| Number of teacher waivers ⁵ | 162 |
| Number of teacher permits ⁶ | 1,013 |
| Average teacher salary | \$43,143 |

Source: Memphis City Schools Report Card 2001

| STUDENT POPULATION 2000-01 | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Number of students | 115,878 |
| African American | 86.7% |
| Caucasian | 10.3% |
| Hispanic | 1.7% |
| Asian | 1.2% |
| Native American | 0.1% |
| English language learners | 1.9% |
| Special education | 12.8% |
| Free and reduced lunch | 70.9% |
| Title I ⁷ | 63.2% |

Source: Memphis City Schools Report Card 2001

As the largest school system in Tennessee and the 21st largest metropolitan system in the nation, the Memphis City school system (MCS) served 115,878 students in the 2000-01 school year. Roughly 37 percent of the system's schools, or 64 schools in MCS, are on notice. In the 2000-01 school year, the system had 165 schools, which included 104 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, seven junior high schools, 30 high schools, seven vocational/technical centers, and two special education centers.⁸

Of the 48 schools that the state Department of Education targeted for assistance in 2000, 26 were Memphis City schools. However, when the department released the official list

⁵ A teacher waiver is issued when both (a) a person qualified for the assignment is not available and (b) the applicant has a license, but does not have the endorsement to teach the anticipated assignment. A teacher may teach with an approved waiver for two years (three years for special education teachers).

⁶ A permit is issued when a person the system or school wants to employ does not hold a Tennessee teaching license. The person may be employed only until a licensed teacher can be secured for the position. A permit may be reissued for a given applicant not more than two times. All permitted teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree.

⁷ Created in 1965 during the War on Poverty, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act serves remedial education programs to poor and disadvantaged children in nearly every school district in the country. Amendments to the law in 1994 were designed to tie the program to schoolwide and districtwide reforms based on challenging academic standards. Title I was formerly known as "Chapter 1."

⁸ In the 2001-02 school year, Memphis City Schools opened nine new schools and re-opened an existing school for a total of 175 schools.

of on-notice schools, 64 schools in the MCS district were identified. Of the 64, 19 were also on the 2000 “heads up” list.

The MCS district is a special school district and not a municipal district, according to a 1996 Tennessee Attorney General opinion.⁹ However, its boundaries coexist with those of the City of Memphis, and the Mayor and Board of Alderman may institute an educational tax, as well.¹⁰ As Memphis annexes unincorporated areas, the school district’s boundaries change.

| FUNDING 2000-01 | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Total expenditures | \$962,743,158 |
| Per pupil expenditure | \$6,850 |
| Federal revenue | 11.4% |
| State revenue | 37.1% |
| <i>includes BEP state share</i> | \$281,979,000 |
| Local revenue | 51.5% |
| <i>includes BEP local share</i> | \$168,010,000 |

Source: Basic Education Program Spreadsheet 2000-01; Tennessee Department of Education Annual Report 2001; Memphis City Schools Report Card 2001

The MCS per pupil expenditure of \$6,850 is more than the statewide average of \$6,055 and less than the national average of \$7,436. The average teacher salary in MCS is \$43,143 compared to a statewide average of \$37,431 in the 2000-01 school year.

General fund monies are allocated to MCS schools on a per pupil basis for instructional and administrative supplies and equipment. Each school receives at least \$200 per teacher for supplies; \$100 of this is given to each teacher for their discretionary use and the other \$100 is pooled. The schools’ Leadership Councils then determine how to spend the pooled money to address their specific needs.

The system allocates athletics, band equipment, special education, and vocational funds based on each school’s program or attendance. Principals receive a \$2,000 allotment for professional development money including travel. Schools receive major equipment funding of \$25,000 on a five-year rotating basis. Elementary schools with enrollments between 400 and 659 receive \$20,000 per year for administrative assistance in lieu of assistant principals.

Title I school-wide programs are funded in all schools with 70 percent or more students receiving free and reduced lunch, which includes most of the on-notice schools. Those schools with the highest levels of poverty receive a higher per-pupil allocation. After system officials determine school-wide allocations, set-asides are established for preschool programs and parental involvement. The remaining Title I grant monies are

⁹ Opinion No. 96-055, Office of the Attorney General of Tennessee, 1996 Tenn. AG LEXIS 59 (March 27, 1996).

¹⁰ Dr. Phillip Doss and Eric Wormhoudt, “Special School Districts: A Report to the Education Oversight Committee,” Comptroller of the Treasury, September 18, 1997, p. 1.

used for instruction in private schools and neglected/delinquent institutions, and for administrative and research purposes.

Schools use Title I funds to provide additional learning opportunities for the lowest-achieving students. Funded activities include intervention programs, such as after-school, summer school, and Saturday school; materials and other resources that supplement reading and mathematics; classroom instruction; computers and other technology; additional teachers and teacher assistants; parental involvement activities; training; professional development; and student incentives.

District officials indicate that federal funds are concentrated toward assistance for the on-notice schools.

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

The Memphis City School Board of Education is comprised of nine elected members: one representing each of seven city districts and two at-large members.¹¹ The board adopts policies, sets system-wide goals, approves the system's budget, and appoints the Superintendent.

Johnnie B. Watson became Superintendent of Memphis City Schools in October 2000 after serving in an interim capacity for approximately six months. Watson has over 40 years of experience in education (30 in the MCS system). Over the course of his time in the MCS district, he has served as a teacher, guidance counselor, and in various administrative positions.

Prior to Watson's tenure, MCS required every school to adopt a school-wide improvement model beginning in the 1996-97 school year. Schools could choose from 18 design models, developed by independent companies around the country. The district spent about \$12 million on models during the six years they were in place. It also received additional federal grant money under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, which targets assistance to high-poverty schools that implement school improvement models. However, after the central office conducted a six-month study in 2001, Watson determined the models were not improving student achievement, and that a system-wide curriculum would better serve the district's highly mobile students. Because the move was a curriculum change rather than one that affected policy, Watson did not need the school board's approval to make the change.

At a school board meeting on May 20, 2002, Watson presented additional strategies to target the system's on-notice schools.¹² The district plans to:

- Reconstitute the management of any school not off the list by 2004;
- Reduce the number of unlicensed teachers in all classrooms in the district by five percent each year; and
- Increase student achievement test scores by three percent each year.

¹¹ Memphis City Schools web site, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/communications/board.htm> (accessed May 12, 2002).

¹² Aimee Edmondson, "Watson outlines plan for schools," *Commercial Appeal*, May 21, 2002.

SYSTEM SUPPORT TO ON-NOTICE SCHOOLS

The MCS Department of Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness developed an Instructional Improvement Initiative to target support to district schools beginning in 2000 when the Department of Education named schools to a “heads-up” list. Although the district plans to extend resources and technical support to all schools in the MCS district using the initiative, efforts in 2002 target resources to the on-notice schools.

Each on-notice school is served by two teams of experienced educators, one based outside the school and one inside the school: (1) one is an Instructional Support Team (IST) made up of central office personnel with expertise in curriculum and instruction, regional Department of Education staff, and Exemplary Educators with whom the state contracts for assistance to on-notice schools, and (2) the other is an Academic Support Team (AST), made up of the school’s lead teachers, counselors, instructional facilitators, and the principal.

Nine ISTs serve the 64 on-notice schools in MCS: three elementary teams, three middle school/junior high teams, and three high school teams. The ISTs work collaboratively with the on-notice schools to develop and implement specific strategies designed to improve overall student achievement. The strategies are based on a needs assessment, and the resulting action plan drives the technical assistance by identifying specific tasks to be accomplished by each member of the team. Each IST has a team leader responsible for managing and monitoring the team’s work. Members of the IST visit classrooms, demonstrate lessons and teaching strategies, and observe and coach teachers.

The ASTs’ role is to keep the schools focused on instructional initiatives and serve as an advocate and leader for school improvement within each school. It requires strong communication and collaboration among teachers and other educators in the school.

The ISTs meet bi-weekly to review strategies, discuss and assess progress, and determine next steps. Team leaders also meet monthly with the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness to discuss progress, and provide written progress reports to Executive Staff twice annually. The team approach assures collaboration among school-focused experts and uninterrupted assistance over the school year.

SYSTEM SUPPORT TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Professional Development Resources

Opened in 1996, the Teaching and Learning Academy serves as a professional development resource for teachers in the MCS district. Funded by MCS and the community, the center offers various types of development opportunities for teachers, including institutes, seminars, action labs, instructional technology, networking, and the Memphis Urban Systemic Program (MUSP). (See page 11 for an explanation of MUSP.)

The Academy focuses on three areas of professional development: effective teaching and learning, innovative leadership, and school redesign. It offers a variety of classes for teachers and other employees both during and after school hours. Recent classes have

focused on increasing student achievement and preparing for the TCAP and Gateway exams.

The Academy also houses the Teacher Resource Center where teachers can find information about innovative teaching practices, examine new teaching materials, or search professional reference material in print or online. The Teacher Resource Center offers service in four major activity areas: the material development workroom; the reference room; the technology exploration gallery; and the dialogue area where teachers interact with one another.

Substitute Teachers

MCS uses an automated system called the Substitute Employee Management System (S.E.M.S.) to log substitute teacher requests throughout the district.¹³ The school calls in to record its substitute needs, and the recording system calls available substitute teachers. Substitutes may express preferences for particular schools, but they must teach a minimum of 10 days each semester to maintain active status. Currently, approximately 1,500 available substitutes are on the district's approved roster.¹⁴

SYSTEM SUPPORT TO STUDENTS/FAMILIES

Preschool Programs

For the 2001-02 school year, 54 schools in the MCS district provided pre-kindergarten services for 1,338 students.¹⁵ The state-funded pre-K program targets at-risk students. Sixteen of the 54 MCS schools serving pre-K MCS students are on notice.

