

# Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



## System Report: Perry County Schools

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



STATE OF TENNESSEE

**COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY**

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Comptroller

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October 28, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John G. Morgan".

John G. Morgan  
Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Faye Taylor  
Department of Education

# Tennessee Schools On Notice 2001-02



## System Report: Perry County Schools

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

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# PERRY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

## Introduction

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

- Perry County High School

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

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

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

The study addressed individual schools to the extent possible.

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

## Background and Methodology

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

“improving.”<sup>1</sup> Schools unable to achieve adequate yearly progress can be on probation up to two years before facing sanctions such as reconstitution or alternative governance. The following figures display the criteria developed by the Department of Education to identify schools needing improvement.

**K-8 criteria used to place schools on notice:**

Achievement criteria

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

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

Growth factors (Adequate Yearly Progress)

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

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

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

**9-12 criteria used to place schools on notice:**

Achievement criteria

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

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

Growth factors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See Appendix A for a list of persons interviewed and documents reviewed regarding 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 discipline<sup>2</sup>

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

### **Common characteristics of Tennessee’s on-notice schools**

OEA staff found that no single system with schools on notice could be characterized by every factor listed above. However, at least some of the factors are true of most of the

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

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

systems and schools. Several have large numbers of students from low income and minority backgrounds and have large concentrations of poverty in their communities. Most have limited parental involvement, many have high staff turnover rates, and some employ a large number of teachers that are less experienced and less qualified (as shown by the number of teachers with waivers and permits).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Perry County School System Background Characteristics

<b>SCHOOLS AND STAFF 2000-01</b>	
Number of schools	4
Number of schools on notice	1
Number of teachers	82
Number of teacher waivers	4
Number of teacher permits	1
Average teacher salary	\$32,878

(Source: Perry County Schools Report Card 2001)

<b>FUNDING 2000-01</b>	
Total expenditures	\$9,105,264 <sup>5</sup>
Per-pupil expenditures	\$5,960
Federal revenue	11.4%
State revenue	65.1%
<i>includes BEP state share</i>	\$3,802,000
Local revenue	23.4%
<i>includes BEP local share</i>	\$859,000

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

Perry County Schools' per pupil expenditure of \$5,960 is less than the statewide average of \$6,055 and national average of \$7,436. The average teacher salary in Perry County is \$32,878 compared to a statewide average of \$37,431 in the 2000-01 school year. Perry County relies more heavily on state funding (65.1 percent) than many other systems throughout the state, whose average state contribution is 47 percent.<sup>6</sup>

The Perry County school system receives several public grants, including Title I, Title II, Title VI, Title XX, IDEA grants, a school-to-work grant, a safe and drug-free schools grant, a family resource center grant, an adult education grant, a vocational education grant, a pre-kindergarten grant, and several state and federal technology grants.<sup>7</sup> In the 2000-01 school year, the system did not receive any private grants.

<b>STUDENT POPULATION 2000-01</b>	
Number of students	1,172
African American	1.7%
Caucasian	97.5%
Other	.8%

<sup>5</sup> In school year 2000-01, expenditures included capital projects totaling \$2,445,549, which encompassed a new high school building. The system's expenditures are generally lower.

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

<sup>7</sup> Annual Public School Budget Document, Perry County, Fiscal Year 2000-01.

English language learners	0
Special education	18.8%
Free and reduced lunch	47.9%

(Source: Perry County Schools Report Card 2001)

### **Additional System Information**

Perry County is in rural west central Tennessee. The county seat, Linden, is approximately 66 miles east of Jackson and 100 miles southwest of Nashville. Perry County, home to fewer than 8,000 residents, experienced slower population growth between 1990 and 2000 (15.4 percent) than the state (16.7 percent).<sup>8</sup> The county also has a lower median household income and a higher percentage of persons and children living in poverty than the state.<sup>9</sup>

Perry County operates one Family Resource Center (FRC).<sup>10</sup> The center employs a director to oversee daily operations. The system's FRC collaborates with various community agencies to provide pre-school age children with activities and supplies, programs geared toward improving reading and writing, freshman orientation, school safety programs, and jobs for Tennessee graduates. The center additionally assists students on a case-by-case basis. The center opened in 2002 and serves four schools, one of which is on notice.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Perry County, Tennessee," U.S. Census Bureau, State and County *QuickFacts*, February 7, 2002, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/47135.html> (accessed May 20, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The General Assembly created a grant program in 1992 to allow local education agencies to establish FRCs to coordinate state and community services to help meet the needs of families with children (T.C.A. 49-2-115).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with R. Wayne Morris, Principal, Perry County High School, January 31, 2002.

