



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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**Hamilton County Schools should keep the focus on student learning**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. –The Hamilton County Department of Education focuses effectively on improving student learning by providing opportunities for teachers and principals to collaborate within and across schools, a new study by the Comptroller’s Office of Education Accountability finds. In addition, the district provides schools user-friendly student data reports and helps educators interpret data to improve classroom teaching.

The district still faces challenges in student attendance, has been criticized for poorly communicating with the public, and is concerned about the effectiveness of educational services some students receive from outside providers under provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The report, titled “District Approaches to Improving High Priority Schools –Hamilton County Department of Education,” looks at the district’s response to four schools in the district that failed to make adequate yearly progress on state assessments for three years in a row.

**Grants help provide quality training** – School officials indicate that the quality of professional development they have received as a result of grants to the district has affected teachers significantly. National and local funders have awarded over \$90 million in competitive grants to the district over the last few years. Grantors include the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Benwood Foundation, the Lyndhurst Foundation, and the Osborne Foundation. The Public Education Foundation, a Chattanooga-based independent, nonprofit agency has also provided support.

**Need for improved communication with the public** – A 2005 study by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University identified communications as one key area that needed improvement in the school district.

**Attendance** – Attendance continues to be a problem for Hamilton County, with almost 35 percent of students missing ten or more days during the 2005-06 school year. District approaches include regular central office reviews of school attendance data, creating various alternative learning environments (including the Virtual School, Evening Schools, and career academies at all high schools), and reinstatement of in-school suspension. The attendance issue also led to the creation of the district’s Adult High School, which has graduated more than 200 students to date, many of whom had dropped out of Hamilton County schools.

The report recommends that the Hamilton County Department of Education should:

- Maintain its focus on student learning through improving classroom instruction, especially in light of its recent change in leadership.
- Make open communications with all stakeholders a priority to make successes better known to the public, as well as providing the public with information to make district decisions more understandable.
- Look into filing a waiver with the U.S. Department of Education to allow the district to provide its own supplemental education services under NCLB.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at [www.comptroller.state.tn.us](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us).

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