Open Enrollment

In 1996, the Memphis City School Board adopted an open enrollment policy that became effective in school year 1997-98. Although students are generally assigned to schools in Memphis City based on their home address, the policy allows students to choose any school in the district on a first-come, first-served basis. The policy states that: "Open enrollment will encourage parents/guardians to become knowledgeable about the needs and interests of their children and become more informed about what educational programs schools are offering." Optional schools that have specific acceptance criteria are excepted from the policy.¹⁶

¹³ Information about substitute teacher system taken from "Guidelines for Substitute Teachers," Memphis City Schools.

¹⁴ Interview with MCS administrators: Bob Archer, Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision; Dr. Marieta Harris, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform; William White, II, Executive Director, Research, Testing & Accountability; and Wayne Booker, Coordinator, Office of Accountability, December 19, 2001.

¹⁵ Handouts about total early childhood enrollment and early childhood program sites, received at interview with Bob Archer, MCS Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision, and Dr. Marieta Harris, MCS Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform, April 25, 2002.

¹⁶ Memphis City School Board Policy #5119, Open Enrollment, Original Adoption 11/11/96, Effective Date 11/11/96.

During the 2001-02 school year, 9,033 students chose to transfer from their home schools to other Memphis City schools under the open enrollment policy. (This does not include transfers granted to students attending optional schools.)¹⁷

Optional Schools

MCS has optional schools similar to what are commonly known as magnet schools in other parts of Tennessee. Optional schools have been a part of the MCS system for over 20 years. They offer more intense and varied instruction than the traditional curriculum. Optional schools may be an individual school or a school within a school, and are available at the elementary, junior high/middle school, and high school levels. They may also focus on a particular program, such as literacy, engineering, or the performing arts.

Some optional schools require students to meet specific academic criteria; others have less stringent academic standards but require satisfactory attendance and behavior. During the 2001-02 school year, MCS had 29 optional school programs. Tuition is free for Memphis City residents, while those outside the city boundaries pay varying annual tuition rates, based on whether they are out-of-city, out-of-county, or out-of-state residents.¹⁸ Six optional schools are on notice: East High, Kingsbury Middle Senior High School, Lester Elementary, Springdale Elementary, Whitehaven High, and Wooddale High. All of the on-notice optional schools except Lester Elementary and Springdale Elementary operate as a school within a school.

KIPP

MCS plans to implement a Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) in the 2002-03 school year. KIPP schools are known nationwide for longer school days, a longer school year, and intense focus on results as indicated by test scores and other quantifiable measures. The initial KIPP-Memphis site will be at Cypress Middle School, an on-notice school, and will serve three 5th grade classes. Eventually, the program will expand to serve three classes in 5th through 8th grades. Students must apply for admission. Those who are considered “at risk” for various reasons, including qualifying for free/reduced price lunch, will have preference. Students living within the KIPP school’s boundaries will have preferred status in the attendance pool, as will those with a sibling already attending the school. MCS will not charge tuition for Memphis City residents.

¹⁷ Information supplied by Bob Archer, Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision, e-mail dated June 19, 2002.

¹⁸ Memphis City Schools web site, Optional Schools and School, http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/communications/optional_schools/optional_schools_main.htm (accessed May 31, 2002).

Memphis Urban Systemic Program

The MUSP, which began in the 1995-96 school year, focuses on K-12 student achievement in science, mathematics, and technology.¹⁹ Contained within MCS' Department of Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness, the program is funded by a major National Science Foundation grant and provides teachers with necessary resources to improve student learning in math, science, and technology. District-wide systemic performance assessments and school-level performance assessments are crucial elements. The initiative seeks to boost student achievement by emphasizing curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and teacher quality. It requires a cooperative effort from teachers, students, and the community.

According to central office staff, the MUSP has affected student achievement. A December 2000 summative evaluation for MUSP found that the program had a positive impact on student achievement and course enrollments in mathematics and science in the following areas:

- The percent of 9th grade students who passed both Algebra I and Physical Science or Biology increased from 32.7 percent in 1994-95 to 62.8 percent in 1999-2000.
- The percent of graduates passing three mathematics courses (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) and three science courses (Physical Science, Biology, and Chemistry or Physics) increased from 40.6 percent in 1994-95 to 74.4 percent in 1998-99.
- The percent of graduates passing both sets of mathematics and science courses (Calculus or four college preparatory math courses and Physics or four college preparatory science courses) increased from 9.5 percent in 1994-95 to 55.6 percent in 1998-99.²⁰

Family Resource Centers

MCS operates nine Family Resource Centers (FRCs), each located in schools in which a minimum of 20 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals.²¹ Each center employs a director to oversee daily operations. The system's FRCs collaborate with various community agencies to provide tutoring, family counseling, on-site case management services, utility assistance, housing assistance, relative caregiver assistance, teen parent workshops, and job development and placement for students and parents. (Note: * = FRC at an on-notice school.)

- The Carnes FRC, opened in 1999, serves one school (Carnes Elementary).
- The Carver FRC, opened in 1998, serves six schools (Carver High*, Florida-Kansas Elementary, A.B. Hill Elementary, Riverview Elementary, Riverview Middle*, Mitchell High*, and Southside High*).

¹⁹ Council of the Great City Schools web site, <http://www.cgcs.org/promise/whatworks/achievement/part04.html> (accessed May 7, 2002).

²⁰ Information supplied by Dr. Marieta Harris, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness, fax dated June 13, 2002.

²¹ 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 (TCA §49-2-115).

- The Cummings-Stafford FRC, opened in 1998, serves two schools (Cummings Elementary and Stafford Elementary).
- The Douglass FRC, opened in 1996, serves one school (Douglass Elementary).
- The Dunn Avenue FRC, opened in 1994, serves three schools (Alcy Elementary, Dunn Elementary, and Norris Elementary).
- The Evans FRC, opened in 2001 serves one school, Evans Elementary.
- The Frayser FRC, opened in 1995, serves two schools (Frayser Elementary* and Frayser High*). Because it is the only FRC in the Frayser area, the Frayser FRC also serves an additional 11 feeder schools.
- The Northside FRC, opened in 1993, serves six schools (Gordon Elementary, Guthrie Elementary, Klondike Elementary, Cypress Junior High*, Humes Junior High*, and Northside High*).
- The Orange Mound FRC, opened in 1995, serves three schools (Dunbar Elementary*, Hanley Elementary, and Melrose High*).²²

DISCIPLINE

Alternative Schools

For the 2001-02 school year, MCS operates 17 alternative schools.²³ These sites serve students in grades 6-12 who have been suspended, expelled, or chosen a non-traditional educational setting. The system has three types of alternative schools: (1) short-term centers, (2) career academies, and (3) voluntary sites. Eight short-term centers serve students who have received a board suspension. These centers also serve expelled students. Six career academies (with one pending) also serve students who have been suspended or expelled. Of the six, one academy is voluntary, and another serves pregnant or post-partum students. Three voluntary sites serve at-risk students. One is a residential program. Students are eligible for these programs for one of three reasons: (1) board suspension; (2) voluntary placement; or (3) pregnant/post partum status. Altogether, the alternative schools have 132 personnel and 1,208 spaces to serve children in the MCS system.

School Security

According to board policy, the central office provides each school with a guidebook titled “MCS Procedures and Guidelines for Emergencies and Crisis Manual.” The manual is updated with current information as needed (e.g., mail handling procedures to avoid anthrax contamination).²⁴

MCS supports an Officer-in-School program whereby police officers from the Memphis Police Department provide security in MCS schools.²⁵ Started in 1975 with five officers, the program now has approximately 48 officers who work in secondary schools. Most work exclusively in one school. However, some work at two schools to expand coverage district-wide. Officers serve full-time in the schools unless other critical matters arise,

²² Personnel at each FRC, usually the manager, provided information about individual FRCs.

²³ Telephone interview with Ronald Pope, Director of Safe Schools and Alternative Programs, Memphis City Schools, April 24, 2002.

²⁴ Interview with MCS Administrators, December 19, 2001.

²⁵ Telephone interview with Larry Hill, Supervisor, MCS Department of Security, Transportation and Risk Management, May 7, 2002.

such as court appearances. The Memphis Police Department and MCS equally share funding responsibility for this program.

All buildings have sign-in procedures for visitors.²⁶ All elementary schools will eventually have entry buzzer systems so every exterior door can be locked. At the secondary level, all schools eventually have video surveillance systems. In addition, MCS board policy requires all secondary schools to conduct a minimum of nine metal detector searches per year. Annually, each MCS school must convene a committee to review its security plan and send any updates to the district administration.²⁷

Truancy

The system's Truancy Assessment Center (TAC) opened in January 2001. MCS manages the center with the assistance of several Memphis City and Shelby County entities and state agencies, including both boards of education, law enforcement agencies, community service agencies, and the Tennessee Departments of Children's Services and Human Services. The center serves students ages 6-17 identified as truant. TAC's purpose is to reduce truancy rates by offering assistance to parents and to public and private schools. Students can meet with trained professionals to assess why they are not attending school. If appropriate, social workers can make referrals to juvenile court or social services. MCS publishes a list of students absent five days or more, which it supplies to the Memphis Police Department. Police bring students who are picked up and whose names are on the list to the TAC. In addition, the center publicizes a truancy hotline for anyone to report children who are not attending school regularly. In its first year of operation, MCS' list of truant students contained 10,000 names.