## Schools on Notice Background Characteristics

PERRY COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL 2000-01	
Grades served	9-12
Number of students	349
African American	2.6%
Caucasian	96.6%
Other	.9%
English language learners*	0
Special education**	---
Free and reduced lunch	34.6%
Number of teachers employed	27
Number of administrators	2

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

PCHS is the only high school in the system and students come from Lobelville Elementary (K-8) and Linden Middle (5-8) schools. R. Wayne Morris has been principal of PCHS for 18 years.

### Analysis and Conclusions

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

#### Strengths

**Perry County central office and school staff are using the school's on-notice status to support self-identified school improvements.** Positive leadership sets the tone for school improvement, and, though noting an initial shock and negative reaction to placement on notice, school and system administrators express a constructive focus on improving the high school. The school has integrated its Exemplary Educator into the planning and implementation of improvement strategies, and the school improvement plan is designed to address the school's on notice status.

**Perry County Schools developed and implemented a new attendance policy for the 2000-01 school year that has positively affected attendance rates throughout the system.** Specifically, the policy limits the number of days a student can miss to eight. After eight absences, if a student has not stayed after school to make up time, the student will fail the respective class. Since the implementation of the policy, the high school's attendance rate improved from 91.1 percent<sup>12</sup> during the 1999-2000 school year to 93.0 percent<sup>13</sup> in the 2000-01 school year. The school's attendance rate rose above the

<sup>12</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, "Perry County Report Card 2000," <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd00/default.asp> (accessed May 20, 2002).

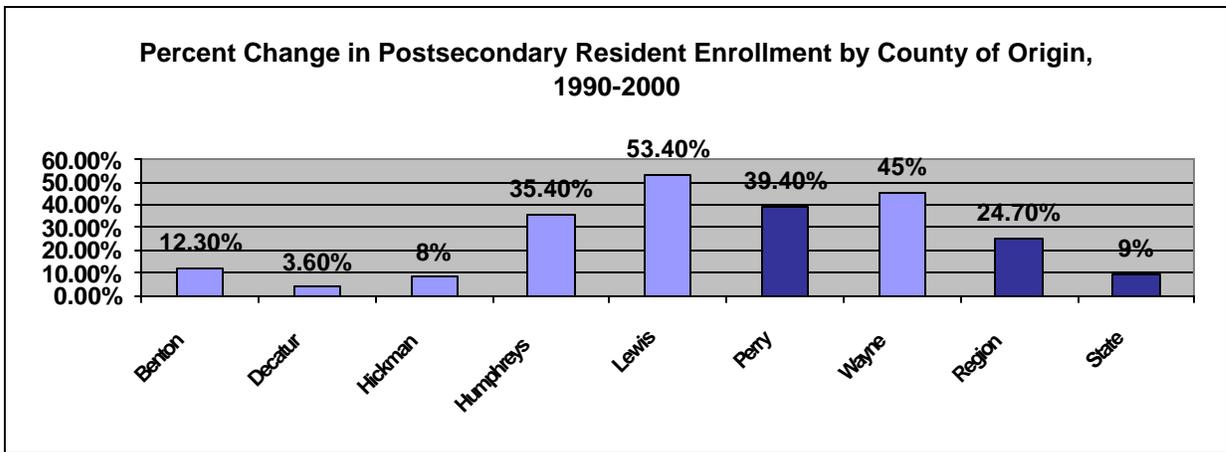
<sup>13</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, "Perry County Report Card 2001," <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/index.asp> (accessed May 20, 2002).

statewide average of 92.7 percent, and PCHS received an “A” for attendance on the statewide report card for the first time.<sup>14</sup>

**The new PCHS facility contributes to a positive learning environment for students.**

Current educational research suggests a link between quality school buildings and higher student achievement, though other factors may influence this relationship.<sup>15</sup> The PCHS facility, opened less than two years ago, provides adequate classroom space and appears to be well-maintained and clean. Parent and teacher surveys conducted for the PCHS school improvement plan reveal that both groups view the school facility as an asset.

**Many PCHS graduates attend postsecondary education institutions.** In school year 2000-01, 74 students graduated from the high school, and school officials indicate that 50 planned to enroll in postsecondary education.<sup>16</sup> Perry County’s increase in enrollment in public postsecondary institutions between 1990 and 2000 exceeds state and regional<sup>17</sup> average increases, as displayed on the following chart. Increasing the percentage of Perry County residents with higher education backgrounds could be useful to county economic development strategies. Higher education levels are also positively correlated with increased participation in the labor force.<sup>18</sup>



(Source: Statistical Abstract of Tennessee Higher Education 2000-01, Tennessee Higher Education Commission)

**In 2000-01, Perry County Schools achieved the EIA requirements for maximum class sizes and class size averages.**<sup>19</sup> The system met these requirements a year earlier than it was required to do so. (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

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Office of Education Accountability, “School Capital Outlay: Tennessee in a National Context,” Comptroller of the Treasury, August 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with R. Wayne Morris, Principal, Perry County High School, January 31, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Here, “regional average” includes figures for Perry County and six school systems in border counties: Benton, Decatur, Hickman, Humphreys, Lewis, and Wayne.