System officials indicate that as of June 2002, the system had experienced a drop in truancy related suspensions from 2,098 to 1,698. In addition, more cases have been referred to Juvenile Court and the police department has improved its methods of picking up truant children.²⁸

GRANTS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Grantors

The Memphis City school system receives several grants, including a major National Science Foundation award for the Memphis Urban Systemic Program. (See page 11.) The U.S. Department of Education and National Endowment for the Humanities are also national grantors. Grantors at the state level include the Departments of Education and Human Services. Corporate grantors include VH-1, Oracle, and International Paper.²⁹

In May 2002, the Department of Education awarded Memphis City Schools, along with 21 other systems in the state, a Reading Excellence Act (REA) grant. The federal grant's

²⁶ OEA staff observed the sign-in procedures at each on-notice school visited.

²⁷ Telephone interview with Larry Hill, Supervisor, MCS Department of Security, Transportation and Risk Management, May 7, 2002.

²⁸ Information supplied by Bob Archer, Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision, e-mail dated June 19, 2002.

²⁹ Information provided via fax by Thelma A. Crivens, Coordinator, Policy Development and Grants Management, Memphis City Schools (April 25, 2002).

goal is to have all students reading at or above grade level by the end of the 3rd grade. Eligibility for the grant was based on a school's identification for Title I School Improvement and/or its level of poverty. Each school had to apply for the competitive grant. Memphis City won the award for 26 of its elementary schools, 13 of which are on notice. MCS will receive the \$10,877,819 grant beginning in June 2002. The grant period runs until August 2004.

Locally, both the Plough Foundation and Partners in Public Education (PIPE) provide financial support for Memphis City Schools. Named for the late Abe Plough, an entrepreneur from Memphis, the Plough Foundation supports several programs in Memphis City and Shelby County, including education programs.³⁰ PIPE is a nonprofit entity whose sole mission is to support and raise money for reform in the MCS system. Founded in 1993 by a group of civic and business leaders, PIPE has an annual operating budget of \$500 million.³¹ System officials indicate that most of the grants from the Plough Foundation and PIPE provide professional development for teachers and principals.

For the 2002-03 school year, another foundation will provide assistance specifically targeted toward on-notice schools in Memphis. The Community Foundation will give \$500,000 to hire 200 tutors for 21 schools. The program, entitled "Our Children – Our Future," has gained national attention for its attention to urban education issues.³²

Other local grantors include the City of Memphis, the Memphis Police Department, and the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, Inc.

Partnerships

MCS benefits from several university, nonprofit, and corporate partnerships. The University of Memphis Center for Research in Education Policy (CREP) developed the School Observation Measure (SOM) used for school evaluation in Memphis City Schools. CREP also assists in training administrators and staff to use the SOM and to compile and report data. The SOM measures the extent to which certain elements are present in schools' classrooms under six headings: instructional orientation, classroom organization, instructional strategies, student activities, technology use, and assessment. Observers rate on a scale from 'not observed' to 'extensively,' for example, whether parent/community involvement in learning activities is evident, or whether technology is used as a learning tool or resource. Once all data are collected using the SOM, CREP analyzes it and produces a profile for each school. Each school receives a 12-page

³⁰ Society of Entrepreneurs web site, http://www.societyofentrepreneurs.com/hall_honor/plough.asp (accessed April 18, 2002).

³¹ Partners in Public Education web site, <http://www.pipememphis.org/aboutus.html> (accessed April 18, 2002).

³² "Memphis Schools Seeks Tutors," *The Urban Educator*, April 2002, Council of the Great City Schools. <http://www.cgcs.org/urbaneducator> (accessed May 7, 2002).

summary based on longitudinal data.³³ Schools use the results to determine whether their teaching and learning practices correspond to their school improvement plan goals.³⁴

CREP also developed a school climate survey MCS distributes every school year to its professional staff, parents, and students.³⁵ Based on school effectiveness literature, the survey measures progress.³⁶

Since 1992, the University of Memphis has sponsored Professional Development Schools (PDSs) in five school districts in West Tennessee, including MCS.³⁷ The MCS district has 10 active PDSs, two of which are at schools on notice (Frayser Elementary and Raleigh Egypt Middle).³⁸ PDSs provide on-site education opportunities at selected schools for teachers who are preparing for licensure. These schools also encourage the development of certified teachers.

Rhodes College recently instituted a scholarship program called the Memphis Scholars Program.³⁹ The program offers a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to any MCS high school student who graduates as a valedictorian or salutatorian and scores at least a 23 on the ACT (out of a possible 36). The first class of Memphis Scholars enrolled at Rhodes for the 2001-02 school year.

The system also established the Adopt-A-School Partnerships Program in 1978, which presents opportunities for area businesses, groups, and agencies to forge a relationship with a Memphis City school.⁴⁰ The program began with four partnerships, and in the 2001-02 school year over 650 groups and companies participated. Program personnel encourage partners to interact personally with students in their adopted school at least once a month, but staff indicate that many visit their schools once a week. Nearly every MCS school has at least one adopter. Program participants include IBM, Williams Refinery, Federal Express, First Tennessee Bank, Memphis City Government, Abundant Grace Fellowship Church, and the Afro-American Police Association.

The Partner Sharing Center, established in 2001, serves as a recycling center where businesses and organizations donate items so that Memphis schools can use them. Donated items are free to MCS teachers and school administrators, who “shop” for materials at the Sharing Center on certain days. MCS’ Department of Communications publishes the “Partners” newsletter three times a year to update the community about the

³³ Interview with Dr. Marty Alberg, Project Manager, University of Memphis Center for Research in Education Policy, August 22, 2001.

³⁴ Interview with Dr. Marieta Harris and Bob Archer, August 22, 2001.

³⁵ Interview with Dr. Marty Alberg, August 22, 2001.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ University of Memphis Department of Education web site, at <http://coe.memphis.edu/tced/pds.asp> (accessed May 3, 2002).

³⁸ <http://coe.memphis.edu/tced/pdsSchools.asp> (accessed May 3, 2002).

³⁹ Telephone interview with Shelley Miller, Assistant Director of Admissions, Rhodes College, May 3, 2002.

⁴⁰ Telephone interview with Brenda Rudolph, Partnership Specialist, MCS Department of Communications & Administrative Services, May 6, 2002.

ongoing relationship between Memphis area businesses and public schools. As of April 2002, contributions to the Partner Sharing Center valued \$18 million.

First Tennessee Bank and Memphis television channel Action News 5 sponsor call-in services for students and parents. The First Tennessee Lesson Line allows parents to call and receive previously recorded school information, such as school events or their child's homework assignment. Provided at no cost to the district or the schools, the communication system allows each teacher to record information about homework and other relevant classroom matters. Parents calling the Lesson Line phone number use an access code to secure the desired information for a school and teacher.

Memphis-area television channel Action News 5 (WMC-TV) sponsors the Homework Hotline, which is also a free service. This hotline provides students with homework assistance throughout the week while school is in session. Memphis City and Shelby County teachers and guidance counselors volunteer to staff the service.

In 1987, Memphis area businessman Avron Fogelman established the Avron B. Fogelman Scholars Program.⁴¹ This program provides free college tuition at the University of Memphis to low-income/underprivileged graduates of MCS schools. Students begin the program in 10th grade. To maintain status as a Fogelman Scholar, students must meet certain requirements, such as maintain a 2.75 GPA and complete a certain number of service projects annually. Initially, thousands of students and parents signed up, but only 13 Fogelman Scholars have graduated from the University of Memphis and only 33 were enrolled in early 2002.⁴²

More recently, early in 2002 Memphis school board member Lee Brown began offering his \$5,000 annual board salary for college scholarships to students from the five high schools in his district who want to teach in Memphis. Brown requires applicants to write an essay on why they want to return to teach in Memphis, and also requires a promise that they do so. Each year, one student from each of the five high schools will get a one-time \$1,000 scholarship.

Others

In 2001, following the release of the on-notice schools list, Congressman Harold Ford, Jr. initiated an Education Standards Task Force to address the needs of the Memphis City on-notice schools with the goal of getting half the schools off the list over the next two years.⁴³ The task force models the national, nonprofit education group Achieve, which helps raise academic standards by holding school systems accountable for achievement through rigorous testing. Ford advocates at the federal level for an increased emphasis on standards to come with additional resources for school systems. Ford's task force aims to

⁴¹ "Briefly Noted," *The Philanthropy Roundtable*, January/February 2002, <http://philanthropyroundtable.org/magazines/2002>. (Accessed May 1, 2002).

⁴² *Philanthropy Magazine*, January/February 2002, <http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/magazines/2002/january/brieflynoted.html> (accessed June 3, 2002).

⁴³ Harold Ford, Jr., "A Call to Action on Education Standards," November 29, 2001, and Letter to the Editor of the *Commercial Appeal*, November 22, 2001, <http://www.house.gov/ford/> (accessed May 17, 2002).

gather the same people that were instrumental in bringing an NBA team to Memphis to explore problems and solutions in student achievement. Business leaders expressed the desire to help the schools in more ways than supplying funds; they also want to be hands-on advocates in the improvement process. Ford has led discussion groups asking principals and students from the schools on notice to talk about issues affecting student achievement such as: how to challenge students to excel in core academic subjects; how to improve curricula and teacher training; how to give students the skills needed to excel in the workplace; and how the school system will respond to the new federal law regarding accountability and achievement. Ford hopes to have an action plan by fall 2002.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Created by the Memphis City School Board through its policy on parental involvement, the Parent Assembly began operating in 2000.⁴⁴ Parents from each school in the district elect one parent representative to a two-year term in the Assembly. In 2001-02, the body has 175 members. The Parent Assembly has three purposes: (1) to advocate on behalf of Memphis City schools; (2) to advise the Superintendent regarding parental concerns; and (3) to strengthen and form PTAs and PTOs at various schools and engage in citywide parental involvement activities. The Assembly must meet a minimum of three times per year and currently meets every two months. The Parent Assembly has engaged in the following activities, among others, since its creation in 2000:

- surveyed parent concerns at all Memphis City schools and presented the results to Superintendent Watson (see pages 26 and 27 for a summary of the results) ;
- published a newsletter called “Parent to Parent”;
- organized a training session on models of parent involvement; and
- sponsored a reading party in March 2002 attended by more than 200 parents and children.