<sup>18</sup> “Chapter 5. Outcomes of Education,” Digest of Education Statistics, 2001, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/digest2001/ch5.asp> (accessed May 20, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, School Approval, Class size and teacher information spreadsheet, 2000-01.

the required average class size for its grade level.) Perry County Schools complied with all class size requirements in school year 2001-02.<sup>20</sup>

★**PCHS has ample technological resources available for students.** Specifically, PCHS has 116 computers available for student use including: computers in the library for research; computers in vocational education classrooms; a computer lab for personal computing instruction using Microsoft Office 2000; a drafting computer lab for instruction; a diversified technology lab; and computers dispersed in regular education and special education classrooms for teacher and student enrichment programs.

In 1999-2000, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) developed a technology model for a well-equipped school.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, SREB recommends that schools have a minimum of one computer per five students, late model computers, and a high level of Internet connectivity.<sup>22</sup> PCHS has one computer for every three students, which is better than the SREB-recommended student-computer ratio. This ratio is also better than Tennessee's average student-computer ratio of 5.4 students for every computer.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, all the equipment is modern, and a majority of the computers are connected to the Internet. To develop technological resources, Perry County system staff applied for and received two grants, which were divided among all schools in the system.

**PCHS has policies and implements procedures to maintain a safe and secure school.**

Security is a growing issue of concern for schools across the county, and the implementation of precautionary measures has become an expected role of modern school administrators. Though limited, educational research supports the common assumption that disorder (i.e., high rates of student delinquent behavior) negatively affects student achievement.<sup>24</sup> Ensuring order is a national priority; the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program in the U.S. Department of Education offers grant money to states and safety guidance for educators.<sup>25</sup> The Tennessee Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program sponsors grants and training for local education agencies and has a website with related resources.<sup>26</sup> PCHS maintains a safe school plan, and school officials note that safety codes and conditions are posted in every classroom. The school maintains camera surveillance and has participated in the state-sponsored Peaceable Schools training.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, School Approval, Class size spreadsheet, 2001-02.

<sup>21</sup> Lou Parker and William R. Thomas, "Guidelines for Technology Equipment Selection and Use: An SREB Model for Schools and Campuses," Southern Regional Education Board, June 1999, <http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/techselectguidelines/EdTechGuidelines.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> "Technology Counts, 2001," *Education Week*, May 10, 2001, pp. 70-105.

<sup>24</sup> Paul E. Barton, Richard J. Coley, and Harold Wenglinsky, "Order in the Classroom: Violence, Discipline, and Student Achievement," ETS Policy Information Center, October 1998, <ftp://ftp.ets.org/pub/res/order.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug Free Schools Program, <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/index.html> (accessed April 15, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Tennessee Department of Education Online, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program Overview, <http://www.state.tn.us/education/sp/sp-drugs.htm> (accessed April 15, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

State law requires that each system establish at least one alternative school, either alone or jointly with other systems, for grades 7-12.<sup>28</sup> Statute also requires that alternative schools be run according to Tennessee Board of Education rules and that the Board “shall provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeat offenders.”<sup>29</sup> The Board’s standards additionally recommend one adult for every 12 students for alternative school programs.

In compliance with state law, Perry County operates an alternative school and stays within the recommended adult-student ratio. Specifically, in 2000-01 approximately 45 students attended Perry County’s alternative school.<sup>30</sup> Further, in the 2000-01 school year, PCHS suspended a lower percentage of its students (6.4 percent) than the state average (10.4 percent) and expelled no students.<sup>31</sup>

### **Areas for Improvement**

**The Perry County Commission and the Perry County School Board have not effectively communicated or collaborated for planning and improvement.** Past litigation<sup>32</sup> inhibits positive working relationships between these entities. The current PCHS improvement plan lists “communications throughout the system” as a desired outcome and performance target. Common goals between the funding body and the school system can ensure student needs are met and contribute to increased achievement.

**Overall, the Perry County school system does not effectively plan or implement resulting planning documents.** The Perry County school system’s district-level improvement plan has not been updated since 1996, which violates State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(a). As a result, the system may be focusing on outdated problems and issues raised during the district improvement process. Updating the district improvement plan would emphasize current problems and issues. As of February 25, 2002, system officials indicate they were updating the district improvement plan for the next five years.

**PCHS received compliments by department officials on the format and content of its 1999 school improvement plan; however, the school has not effectively implemented past plans to promote improvement.** As a result, faculty and staff have not always addressed goals identified during the improvement process.

In addition to requiring district planning, the State Board of Education requires that systems have each school “develop, maintain, and implement a school improvement

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<sup>28</sup> T.C.A. 49-6-3402(a).