The Parent Learning Academy (PLA), opened in September 2001, is an outgrowth of the Parent Assembly. PLA holds free classes for parents in six Memphis locations. The first semester, the PLA courses focused on helping children in reading, math, and science in grades K-8. The system plans to expand course topics in the future. Activities planned for the spring semester of 2002 include an educational fair and a course on preventing alcohol and drug abuse and violence by children. Parent attendees will receive a guide to child-oriented activities in the Memphis area during the upcoming summer and throughout the year. First Tennessee Bank Community Relations Program and the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, Inc. are sponsors of the PLA for its first year of operation.

Memphis City Schools also has a Parent Involvement and Family Support Division to communicate with and provide services to parents of MCS students.

⁴⁴ Information about Parent Assembly and Parent Learning Academy provided in telephone interview with Thelma A. Crivens, Coordinator, Policy Development and Grants Management, Memphis City Schools (April 25, 2002).

Analysis and Conclusions

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

★ **Many Memphis City School students are not ready to learn when they begin attending school.** Pre-kindergarten programs are not readily available to many Memphis City School (MCS) students who attend on-notice schools. Many of the students come from a low socioeconomic background, which is often correlated with low academic achievement.⁴⁵ In the current school year 2001-02, 1,388 preschoolers are attending classes in 54 Memphis City schools. Officials indicate that the need is much greater—the central office’s budget request for 2002-03 includes funds to provide preschool to about 9,100 children (based on the number of four-year-old children expected to attend kindergarten in the system).

Research shows that high-quality preschool is particularly important for students who fit the demographics of MCS on-notice schools: a large percentage of students are from low-income minority families often headed by a single parent or other relative. Several studies indicate that pre-kindergarten programs have a significant positive effect on children’s future school performance and other life experiences, particularly those children who are at risk of failure because of poverty. Studies have found that when at-risk children attend high-quality preschool programs, fewer are placed in special education in later grades, fewer are retained to repeat a grade, and more graduate from high school. Preschool programs also have been found to contribute to lower juvenile delinquency rates.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

According to data from the MCS Office of Testing, students entering kindergarten in Memphis City test at an extremely low level for school readiness. MCS students take a norm-referenced test called Developing Skills Checklist (a product of CTB/McGraw-Hill) during the first month of kindergarten. The percentiles range from 1-99 with the 50th percentile being average. MCS kindergarten students tested at the following percentiles in the areas noted for the last five years:⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Executive Summary, Early Learning, Later Success: The Carolina Abecedarian Project, http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/embargoed/executive_summary.htm (accessed May 31, 2002).

⁴⁶ *Why pre-k?*, A Legislative Staff Briefing Paper, the Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, March 2001, p. 2.

⁴⁷ David W. Grissmer, et al., *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, RAND Corporation, July 25, 2000, p. xxvi.

⁴⁸ The ‘Memory’ section tests for these skills: sequencing numbers orally, recalling names, following directions, naming letters, identifying beginning and ending sounds and letters of pictured objects, blending sounds to make words; the ‘Auditory’ section tests for these skills: identifying same/different words, segmenting sentences, segmenting compound words, segmenting words (identifying syllables, for example), rhyming words. E-mail correspondence from Lee McGarity, Office of Testing, Memphis City Schools, dated May 7, 2002.

Results: Developing Skills Checklist test for Memphis City kindergarten students

| Test Date | Math | Language | Memory | Auditory |
|-----------|------|----------|--------|----------|
| Fall 2001 | 16 | 19 | 27 | 20 |
| Fall 2000 | 16 | 19 | 23 | 20 |
| Fall 1999 | 13 | 19 | 23 | 20 |
| Fall 1998 | 13 | 19 | 23 | 20 |
| Fall 1997 | 13 | 19 | 19 | 20 |

Source: Office of Testing, Memphis City Schools

Most principals in the on-notice elementary schools visited indicated that few of their students had the opportunity to attend preschool before entering kindergarten. Principals of on-notice middle and high schools in Memphis City emphasized the importance of preschool as well—they note that if students are behind when they get to the middle or high school grades, catching up and succeeding in school becomes much less likely.

★ **Memphis City Schools has difficulty hiring enough certified teachers, but is working with the Department of Education to develop additional ways to attract and retain more teachers.** Because of teacher hiring problems, the system employs a large number of teachers on waivers and permits. SREB’s 2001 report, *Educator Supply and Demand Statistical Report for the State of Tennessee*, noted that Memphis accounts for 43.2 percent of the total waivers and permits in the state, while accounting for only 12.5 percent of the total educator workforce.⁴⁹

Hiring enough certified teachers in Memphis is a problem not only in the on-notice schools, but also throughout the system, and is exacerbated by the city’s location. Memphis lies on the southwest corner of the state and is bordered by Arkansas and Mississippi, as well as Tipton and Fayette counties in Tennessee. For a variety of reasons, Tennessee-certified teachers living in the Memphis area may choose to teach in another state, in Tipton or Fayette counties, or in the Shelby County school system. MCS staff indicate that, for example, retired Memphis educators may take jobs in Mississippi where they can be vested in five years. During the five years, they can draw retirement from Tennessee and receive a salary from Mississippi. Then, after being vested in Mississippi, they can draw retirement from two sources.

The SREB report found that graduates of teacher education programs tend to work in school systems near their home colleges and universities. The Memphis area has fewer higher education institutions that produce teachers than either middle or east Tennessee. While 12 teacher education programs serve the middle Tennessee area (including three at public universities), and 15 serve the east Tennessee area (also including three at public universities), seven programs are accessible to the Memphis area and only one of these is at a public university.

Other obstacles include statewide shortages of teacher candidates in certain subject areas and negative perceptions of working in an urban setting with few incentives to do so.

⁴⁹ Note that this calculation refers to 1998-99 data from Memphis City Schools. Southern Regional Education Board, *Educator Supply and Demand Statistical Report for the State of Tennessee*, Final Report for Data through 1998-99, June 2001, p. 16.

In March 2002, the Department of Education fined Memphis City Schools \$1.5 million, principally for late reporting of required teacher waiver and permit information.⁵⁰ To diminish future problems, Superintendent Johnnie Watson and his staff proposed several approaches to decrease teacher shortages (and thus reduce the need for many waivers and permits) and increase teacher retention. The draft proposal, under consideration by the Commissioner of Education, would allow the system in coordination with area universities to develop an accelerated program for permitted teachers and explore ways to accelerate degree tracks for students entering graduate-level course work. The system also proposes special programs to encourage area students to enter the teaching profession and financial incentives for teachers who commit to teach in the system for five years.

The system has taken other steps both to increase the pool of teacher candidates, encourage permitted teachers to get their licenses, and ensure teaching quality. Memphis City Schools:

- *Recruits teachers from foreign countries, such as Spain.* Central office staff employ this strategy particularly to find foreign language teachers, an area in which Tennessee has a teacher shortage.
- *Maintains a relationship with the University of Memphis, which has named 10 professional development schools (PDS) in the system.* The University of Memphis piloted the system's first PDS in 1992. Principals at two PDSs (both of which are on notice) reported that the designation provides a valuable source for hiring teachers—many of those who student teach at the schools choose to continue once certified.
- *Hires certified teachers specifically assigned to monitor and mentor its permitted teachers.* This strategy began during the 2001-02 school year.
- *Offers a \$6,000 to \$10,000 increase in teacher salaries for those teachers who earn National Board Certification.* The system currently has only four such teachers. The program began during the 2001-02 school year.
- *Offers teachers, through a city program, \$10,000 to use for a house purchase in selected zip code areas.* The program, which began early in 2002, also serves police officers in Memphis.

In 2001, Memphis City Schools' average cohort dropout rate was 30 percent, well above the state average of 13.9 percent and the state goal of not more than 10 percent.⁵¹ Most of the system's high schools—23 of the 30—are on notice. All had high dropout rates in 2001, ranging from 17.3 percent to 49 percent. These numbers reflect the dropout *cohort* rates, 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.⁵² The cohort rate is one of the variables the Department of Education and the State Board of Education use to determine whether a high school in

⁵⁰ Letter from Faye P. Taylor, Commissioner of Education, to Johnnie Watson, Director, Memphis City Schools, March 5, 2002.

⁵¹ Tennessee Department of Education, *State of Tennessee Report Card 2001*, How to Interpret the Report Card, <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/rptcrd.htm>, (accessed April 30, 2002).

⁵² Tennessee Department of Education, *Annual Report 2001*, p. 39.

Tennessee 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, Memphis City’s event dropout rate for 2000-01 was 7.5 percent, compared to the state average of 3.8 percent.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ In other words, 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 Memphis City 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, Memphis City Schools and State Averages

| Year | MCS Event Dropout Rate | State Average Event Rate | MCS Cohort Dropout Rate | State Average Cohort Rate |
|-----------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1995-96 | 7.5% | 4.5% | 35.2% | 16.4% |
| 1996-97 | 9.4% | 4.6% | 31.9% | 15.6% |
| 1997-98 | 8.9% | 4.5% | 29.3% | 15.2% |
| 1998-99 | 8.5% | 4.2% | 28.5% | 14.8% |
| 1999-2000 | 6.9% | 3.9% | 29.2% | 14.4% |
| 2000-01 | 7.5% | 3.8% | 30.0% | 13.9% |

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

Memphis City School officials indicate that the system addresses the dropout rate in three ways: through the school improvement plans, the 2001 implementation of the Truancy Assessment Center, and the system’s alternative schools. The district office requires high schools to address the dropout rate in their annual school improvement plans, including strategies to reduce it. Current year school improvement plans for the high schools on notice include strategies focused on extra instructional support for students at risk of failing (after-school tutoring and Saturday classes, for example) and increased communication with parents of students with poor attendance rates.⁵⁵

One of the system’s major attempts to address the dropout rate began in January 2001 when it opened the Truancy Assessment Center. The center is a coalition of agencies in Memphis and Shelby County, including the police department, Attorney General’s office, and the school system. An assistant district attorney is assigned to work with the center to identify students who are habitually absent without adequate excuse. Schools may also refer students to the center. Using a list of truant students supplied by the system—in 2001, the list contained about 10,000 names—police officers who pick up the students bring them to the center where they and their families meet with a social worker to determine any problems that may be contributing to their school absences. Social workers may make referrals to other social service agencies when needed.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁵ Frayser High School 2001-2002 School Improvement Plan, Fairley High School Improvement Plan 2001-2002, and School Improvement Plan, G.W. Carver High School, School Year 2001-2002.

In addition, the system has about 1,200 seats in 17 alternative school centers and programs. Central office staff indicate that all expelled students are offered a position in an alternative school in an effort to avoid a disruption in their education. The schools emphasize individual counseling, career guidance, and instruction by specially-trained staff.

Although Memphis has several community groups and individuals expressing support for public schools, their efforts seem uncoordinated and fragmented. In interviews, public meetings, and newspaper articles, elected officials and others expressed concern about Memphis' schools, yet apparently have had little direct communication with school officials. Most principals interviewed indicated that state legislators have never visited their schools. The school district has developed a plan for improving schools and is putting it into action, but community leaders do not seem aware of it. Similarly, analysts heard from a few volunteers that the central office has not been responsive to their calls.

According to the system's facility survey, most of the on-notice school facilities are in fair condition. The system has developed a rating system for schools using the following categories: structure, appearance, roof, asbestos, electrical, fire, and HVAC. The Department of Business Operations grades each school (A, B, C, D, or F) in each category and then gives an overall grade, which determines its priority level for repairs or renovation. In the 2000 facility survey, five schools on notice are rated A, 37 are rated B, 17 are rated C, and one is rated D. Three of the schools are not rated because they were under renovation at the time of the survey.⁵⁶

Overall capital improvement needs in Memphis City Schools, however, are significant. System officials estimate the funding needed to make repairs and renovations to existing facilities exceeds \$500 million. This amount does not include funds to build new schools. The system's goal is to raise all schools to a level B or better. Improvements have been gradual because the needs are significant and costly. For example, the 2001-02 school year is the first that all schools in the system have been air-conditioned.

During the 2001-02 school year, the system hired a new director of the Division of Facility Planning, who began work in late April 2002. Since the mid-1990s, an outside consultant has managed the major construction and renovation projects for the system. However, by fall 2002 all management functions related to MCS capital improvements will be under the director's supervision.

An analysis of MCS construction costs found that on average MCS schools are larger on a square foot per student basis and have larger classrooms than schools in other systems. MCS schools also often include amenities, such as auditoriums and music suites, that schools in other systems do not include. The study also concluded that the mechanical

⁵⁶ Memphis City Schools Facility Survey, 2000.

and electrical systems in MCS schools are more expensive than those used in schools in other systems.⁵⁷

Because student mobility has been a major problem for the Memphis City school system, the administration developed and implemented a system-wide curriculum beginning in 2001-02. Central office staff estimate that an average 24 percent of students transfer to other schools in the district each year.⁵⁸ High student mobility is associated with low achievement and high poverty rates. In general, highly mobile students are poorer than their non-mobile counterparts.⁵⁹ High mobility is shown to lower achievement for individual students, but may also have a general effect of lowering school- and district-wide performance.⁶⁰

Concerns about high student mobility led to the system administration's decision to develop a system-wide curriculum in the major content areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies beginning in the 2001-02 school year. This curriculum replaced a number of school reform models and alleviated some of the negative effects of transferring from one school to another.

A 1998 study in Minneapolis supports the change, recommending that a standardized curriculum and consistent standards could benefit highly mobile students.⁶¹ The Minneapolis study, conducted by county planners, school officials, and a nonprofit affordable housing group, resulted in "The Kids Mobility Project." The housing nonprofit was included because mobility is often tied to the issue of affordable housing in a community. One of the findings was that students' academic success was negatively affected by family moves even when they remained in the same schools. The study also found a relationship between frequent moves and poor reading performance.⁶² Some school systems in other states have taken steps to reduce mobility rates by informing parents of the negative academic consequences for their children.⁶³

In preparation for the change in Memphis City schools, district staff developed 69 curriculum guides, one for each grade in the major content areas for K-6 and subject-specific guides for middle school and high school classes. About 150 additional curriculum guides are scheduled to be implemented in the 2002-03 year in the areas of

⁵⁷ Fleming Associates, *An Analysis of Memphis City Schools' Construction Cost: Why Do Our Schools Cost What They Cost To Build?* March 19, 2001. The study also cites certain market conditions and bid timing as factors in the cost of MCS capital construction.

⁵⁸ Interview with Bob Archer, MCS Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision, and Dr. Marieta Harris, MCS Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform, April 25, 2002.

⁵⁹ General Accounting Office, "Elementary School Children: Many Change Schools Frequently, Harming Their Education," HEHS-94-95, February 4, 1994, <http://www.gao.gov> (accessed March 12, 2002).

⁶⁰ 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).

⁶¹ Family Housing Fund, *Kids Mobility Project Report*, Executive Summary, <http://www.fhfund.org/Research/kids.htm> (accessed May 17, 2002), no date.

⁶² Linda Jacobson, "Moving Targets," *Education Week*, April 4, 2001.

⁶³ Ibid.

foreign language, visual arts and theater, music and dance, and health and physical education.⁶⁴

In 2001-02, Memphis City Schools achieved the EIA requirements for maximum class sizes and class size averages. In 2000-01, the year for which the system was placed on notice, several MCS middle and high schools on notice and some of the elementary schools on notice exceeded the EIA requirements for maximum class sizes and class size averages. 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.)

In 2001-02, the system opened nine new schools and re-opened an existing school, which resulted in full compliance with the state's class size requirements.

★ **Memphis City Schools' team-based approach to delivering technical assistance to its on-notice schools appears to effectively assist the on-notice schools.** Central office staff cite some gains at the end of the first year of the initiative: improvements in coordination of district efforts to support schools; positive response from schools to district assistance; and overall progress toward higher-level instruction and other conditions that contribute to increased student performance.

The central office has two goals for its Instructional Improvement Initiative (III),⁶⁵ developed specifically to assist the state-identified schools: to provide targeted support to schools and to facilitate quantifiable improvement in student achievement in the on-notice schools. The initiative emphasizes data analysis to determine needed instructional approaches. It also requires collaboration and regular communication among central office staff and school officials, focusing their attention on each individual school. Because of the design, MCS officials have ensured that all on-notice schools have continual and consistent technical assistance.

A written description of the initiative states:

Research on the implementation of change in education suggests that most successful efforts to improve schools are controlled by those who work in them—administrators and teachers at the building level. The purpose of the III process is to stimulate, support, and accelerate change at the school level and help build capacity to sustain the efforts necessary to drive improvement over time.⁶⁶

Memphis City began targeting technical assistance to the heads-up schools identified by the Department of Education during the 2000-01 school year. When the list of on-notice schools was released for the 2001-02 school year, staff adjusted the plan based on the previous year's experiences.

⁶⁴ *Inside Memphis City Schools, 2001-2002*, a brochure produced by Memphis City Schools.

⁶⁵ Dr. Marieta Harris, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform, "Instructional Improvement Initiative 2001-2002," Memphis City Schools, Revised: October 1, 2001.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

★ **Exemplary Educators, the state’s technical assistance providers to systems and schools, are not present in all on-notice schools in Memphis City.** As a result, some schools on notice are not receiving the benefit of state assistance, and others are receiving only partial assistance. Only 18 EEs are assigned to Memphis City’s 64 on-notice schools. Five of the 18 began working as EEs well into the school year, in March 2002. MCS officials indicate that as of late April 2002, 50 of the 64 on-notice schools had been assigned an EE. Some of the 18 EEs serve three schools, and others serve two schools.⁶⁷ The other 14 on-notice MCS schools have not been assigned an EE.

Some principals of the on-notice schools visited have rated the assistance their EE has provided as exceptional—others have found their help to be minimal. Memphis has included the EEs as members of the Instructional Support Teams, which provide technical assistance to all on-notice schools. (See previous finding.)

Memphis City Schools provides extensive professional development for teachers and administrators through its Teaching and Learning Academy. The Teaching and Learning Academy opened in 1996 as a state-of-the-art facility for professional development for all MCS employees. Opening the Academy was a collaborative effort between the school district and the community, most specifically Partners in Public Education (PIPE). Staff of Memphis City Schools operates the Academy. Every year about 3,500 teachers take one or more of almost 150 courses offered at the Teaching and Learning Academy.⁶⁸

According to central office staff, professional development courses are determined through annual requests for proposals distributed to personnel in several divisions of Memphis City Schools: Pupil Services; Accountability; Research and Evaluation; Student Standards, Curriculum and Assessment; Memphis Urban Systemic Programs; all Staff Development Coordinators assigned to the Teaching and Learning Academy; the Teaching and Learning Academy Teacher Resource Center Manager; Alternative Schools; Optional Schools; Instructional Support; Title I Services; Exceptional Children; Mental Health and Student Support; Youth and Family Services; and Technology and Careers.