<sup>29</sup> T.C.A. 49-6-3402(b) and (f).

<sup>30</sup> Telephone interview with Brent Cunningham, Alternative School Director, Perry County School System, April 30, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, “Perry County Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/index.asp> (accessed May 20, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Perry County, Tennessee vs. Perry County Board of Education, filed February 21, 2001.

plan” that should be updated every two years.<sup>33</sup> PCHS has developed SIPs in compliance with this rule and updated its SIP every two years as prescribed by Board rule.

Concerning implementation of the plan, PCHS officials stated that in the past, the school has not used it consistently or regularly. The high school is, however, improving the implementation of its school improvement plan and working to use the document on an ongoing basis.

★ **Neither PCHS nor any other schools in the system are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).** The state-mandated school improvement planning process is similar to the SACS accreditation planning process. As reported on the 2001 Tennessee Statewide Report Card, 1,110 out of 1,623, or approximately 68 percent of Tennessee schools are accredited.<sup>34</sup> According to system officials, the schools have not considered SACS accreditation in the past because they have not met each SACS standard for accreditation, including school space and staffing needs. Specifically, system officials stated that the old school building did not have enough space to accommodate student-teacher ratios and the school did not have enough librarians. Though the system presently meets space requirements because of the opening of the new facility, staffing requirements inhibit eligibility. The system does not intend to consider SACS accreditation in the near future.

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.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition, department staff note that SACS provides an outside team to assist with school level planning and make recommendations for improvement.<sup>36</sup>

★ **PCHS experiences high rates of teacher turnover, especially for new teachers.** Though school leadership has remained stable, PCHS has experienced a 30 percent turnover rate in teaching staff for each of the past two school years.<sup>37</sup> School officials report that attrition is especially high among teachers with fewer than four years of

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<sup>33</sup> Tennessee State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-3-.03(16)(b).

<sup>34</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, “Statewide Report Card 2001,” <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd01/state1.htm> (accessed February 14, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools web site, <http://www.sacs.org/pub/elem/csip/qsip/page3.html> (accessed May 29, 2002).

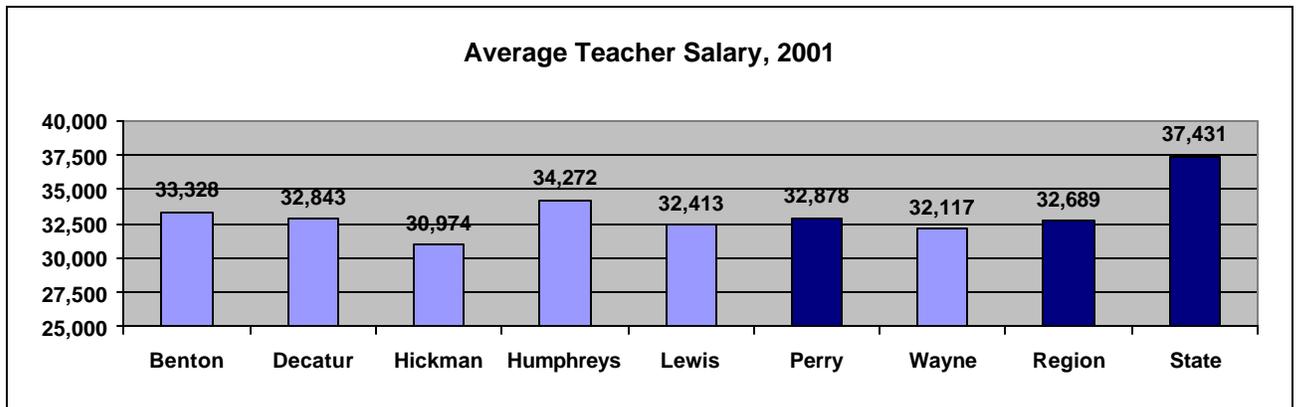
<sup>36</sup> Telephone interview with Connie Smith, Director of Accountability, Tennessee Department of Education, February 26, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Perry County Schools, School Board Members and System-wide Personnel, Principals, and Teachers: 1998-99, 1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02. The PCHS turnover rate is the percentage of teachers that did not return to the school from one school year to the next.

experience. Tennessee’s teaching force has an overall turnover rate of six percent,<sup>38</sup> statewide figures for 1998 indicate that teachers with fewer than five years of experience contribute to 44 percent of total teacher attrition.<sup>39</sup> (This trend may exist because new teachers comprise a significant percentage of total educators.)

Current research highlights the increased fiscal burden of districts and schools with high teacher turnover rates.<sup>40</sup> High turnover also contributes to discontinuity in the educational system and has been linked to lowered student performance on standardized tests.<sup>41</sup> Increased teacher experience positively affects student achievement and is undermined by high turnover.<sup>42</sup> Teachers who leave remove their growing levels of experience from classrooms; less experienced teachers often fill the open slots.

Teacher attrition is linked to many factors. One report finds that, excluding retirement, most teachers voluntarily change jobs or leave the profession for personal reasons, job dissatisfaction, or to pursue other jobs.<sup>43</sup> Salary is linked to dissatisfaction and career changes. In 2000-01, the average teacher salary in the Perry County school system was \$32,878, less than the statewide average of \$37,431. The following chart contains average teacher salary figures for Perry and its six border counties. Perry County’s average slightly exceeds the regional average of \$32,689.<sup>44</sup>



(Source: Tennessee Department of Education Statewide Report Card 2001)

<sup>38</sup> Tennessee State Board of Education, Key Area Five: Teacher Education and Professional Growth, *Master Plan 2002*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, *Teacher Supply and Demand Statistical Report for the State of Tennessee*, June 2001, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Texas Center for Educational Research, *The Cost of Teacher Turnover*, November 2000, p. 1, <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/txbess/turnoverrpt.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2002).

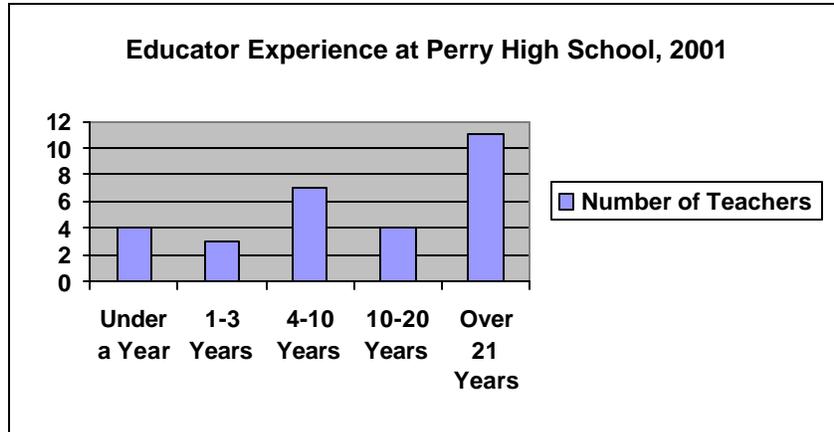
<sup>41</sup> David W. Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, Jennifer Kawata, and Stephanie Williamson, *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Scores Tell Us*, RAND Corporation, 2000, <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR924/> (accessed March 14, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Daniel P. Mayer, John E. Mullens, and Mary T. Moore, *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report*, U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2001-030, December 2000, p. 13.

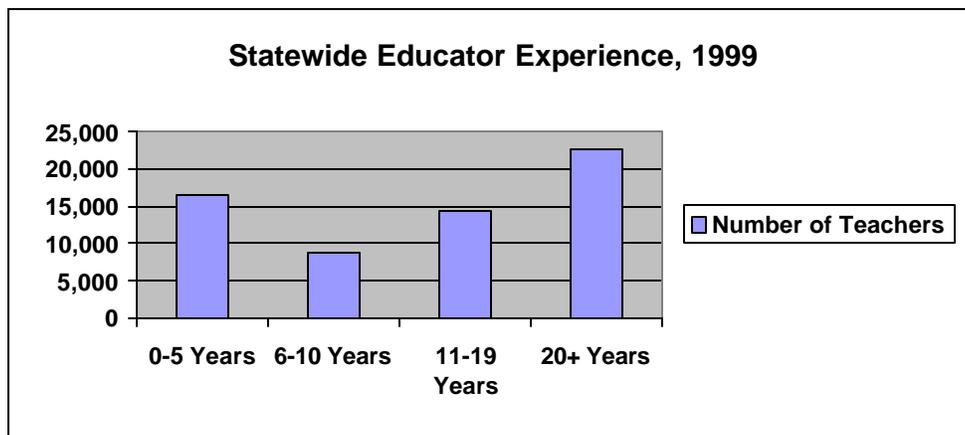
<sup>43</sup> Richard M. Ingersoll, *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools*, University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, pp. 3, <http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Turnover-Ing-01-2001.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Here, “regional average” includes figures for Perry County and six school systems in border counties: Benton, Decatur, Hickman, Humphreys, Lewis, and Wayne.

★ **In coming years, PCHS could experience a shortage of teachers and administrators as many of its educators near retirement.** Eleven of PCHS’s 29 educators have over 21 years of experience. The school could experience a future “experience deficiency” as educators in this category retire from the school system. Schools depend on experienced teachers to orient newer teachers and plan school activities. As stated above, teacher experience is also linked to higher student achievement. The following charts represent a breakdown of PCHS staff experience and similar statewide totals, respectively.