The Professional Development Coordinator reviews the 350 to 400 proposals submitted annually, based on criteria that includes: the extent to which the topic addresses a district priority; the consistency of the topic with mandates outlined in the district strategic plan; the consistency of the topic with district policy, philosophy, and/or mandates or compliance issues; and the extent to which the topic is based on sound educational research and documented best practice. The Coordinator prepares a summary of the proposals with recommendations for additions and modifications. The Associate Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness reviews the summary and makes the final decisions.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Interview with Bob Archer and Dr. Marieta Harris, April 25, 2002.

⁶⁸ E-mail correspondence from Jack Leach, Coordinator of Professional Development, MCS Teaching and Learning Academy, May 21, 2002.

⁶⁹ Information supplied by Dr. Marieta Harris, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and School Effectiveness, fax dated June 13, 2002.

The school board created the Parent Assembly and Parent Learning Academy to improve parental involvement, which is low among the schools on notice in Memphis City. In addition, some schools on notice have found innovative ways to increase both community and parental involvement. The Parent Assembly with one parent member from each school provides an organized method for parents to communicate with the board and central office staff. In turn, the Parent Learning Academy provides a way for the central office to supply parents with important information regarding their children’s education.

The Parent Assembly survey conducted shortly after the assembly’s creation identified five main areas of concern for parents: (1) personnel issues; (2) curriculum/classroom needs; (3) safety issues; (4) building repairs/maintenance issues/equipment; and (5) administrative issues. In the personnel area, parents identified two major issues: lack of teacher accountability and concern for students’ grasp of material, and a need for more teacher assistants. In the area of curriculum, parents felt that reading comprehension and math skills were inadequate; more counseling and training were needed on student safety and health issues; and more tutors and camps were needed in math, reading, science, and TCAP preparation. As to safety, parents noted that crossing guards need to report for work in a timely manner, and that students were continually threatened by gangs and other students. Major administrative issues identified include: a desire for mandatory student uniforms in all schools, keeping cafeterias clean and serving appropriate meals, and improving the district’s “failing grade.” While parents identified building repair and maintenance as a concern, there were no major findings in that area. The primary issue parents identified that did not fit in one of the five main categories called for greater parent accountability and involvement in school curriculum and activities.

In addition to the board and central office efforts, several of the on-notice schools exhibited innovative approaches to increasing parental involvement. For example, Manassas High School has several adopters, all of which work together to target their resources in the most effective way. The principal at Frayser Elementary allows parents to pick up students’ report cards early if they attend the PTO meeting—she also puts every child on the program for the meeting and uses this as a learning opportunity for students, requiring them to memorize and recite a poem every month.

Airways Middle requires parents to personally pick up their child’s report card at the school unless there is a sufficient reason why the parent cannot do so. Although parents initially resisted this school policy, school personnel indicated that it had increased parent-teacher contact significantly. Chickasaw Junior High holds “parent revivals,” emphasizing the positive motivation for interaction between parent and school. Chickasaw also instituted a mass mailing campaign to increase attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Whitney Elementary administrators have gone directly to parents’ homes to discuss student concerns.

Recognizing that children should not be penalized for their parents’ refusal to participate, at least one school also has found a way to supplement parental support if it can’t be increased. The Manassas Alumni Association tutors and mentors individual students—

acting, in the principal's words, as "surrogate parents." Similarly, parents from a Shelby County elementary school with an active PTA tutor students at a Memphis City on-notice school.

It should be noted that parental involvement programs directed at parents in low-income households are faced with the complex sociological task of changing long-established patterns of behavior. Parents in low-income households are often under-educated and not used to participating in academic activities with their children. Although parental involvement improves the academic achievement of students, creating and maintaining that involvement can be a tedious assignment for already over-burdened teachers and administrators to undertake.

Some principals in the on-notice schools expressed misunderstanding about testing accommodations and alternative tests allowed for certain special education students.

Staff from the district office expressed surprise at this observation, noting the many professional development opportunities in the area of special education. According to the Division of Exceptional Children within the central office, special education seminars are available monthly either at the district office or at a requesting school on the special education topic of the school's choice. The meetings are well-attended, but mainly by special education teachers rather than principals. Also, the division confirmed system-wide confusion over the new TCAP-Alt test that debuted this year. To address this confusion, Department of Education officials conducted a seminar addressing questions concerning the TCAP-Alt. The district plans to conduct a similar workshop to address that concern.

Principals of all on-notice Memphis City schools visited for this study were satisfied with the level of support provided by the district. Most principals supported the district administration's adoption of a system-wide curriculum. Most principals also thought the method for allocating resources and the method for scheduling maintenance was fair.

The Memphis City Schools Superintendent has proposed a system audit by an independent consultant that would review all operations and make recommendations for improvement. In April 2002, Superintendent Johnnie Watson requested and received school board approval to hire MGT of America, an educational management and consulting firm, to review every aspect of the district, from its efforts to increase student achievement to its use of personnel. The audit would cost \$575,000, for which Watson is trying to raise private funds.⁷⁰ MGT recently completed a similar audit of Metro Nashville Public Schools.

The Memphis City school system is the largest in Tennessee and the 21st largest in the nation. Memphis City is about 40 percent larger than the next most populous district in the state (Davidson County). System officials note that because of its size it is difficult to compare MCS to any other district in the state. Much recent research has suggested that smaller school size may be correlated with improved student achievement,

⁷⁰ Aimee Edmondson, "Watson Seeks Detailed Audit of Schools," *Commercial Appeal*, April 30, 2002.

particularly for impoverished students. Fewer studies relate district size to student achievement, but a 2000 study of Georgia school districts⁷¹ found that:

“socioeconomic status (or poverty) and size work *jointly* to influence student performance. In other words, the interaction of poverty and district size exerts an important influence on school performance.”⁷²

Previous studies have indicated a link between district size and student achievement. A study in West Virginia found that the link between district size and achievement was “*much weaker* in both smaller schools and smaller districts. This means that smaller units seemingly work to reduce the link between poverty and achievement.”⁷³

In five different state studies on the influence of district size on school performance, two common principles emerged:

First, in impoverished communities, small schools in small districts boost school performance. In general, more impoverished locales should have smaller districts and schools.

Second, in *every single comparison made* in each of the five studies, smaller districts and smaller schools demonstrated greater achievement equity.⁷⁴

A March 2002 study *How Poverty and the Size of Schools and School Districts Affect School Performance in Arkansas*, found that:

1. The higher the level of poverty in a community served by a school, the more damage larger schools and school districts inflict on school achievement. In more affluent communities, the impact of school and district size is quite small, but the poorer the community, the stronger the influence.
2. The achievement gap between children from more affluent and those from less affluent communities is narrowed in smaller schools and smaller districts, and widened in larger schools and larger districts.
3. Smaller schools are most effective against poverty when they are located in smaller districts; they are less effective when they are located in larger districts. Poverty dampens student achievement most in larger schools located in larger districts.
4. The relationship between school size, poverty, and student achievement is as much as three times greater in schools with the largest percentage of African American students.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Robert Bickel and Craig Howley, “The Influence of Scale on School Performance: A Multi-Level Extension of the Matthew Principle,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 8, No. 22, May 10, 2000, <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n22/> (accessed June 4, 2002).

⁷² Craig B. Howley, “School District Size and School Performance,” *Rural Education Issue Digest*, AEL, 2000, page 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Jerry D. Johnson, Craig B. Howley, Aimee A. Howley, *How Poverty and the Size of Schools and School Districts Affect School Performance in Arkansas*, A Rural School and Community Trust Summary of Recent Research, March 2002, p. 5, http://www.ruraledu.org/AR_REP02_72ppi.pdf (accessed June 11, 2002).

The increased interest in other states in reducing the size of school districts is based not only on student achievement but also on costs. The Louisiana State Legislature has commissioned a task force to study the feasibility and advisability of splitting large school districts into smaller, more manageable units.⁷⁶ The resolution creating the task force cites a bureaucratic “gulf” between teachers and school boards and notes the endemic inefficiency of large bureaucracies. Discussions in the California State Legislature of creating independent districts in the Los Angeles area prompted the Los Angeles Unified School District (the nation’s second largest) to approve a plan to divide into 11 “semiautonomous” districts.⁷⁷ Test scores have risen since the division, though some argue that has been a result of reading coaches and not of the new organization. Expected administrative cost savings have not occurred.⁷⁸ In New York, a 1995 study of the cost effects of school district consolidation found that per pupil expenditures begin to increase when district enrollments exceed 6,500.⁷⁹ A follow-up study found that “diseconomies of size may begin to emerge for districts above 15,000 students.”⁸⁰

Memphis City has 13 schools that serve grades 7-12, 11 of which are on notice. Principals of some of the 7-12 schools on notice indicate that the grade configuration is not the best possible. Many point to the problems inherent in having 7th graders (12-year-olds) in the same building as 11th and 12th graders (16- and 17-year-olds). Although central office officials agree that the 7-12 design is probably not the ideal, they note the time, expense, and difficulty of renovating existing structures, transferring students, and in some cases building new schools.

In 1993-94, the system began implementing a middle school initiative, requiring the eventual transfer of 6th grade students from elementary schools and 9th grade students from junior highs to high schools. Several other systems and states have taken similar steps to address poor student performance that often occurs in the middle grades. By 2001-02, 20 MCS schools were middle schools, exclusively serving grades 6-8.