(Source: Perry County High School Improvement Plan 2001)



(Source: Educator Supply and Demand Statistical Report for the State of Tennessee, Southern Regional Education Board, June 2001)

**PCHS experiences low parental involvement and support of academics.** Parental involvement in student learning is positively linked to achievement.<sup>45</sup> PCHS sports teams have active booster clubs, but school attempts to organize a parent-teacher organization have been unsuccessful.<sup>46</sup> Such organizations contribute time and money to improving schools across the state, and collaboration between parents and teachers “sends powerful

<sup>45</sup> Gary Hoachlander, Martha Alt, and Renee Beltranena, Southern Regional Education Board, *Leading School Improvement: What Research Says: A Review of the Literature*, March 2001, p. 34, [http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/pubs/LeadingSchool\\_Improvement.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/pubs/LeadingSchool_Improvement.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Perry County High Schools, School Improvement Plan, 2001

messages to students about expectations, care and support.”<sup>47</sup> According to school officials, only five percent of parents attend parent teacher conferences. The school improvement plan repeatedly identifies parental involvement as an area needing improvement.

**High levels of staff absenteeism at PCHS contribute to a significant reliance on substitute teachers.** In school year 2000-01, 29 faculty members missed a total of 305.5 days during a 180-day school year (not including teacher in-service days). In the same year, 19 substitute teachers served a total of 382 days.<sup>48</sup> A non-licensed substitute teacher did not serve more than 20 consecutive days, which is compliant with statutory requirements.<sup>49</sup> Research indicates that substitute teachers are often disadvantaged because they are seen as “babysitters,” lack a formal lesson plan, and are often unfamiliar with school policy.<sup>50</sup>

**PCHS teachers do not have access to high levels of professional development, and its teachers do not have individual professional growth plans.** Teacher in-service and recent opportunities made available by the school’s Exemplary Educator appear to constitute the majority of staff development activities. SREB notes, however, that many educators view such opportunities as “an ad hoc, disconnected series of one-time activities that have little or no impact on improving student learning.”<sup>51</sup> The State Board of Education 2002 Master Plan lists teacher participation in professional development as a strategy for school improvement and one of Tennessee’s “most pressing needs.”<sup>52</sup> Staff development is also a desired outcome and performance target in Perry County High School’s improvement plan.

School officials indicate that the professional development portion of teacher evaluation forms is not completed, noting high teacher turnover rates and the lack of time and funds for development opportunities as contributing factors. State Board of Education Rule 0520-2-1-.02(1)(b)6, which relates to local evaluations, states that a “growth plan will be developed for all [apprentice and professionally licensed] teachers” to include “identified area(s) for growth, action plan, and progress reporting procedures.” Individual growth plans contribute to accountability for development activities and can target teacher growth toward specific goals.

**PCHS students have access to few honors courses and no advanced placement courses.** PCHS provides only one honors course, Advanced English in all grade levels,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Perry County High School staff absentee and substitute list, provided by Perry County central office staff, March 13, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> T.C.A. 49-5-709(a) and T.C.A. 49-3-312(2)(c).

<sup>50</sup> Ismat Abdal-Haqq, “Not Just a Warm Body: Changing Images of the Substitute Teacher,” *ERIC Digest*, September 1997, [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed412208.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed412208.html) (accessed March 11, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Hoachlander, et al.

<sup>52</sup> Tennessee State Board of Education, Key Result Area 5: Teacher Education and Professional Growth, *Master Plan 2002*, p. 9.

and offers no advanced placement courses.<sup>53</sup> According to school officials, students do not take advanced placement tests or CLEP tests for college credit. Surveys conducted for the school improvement plan indicate that teachers, students, and parents are concerned about this deficiency. The plan lists the lack of academically challenging classes and incentives for gifted students in the form of advanced placement courses or accelerated courses as school limitations.

The Tennessee State Board of Education 2002 Master Plan promotes the “implementation of advanced placement courses in all high schools.”<sup>54</sup> Rigorous courses challenge high school students and provide a glimpse of college-level work; students who complete advanced placement courses are more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees than those who do not.<sup>55</sup> About 62 percent of the nation’s high schools offer advanced placement courses, though access is unequal by income, race, and geographic location.<sup>56</sup>

**PCHS students have access to few student enrichment activities.** Student activities are an important part of school life, contributing to student satisfaction and success. Extracurricular activities are associated with increased student academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and increased likelihood of college attendance.<sup>57</sup> One study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human services notes that “to a point, students who spend more time (5-19 hours per week) in extracurricular activities were...less likely to engage in risky behavior.”<sup>58</sup> School officials indicate that PCHS does not have a band and only recently regained its football program. Parents and teachers surveyed for the current PCHS improvement plan are concerned about the lack of a variety of student activities.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> PCHS does offer several other college preparatory classes not considered honors courses (chemistry, physics, physiology, advanced math).

<sup>54</sup> Tennessee State Board of Education, Key Result Area 3: High School Education, *Master Plan 2002*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, *Dispelling the Culture of Mediocrity: Expanding Advanced Placement*. Washington, D.C., 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Jerry P. Gollub, Meryl W. Berenthal, Jay B. Labov, Philip C. Curtis, Eds., “Learning and Understanding: Improving Advanced Study of Mathematics and Science in U.S. High Schools,” Center for Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, 2002. <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309074401/html/> (accessed March 12, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement,” Education Policy Brief, June 1995, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/95741.html> (accessed March 12, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> Nicholas Zill, Christine Winquist Nord, and Laura Spencer Loomis. “Adolescent Time Use, Risky Behavior and Outcomes: An Analysis of National Data,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, September 11, 1995, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/cyp/xstimuse.htm> (accessed March 12, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Perry County High School Improvement Plan 2001, p. 25.

## Recommendations

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

**The Perry County Commission and school board should work to improve communication and consider participating in some form of integrated planning and goal formation.** The entities may wish to consult a neutral, third-party mediator to identify potential hindrances to effective communication and planning. The commission and board might further consider planning targeted work sessions in the areas of enhanced communication and education improvement.

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

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

**Perry County Schools should regularly use and refer to the district-level planning document and implement stated goals and objectives.** To ensure school-level implementation of the district improvement plan, the district should follow up with schools on a regular basis and review the individual schools' strategies for improvements.

**System and school leaders should continue to focus on and make school level improvements, which have resulted from the on-notice placement. Further, PCHS should continue to use its school improvement plan on an ongoing basis in an effort to implement enumerated goals, objectives, and strategies.** The SACS Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools reported that a School Improvement Team should provide guidance for the implementation of the SIP by encouraging the school's entire staff to participate.<sup>60</sup> Further, the Commission suggested that successful improvement implementation includes preparation, effective monitoring, communication, and reporting.<sup>61</sup>

★ **The Perry County school system should strengthen teacher orientation practices and design new strategies to curb its high teacher turnover rate.** PCHS currently provides every new teacher with two peer teachers for teacher orientation. The system and school also provide specialized in-service training for new teachers, and the school principal maintains an "open door policy" for teachers with questions.<sup>62</sup> PCHS could strengthen its method of orienting new teachers by requiring periodic meetings between new teachers and administrators and by including the development of targeted professional development planning in the first-year teacher evaluation process. PCHS

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<sup>60</sup> The Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, "The Quality School Improvement Process for Elementary and Middle Schools," 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with R. Wayne Morris, Principal, Perry County High School, January 31, 2002.

might explore the use of team teaching between new and experienced teachers in subject areas. School administrators may also be able to curb voluntary teacher turnover by providing more opportunities for teacher input in school decision-making.<sup>63</sup>

High schools across the country have also begun implementing teacher academies in an attempt to increase teacher retention. Like other vocational academies, teacher academies include student internships, specialized coursework for participating students, and a mentoring system between teachers and enrollees. Although Perry County is not located near a college or university, its superior technology availability could create possible co-enrollment of academy students in electronic postsecondary coursework.

**The Perry County school system should consider alternative/non-traditional methods of increasing parent and community involvement.** PCHS boys' basketball games are major social events, drawing large crowds to games. Past teams have won six state championships. PCHS might use its basketball games to increase involvement beyond athletics into academics and other areas of school life. The new high school gymnasium accommodates large crowds, and the system and school could use games to communicate with many parents. The principal could make brief announcements about important curricular events during halftime. For example, he could recognize students for academic achievement or provide specific school information: "report cards will be issued next week, Gateways are approaching, and the after-school tutoring program needs volunteers."

To increase attendance at parent teacher conferences, PCHS could offer tokens for free admittance to athletic and other school events. The school could also use its excellent computer and Internet connectivity to attract parents to night or after-school classes taught by volunteer community members. As parent involvement increases at PCHS, the school may wish to offer strategies to involve parents as decision-makers; SREB notes that some schools are "including parent representatives on school-improvement advisory boards."<sup>64</sup> The high school may consider recruiting more parent members for its school improvement team and designing specific objectives and strategies to increase parental involvement in academics.

★**The Perry County system and school officials should consider working toward SACS accreditation for the high school and other schools within the system.** Though the state has not evaluated the benefits of SACS accreditation, it does ensure schools meet a minimum number of standards. The school is already compiling and submitting the required information to meet state policy requirements. The system should review SACS standards that it does not meet and discuss future accreditation possibilities.

**Because of its heavy reliance on substitute teachers, the Perry County school system should consider implementing strategies to develop an experienced and dependable group of substitute teachers.** Relevant research suggests there are system-level

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<sup>63</sup> Ingersoll, p. 24.