The system has plans to alter the grade levels at some, but not all, of the grade 7-12 schools. The MCS board has approved seven capital improvement projects that extend to 2008-09, in part to facilitate implementation of the middle school concept.⁸¹ All projects are renovations of and/or additions to existing middle and high schools with a total budget cost of \$122.7 million.

⁷⁶ Michelle Krupa, “State studies splitting big schools districts,” *The Times Picayune*, June 8, 2002. http://www.nola.com/printer/printer.ssf?/newsstory/o_split08.html (accessed June 11, 2002).

⁷⁷ National School Board Association, “Plan Approved to Break Up Los Angeles School System,” *School Board News*, April 18, 2000. <http://www.nsba.org/sbn/00-apr/041800-2.htm>.

⁷⁸ CNN.com, “L.A. school district reorganizes,” January 4, 2002. <http://fyi.cnn.com/2002/fyi/teachers.ednews/01/04/losangeles.schools.ap/> (accessed June 11, 2002).

⁷⁹ *Potential Cost Savings from School District Consolidation: A Case Study of New York*, Elsevier Science Ltd., 1995, p. 274.

⁸⁰ Matthew Andrews, William Duncombe, and John Yinger, *Revisiting Economies of Size in American Education: Are We Any Closer to a Consensus?*, (no date), p. 2. <http://www-cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/efap/publications/revisiting%20economies.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2002).

⁸¹ Memo from Roland McElrath, MCS Associate Superintendent, Department of Business Operations, to Dr. Marieta Harris, MCS Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform, April 25, 2002.

Although many principals at the on-notice schools support the concept of optional schools, others believe that the optional program lessens other schools' abilities to attract higher-performing students and more capable teachers. However, according to central office staff, regular MCS schools lose more students to the district's open enrollment policy than to its optional schools.⁸² Some principals also expressed concern that maintaining separate schools for high-performing students has the mathematical effect of reducing the average test scores of the schools these students would otherwise have attended. However, since only about 10 percent of the system's students (11,263 as of October 2001) attend optional schools, the effect on test scores is probably not significant enough to determine whether a school is placed on notice, particularly since criteria include raising scores for the lowest-achieving students.

Memphis City will operate 30 optional schools in 2002-03. Eleven of these will be "optional only." The remainder will operate as schools within schools. MCS operates optional schools to "give parents options in selecting a public education that can best fit their children's talents and abilities."⁸³ Optional schools provide some specialized programs (e.g., creative and performing arts, technology, international studies), but primarily emphasize advanced study and college prep courses. Optional schools also provide a public education alternative for those parents of high-performing students who might otherwise send their children to private schools.

Research is not conclusive regarding the academic and social effects of integrating high-performing and low-performing students.

Some optional schools list parental support as a requirement for admission. This requirement may discriminate against those students who would otherwise qualify for admission to an optional school, but have parents who are unwilling or unable to support the school.

Memphis City Schools awards teachers for best practices in the classroom. In the spring of 2001, the central office began an awards program for teachers who identify and use research-based, data-driven methods and strategies that positively affect student achievement and can be replicated in other classrooms. According to the system's September 2001 *Pathways* newsletter, "the ultimate goal for this process is to identify successful methods and strategies that have achieved solid results and directly impact or support student achievement."⁸⁴ Teachers apply for the award within three categories: Academic Achievement, Student Support, and School, Family, Community Connections. The winners and their strategies are profiled in the newsletter, which is distributed to all MCS employees.

⁸² Interview with Bob Archer and Dr. Marieta Harris, April 25, 2002.

⁸³ MCS website, http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/communications/optional_schools/optional_schools_main.htm (accessed May 23, 2002).

⁸⁴ "Two teachers receive 'Best Practice for Performance Excellence' awards," *Pathways*, a Publication for Employees of Memphis City Schools, September 2001, p. 1.

Memphis City Schools is aware of security issues. Research shows that supervising access to schools, increasing visibility of adults, and working with local law enforcement agencies help create a safe school environment.⁸⁵ MCS is implementing a plan to install buzzer entry systems in all elementary schools and surveillance systems in all secondary schools. Some schools OEA staff visited also use metal detectors. OEA staff observed a general practice in several schools where teachers stand in the halls during class changes and on the grounds during dismissal to monitor student behavior. MCS collaborates with the Memphis Police Department to provide law enforcement officers to schools.

MCS staff, as well as several principals, indicated that gangs operated within and around schools. Staff said that well-organized gangs actually recognize the value of education as a necessary credential for entry into the corporate sector. These gangs recruit from within the school system and encourage academic achievement for their members. Those gangs that are disruptive are “small time,” and can usually be dealt with through regular school disciplinary procedures or with the assistance of regular law enforcement.⁸⁶

★ **All Memphis City schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).** The state-mandated school improvement planning process in which all Tennessee 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 SACS accredited.⁸⁷ SACS accreditation ensures that schools meet a minimum set of standards, but does not ensure any particular level of 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.”⁸⁸

In addition, department staff note that SACS provides an outside team to assist with school level planning and make recommendations for improvement.⁸⁹

Although 64 Memphis City Schools are on notice, students throughout the system continue to learn and to achieve at high levels. System educators also receive awards and recognition for their work in the schools. For example, Kana Barker-Mabon, instructional facilitator at Cypress Middle School, won the \$25,000 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award for 2001. A Northside High student won first place

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, *Early Warning, Early Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (2000), p. 20.

⁸⁶ Interview with Bob Archer and Dr. Marieta Harris, April 25, 2002.

⁸⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, Statewide Report Card 2001, <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 14, 2002).

⁸⁸ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools web site, <http://www.sacs.org/pub/elem/csip/qsip/page3.html> (accessed May 29, 2002).

⁸⁹ Telephone interview with Connie Smith, Director of Accountability, Tennessee Department of Education, February 26, 2002.

in French I poetry interpretation over all other city and county students. Chickasaw Junior High School won \$300 for the best Interactivity Award at the International Web Site contest. Two Hamilton High students received fully-paid scholarships to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire for five weeks in the summer of 2001. They studied with other students from all over the world. Ten students at Wooddale High placed first, second, and third in various categories in the Foreign Language Fair at the University of Memphis. At the Wordsmith creative writing competition at the University of Memphis, Wooddale High won first place in the school sweepstakes for 9th grade.

All examples are from on-notice schools in Memphis City. Each issue of the system's *Pathways* newsletter highlights accomplishments of all schools in the system.

Recommendations

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

★ **Memphis City Schools should continue its efforts to expand pre-kindergarten opportunities to at-risk children.** The director of Memphis City Schools has requested a budget improvement for 2002-03 that would fund 20 additional preschool classrooms. Also, the system may want to consider an information campaign targeted at high poverty families to inform them of strategies to prepare their children for school.

★ **Memphis City Schools should continue to develop and implement strategies to attract and retain quality teachers, and the state Department of Education should provide assistance and guidance.** The school system administration made a recent proposal that would allow it to expand its teacher supply in a responsible manner. In addition, the system has adopted and will fund other teacher incentives.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission may wish to consider expanding teacher education programs in the Memphis area. More classes could be offered in non-traditional settings or through distance learning to increase the number of teachers in the Memphis area. The Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities, the governing body of private institutions in the state, may also wish to encourage their colleges and universities in the Memphis area to expand teacher education programs and contribute to increasing the number of teachers as well.

Memphis City Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of the Truancy Assessment Center in lowering the dropout rate. In addition to operating the center, the system may want to focus greater attention on students in middle and high schools to lower the number of students who drop out. Although early childhood education is crucial to improving MCS student success in the long-term, high dropout rates suggest that increased attention to middle- and high-school students is warranted.

The Memphis City School Board and central office staff should be more proactive in working with all education stakeholders in Memphis City. By providing a forum for all who wish to participate, the board and central office may be able to better coordinate efforts. The board and staff should clearly enumerate the system's needs and how various

groups could best address the needs. Similarly, elected officials should contact district officials before organizing public meetings about education. One of the arguments for smaller district size is the lack of communication between school communities (principals, teachers, parents, and students) and large district administrators and governing boards. In responding to the challenge presented by the large number of schools on notice in the Memphis City system, the board and central office staff should be cognizant of the distance these stakeholders often feel themselves to be from policy-making activities.

Memphis City Schools may wish to study further the effects of student mobility and explore possible solutions by collaborating with other community agencies, particularly those concerned with housing. The 1998 Minneapolis student mobility study cited in the report resulted from a joint effort by school officials, planners, and a nonprofit group that promotes affordable housing, because that issue frequently impacts mobility in a community. The report led to recommendations for schools and other community agencies in an effort to reduce and lessen the negative effects of family and student mobility.

Memphis City Schools should continue its focus on school-level improvements. The system has done a commendable job of developing and implementing a system to deliver continual technical assistance to the schools on notice. The system should continue its efforts in this area.

Memphis City Schools should continue to concentrate on increasing parental involvement, using strategies at both the central office level and the school level. The system should disseminate information among all schools about individual schools' effective strategies.

Memphis City Schools may wish to strongly encourage principals to attend special education workshops so they are aware of special accommodations in testing and alternative forms of testing for certain students. Currently, principals are invited to the training, but not required to attend. With the increased emphasis on testing and accountability, however, principals must have accurate and up-to-date information about special education testing.