<sup>64</sup> Hoachlander, et. al. pp. 34-35.

strategies for creating an experienced and dependable group of substitutes.<sup>65</sup> However, hiring full-time, permanent substitutes and developing a graduated substitute pay scale would require funding increases.<sup>66</sup> The system could provide more in-depth in-service training for substitute teachers to familiarize them with school policy and enhance their expertise with minor additional cost.<sup>67</sup>

**Perry County Schools should develop and implement strategies to provide efficient and effective professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators.** PCHS can use needs identified in its improvement plan to design specific development opportunities for educators; the school has done so to a degree through its Exemplary Educator. The central office should consider updating its system-wide professional development plan and using it to implement and monitor targeted staff development.

In designing specific strategies, the school and system should take advantage of existing resources and structures. For instance, several PCHS teachers have participated in technology training and could educate others to use computers as teaching tools. As well, the technology availability at the high school makes online development opportunities possible. The high school may wish to involve teachers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development activities. A committee of teachers could explore the creative use of in-service days to provide meaningful staff development.

**The Perry County school system should ensure that all teachers have professional growth plans.** Individual growth plans should be linked to the school improvement plan and system professional development plan to increase accountability for learning.

**The Perry County School Board should explore ways to add honors and advanced placement classes to PCHS course offerings.** PCHS may do so during school hours by establishing criteria to create honors courses and transferring eligible students from general courses. Perry County Schools and PCHS may wish to investigate two grant programs sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Education that could increase student access to high-level courses. The Advanced Placement Incentive program (API) offers the advanced placement expansion grant to train high school teachers to teach Advanced Placement courses. API is also sponsoring the last round of AP Nexus grants, which allow students meeting academic criteria at schools not offering advanced placement courses to take classes online. The grant includes a staff mentor stipend.<sup>68</sup> The AP Nexus grant could provide a catalyst for increased use of PCHS computers for coursework currently unavailable in a full-time class setting.

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<sup>65</sup> Ismat Abdal-Haqq, "Not Just a Warm Body: Changing Images of the Substitute Teacher," *ERIC Digest*, September 1997, [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed412208.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed412208.html) (accessed March 11, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Telephone interview with Michael Copas, API Incentive Grant Director, Tennessee Department of Education, March 11, 2002.

**The Perry County school system should seek to provide a well-balanced and consistent program of student activities at PCHS; however, this would require additional funding.** The high school might distribute surveys to all students to determine interest areas or solicit individual students and teachers interested in planning and leading student activities. The school may wish to consider using a flexible schedule once a month to allow student organizations to meet during the school day.

## **Appendix A**

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

#### **Interviews**

David Rhodes, Director of Schools, Perry County Schools  
James Swain, Regional Director, Tennessee Department of Education  
R. Wayne Morris, Principal, Perry County High School  
Linda Fesmire, Supervisor of Attendance/Vocational Director, Perry County Schools  
Martha Sharp, Chairman, Perry County School Board  
Benny Howard, County Executive, Perry County  
School officials at other Perry County Schools

#### **Documents**

Perry County School System Report Card 2001  
Perry County School System Accountability Follow-up Audit  
Review and Analysis of School System Data, Perry County (1997, 1999, 2000)  
TACIR School Facility Survey, 2002  
Audit Documents:  
    Membership and Attendance Audit, 2000, Perry County Schools, Internal Audit  
    Section, Tennessee Department of Education  
    Perry County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 1999-2000  
    Perry County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 1998-99  
Perry County High School Report Card 2001  
Perry County High School Improvement Plan 2001  
Educational Improvement Plan, Perry County School System: Progress Through  
Excellence in Education  
Perry County School System 3-Year Technology Plan  
Professional Development Plan, Perry County School System, Five-Year Plan 1996-2000  
Perry County Schools 2001-02 Teacher In-service documents  
Perry County Schools Budget 2000-01  
Tennessee Department of Education Internal Audit Reports  
Selected Perry County School Board Policies

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

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

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

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

**Schools making adequate progress**  
**2001-02**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Appendix C**

### **System Response**

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

MARTHA R. SHARP, CHAIRPERSON, LINDEN  
JANET L. CARROLL, LINDEN  
DON KIRK, LINDEN

DON R. BARNETTE, VICE-CHM., LOBELVILLE  
JORENE M. CHOATE, LINDEN  
JACKIE DUNCAN, LINDEN

# PERRY COUNTY SCHOOLS

DAVID R. RHODES, DIRECTOR OF SCHOOLS

333 SOUTH MILL STREET  
LINDEN, TENNESSEE 37096  
PHONE: (931) 589-2102  
FAX: (931) 589-5110

October 28, 2002

Emily Wilson  
State of Tennessee  
Comptroller of the Treasury  
Office of Education Accountability  
505 Deadrick Street Suite 1700  
Nashville, TN 37243-0268

Dear Emily,

I have read your analysis of the Perry County School System and concur with your findings as represented.

If I can be of further assistance, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



David R. Rhodes  
Director  
Perry County Schools

DRR:lr

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