Appendix A

Persons Interviewed and Documents Reviewed

State Department of Education Personnel

Dr. Ralph Barnett, West Tennessee Regional Director

Mr. Nathan Boyd, Field Services Director, Southwest Regional Office

Mr. H. Danny Johnson, Consultant

System Administration Personnel

Mr. Bob Archer, Associate Superintendent, School Administration & Student Support

Dr. Marieta Harris, Associate Superintendent, Curriculum & School Reform

Mr. William White II, Executive Director, Research, Testing & Accountability

Mr. Wayne Booker, Coordinator, Office of Accountability

Ms. Thelma Crivens, Coordinator, Policy Development and Grants Management

Mr. Ron Pope, Director of Safe Schools and Alternative Programs

Ms. Brenda Rudolph, Partnership Specialist, Department of Communications & Administrative Services

Mr. Larry Hill, Supervisor, Security, Transportation and Risk Management

School Personnel

Mr. John Duckworth, Principal, Whitney Elementary

Mr. Tony Wall, Principal, Cypress Middle

Ms. Carolyn Currie, Principal, Northside High

Mr. Lawrence Green, Principal, Winchester Elementary

Mr. Dorothy Lee, Assistant Principal, Oakhaven High

Ms. Elsie Bailey, Principal, Booker T. Washington High

Mr. Anthony Harris, Principal, Treadwell Elementary

Dr. Charlie Folsom, Principal, Airways Middle

Ms. Millicent Dewitt, Instructional Facilitator, Airways Middle

Ms. Robin Ballard, Math Teacher, Airways Middle

Dr. Willie Tobias, Jr., Principal, Chickasaw Junior High

Mr. E. Reeves, Assistant Principal, Chickasaw Junior High

Dr. Patricia Terry, Instructional Support Team Leader, Chickasaw Junior High

Ms. J. Hubbard, Instructional Facilitator, Chickasaw Junior High

Mrs. Pam Harris Giles, Math Department Chair, Chickasaw Junior High

Mrs. M. Wilson, English Department Chair, Chickasaw Junior High

Mr. Seymour, Science Teacher, Chickasaw Junior High

Mr. Conyers, Social Studies Teacher, Chickasaw Junior High

Ms. Celia Moore, Principal, Frayser Elementary

Mr. W. Barry McGee, Principal, Raleigh Egypt Middle

Dr. Oscar Love, Principal, East High

Ms. Charlotte Harper, Principal, Graceland Elementary

Mr. Joe Davis, Principal, Manassas High

Additional Persons

Personnel from nine Memphis City Family Resource Centers

Documents

- 2001 Report Cards from Tennessee Department of Education
- 2001-2002 School Improvement Plans
- Inside Memphis City Schools 2001-2002: The Future Starts Here
- MCS Board Policies
- District Technology Plan
- Instructional Improvement Initiative 2001-2002
- Thumbs Up – MCS Division of Optional Schools
- Summary Report: Title I Center for Parental Involvement (Submitted in August 2001)
- 2001-2002 Action Plan, Title I Center for Parental Involvement
- 21st Century Standards for 21st Century Students: A Parent's Guide
- Draft Title I Plan for Increasing Achievement in Title I Schools
- Draft Title I Strategic Action Plan 2001-2002
- General Fund Budget 2001-2002
- Special Revenue Fund Budget 2001-2002
- Title I Needs Assessment Results from several schools
- Optional Schools 2001-02 Booklet
- KIPP Memphis Fact Sheet
- Partners: Celebrating Community Involvement in Memphis City Schools (Spring 2001)
- *Pathways* publications (for MCS employees)
- Teaching & Learning Academy Professional Development Catalog (Fall 2001)
- “A Framework For Action: A Blueprint for Recruiting, Preparing, and Supporting Excellent Teachers in the Memphis City Schools” (DRAFT version, dated March 23, 2002)
- Newspaper articles

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.



2597 Avery Avenue • Memphis, Tennessee 38112-4892 • (901) 325-5300

Reply to the office of:

Johnnie B. Watson
Superintendent

Phone (901) 325-5444 / FAX (901) 325-5578

EMAIL: superintendent@Memphis-Schools.k12.tn.us

WEBSITE: www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us

August 12, 2002

Ms. Ethel R. Detch, Director
Office of Education Accountability
Comptroller of the Treasury
State of Tennessee
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243-0268

Dear Ms. Detch:

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Memphis City Schools should continue its efforts to expand pre-kindergarten opportunities to at-risk children.

As noted in your report, many of our children do indeed start school without many of the needed readiness skills to help them be successful. One of the objectives in the MCS *Strategic Plan 2001-04* deals directly with equipping students who enter kindergarten with readiness skills. We are working to expand and improve the existing preschool classrooms, and we have activities underway to collaborate with community daycare and preschool providers to provide support necessary to ensure children are ready to succeed when they enter school. MCS has plans to fund twenty additional early childhood classrooms for the 2002-03 school year pending the availability of funds. However, local resources are limited, and the state should continue to explore ways of providing support to school systems throughout the state in need of preschool educational programs.

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Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan is "to ensure that all schools are staffed with highly-qualified personnel." Supporting strategies include stimulating interest in teaching among high



2597 Avery Avenue • Memphis, Tennessee 38112-4892 • (901) 325-5300

Reply to the office of:

Johnnie B. Watson
Superintendent

Phone (901) 325-5444 / FAX (901) 325-5578

EMAIL: superintendent@Memphis-Schools.k12.tn.us

WEBSITE: www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us

August 12, 2002

Ms. Ethel R. Detch, Director
Office of Education Accountability
Comptroller of the Treasury
State of Tennessee
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243-0268

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school students and individuals in other professions, establishing and maintaining competitive salaries and benefits, strengthening partnerships with teacher-preparation programs, developing and implementing alternative certification programs, implementing additional course offerings and training for paraprofessionals who would like to become licensed, and providing effective professional development and support for new and continuing teachers. To support us in these efforts, we have submitted grants to the state Department of Education and other sources.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission may wish to consider expanding teacher education programs in the Memphis area.

Staff of the Memphis City Schools would welcome any efforts in our area aimed at increasing the supply of quality teacher candidates.

Memphis City Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of the Truancy Assessment Center in lowering the dropout rate.

The Memphis City Schools has contracted with Dr. David Forde of the University of Memphis' Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice to conduct an evaluation of the Truancy Assessment Center. This study is being funded by a Local Law Enforcement Block Grant, and a report is expected in November of this year.

The Memphis City School Board and central office should be more proactive in working with all education stakeholders in Memphis City.

The publicity surrounding the schools on notice has caused many community members and organizations to become interested in helping the Memphis City Schools. We welcome and encourage their involvement, and I continue to spread the message that the Memphis City Schools alone cannot do the job of helping our students reach their highest potential. Goal 3 of our Strategic Plan focuses on the Coordination of Community Resources. Developing a better coordinated approach to bring all community resources to bear in helping our children and their families is vital to our success. I will continue to use the Strategic Plan to channel any external support into a coordinated effort.

Family, School, and Community-Shared Expectations are the essence of the Strategic Plan's Goal 4, which furthers the emphasis on the partnership necessary to help all students succeed. We must have the assistance of the community in order to address the needs of our children, their schools, and their families. One initiative that is underway which involves outside funding and depends on community volunteers is *Our Children – Our Future*, a tutoring program in reading and mathematics targeting students in 21 of the state-identified schools. Students in these schools will receive one on one assistance from at least 225 trained tutors during the coming school year.

Memphis City Schools may wish to study further the effects of student mobility and explore possible solutions by collaborating with other community agencies, particularly those concerned with housing.

One of the primary reasons the Memphis City Schools moved from school-based reform models to a systemwide curriculum was the high mobility of our students. We will

continue to study the impact that mobility has on our students and make the necessary policy and programmatic changes to ensure it has as little impact as possible.

The Memphis City Schools does have a relationship with the Memphis Housing Authority, and I agree that additional collaboration with MHA and other agencies may be needed.

Memphis City Schools should continue its focus on school-level improvements.

The Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and School Effectiveness will continue to implement its support plan for low performing schools. Instructional Support Teams, including state appointed Exemplary Educators, will continue to

- assist schools in the development of strategies to improve classroom instruction,
- model quality curriculum implementation and appropriate use of instructional strategies,
- provide classroom demonstration lessons, and
- advise on the use of various assessments and intervention strategies.

Other school-level support activities that will be continued include

- establishing school-based Academic Teams,
- assisting and supporting Exemplary Educators,
- providing professional development for Academic Teams,
- creating a school climate and culture for improved student achievement, and
- monitoring and observing classrooms and providing timely feedback to teachers.

Memphis City Schools should continue to concentrate on increasing parental involvement, using strategies at both the central office level and the school level.

Strategic Goal 4 is to strengthen the family/school/community partnership to support the academic, vocational, social and emotional development of all students. The second objective under this goal deals with ensuring ongoing, meaningful parent involvement in the Memphis City Schools.

To help meet this goal and objective, staff will continue to

- monitor the establishment and implementation of School Leadership Councils;
- provide training to School Leadership Councils;
- provide assistance to schools in organizing parent groups;
- support initiatives of the Division of Parental Involvement and Family Support, the Parent Assembly, and the Title I Parent Involvement Center;
- train parent facilitators in the Parent to Parent Education Program; and
- train parent volunteers to serve on Parent Patrols.

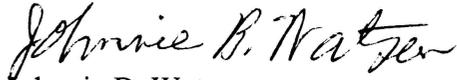
Memphis City Schools may wish to strongly encourage principals to attend special education workshops so they are aware of special accommodations in testing and alternative forms of testing for certain students.

The Memphis City Schools' Division of Exceptional Children provides on-going training regarding statewide and districtwide assessments and the IEP decisions that affect special accommodations in testing and alternative forms of testing. Christy Gunn, State TCAP-

ALT Coordinator, is holding workshops for selected Memphis City Schools staff during the 2002-2003 school year. She is conducting a workshop for selected administrative staff as an update to changes in the TCAP-ALT assessment process. Other sessions during the year have been planned and will include teachers, principals, and other administrative staff.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to your report. Please contact me or my Executive Staff if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnnie B. Watson".

Johnnie B. Watson
Superintendent