



Representing the Public in Public Education

POSITION STATEMENTS

The Tennessee School Boards Association recognizes the significance and importance of public education to the future of our local communities, state, and nation. Local boards of education are unified in providing Tennessee's children with an exceptional education using all available resources.

TSBA believes that improvement of student achievement is the most significant task of the school district and affirms a commitment to the improvement of student learning. The Association acknowledges the challenges that public schools face as well as the need for continued improvement, and its member boards of education are dedicated toward reaching the goal of every child achieving his/her highest potential.

I. CONTROL AND SUPPORT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

A. Governance

The responsibility for control and support of public schools is legally vested in the General Assembly while in large measure the operation is delegated to local school boards.

TSBA supports continued efforts to reduce state education law for the purpose of eliminating unconstitutional, conflicting, redundant, and unnecessary statutes.

TSBA believes the takeover of local schools or school districts from elected school boards and the communities they serve should take place only as a remedy of last resort. State and federal education policies should be designed to assist local school districts in improving student achievement for all children and not as a disguised means to label public schools as failures. Prior to any state or federal intervention based on a school's or district's failure to meet performance or accountability standards, governments should ensure that local schools and districts receive the necessary resources, support, and time to improve.

B. Local Control

Local school boards reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve as well as the interests and concerns of professional and nonprofessional employees. Non-partisan lay control is best ensured when educational policy is made by local lay representatives whose undivided attention and interests are devoted to education. While public education may be a federal concern, it is a state responsibility and a local operation.

The authority of the local school board is established by law, and this authority may not be delegated to others. Local boards of education must not relinquish their governance responsibilities.



School boards, subject to the requirements of existing law, should refrain from agreements that compromise their responsibility for representing general public interest in education. They should also resist, by all lawful means, the enactment of laws that would surrender their responsibility for the general public interest to third party agents.

Since local boards know the unique and varied needs of their communities, TSBA believes the General Assembly and State Board of Education should not violate local control through laws, rules, or regulations.

C. Local Elections

Local control is essential to the effective operation of school boards, and school board members should be responsible to the citizens that elected them. School board members have a unique knowledge of local needs and represent the collective will of the community as it relates to public education. As such, a local school board should be politically accountable to the constituents within their district.

TSBA believes the authority of election and retention of school board members should remain solely with the district they represent. The General Assembly should not pass legislation that would jeopardize the local governance structure or enable citizens outside a particular school district to participate in or influence the election of its school board members. Recall procedures should apply to all elected local officials and grounds for recall should be acts of malfeasance or misfeasance while in office or violation of oath of office.

D. Fiscal Independence

TSBA supports the development of a school budget law which provides the opportunity for local school boards to achieve fiscal independence. TSBA supports legislation that allows existing school districts to convert to special school districts.

E. Allocation of Public Funds

TSBA advocates that funds raised by general taxation for educational purposes should be administered by public officials and should not be used to support privately operated schools through tuition tax credits, vouchers, or block grants.

F. Federal Financial Support

TSBA believes federal involvement must recognize that policy decisions regarding education are best determined on the local level, and local boards of education must maintain control of public schools.

Funds from federal sources should be administered by the state and its appropriate agencies through local boards of education, and every program mandated at the federal level by direct or coercive means should be fully funded by the federal government.

G. Employment of Superintendents by Boards



TSBA is dedicated to the principle that the chief school executive officer should be employed by the local board of education and be given authority over all personnel matters.

H. Reorganization of School Districts

TSBA opposes mandatory consolidation of school districts and supports the rationale that school consolidation decisions should be made locally on a case-by-case basis.

I. Labor Relations

TSBA believes that a good working relationship among teachers, personnel, administrators, and school board members is essential to securing an effective learning environment for students.

TSBA supports the process of collaborative conferencing as it will ensure that administrators and educators are working together to accomplish goals and serve the best interests of students.

TSBA opposes any actions to return to collective bargaining or similar processes which would require school boards and/or superintendents to seek the approval of another organization prior to implementing reforms or making decisions that are best for the district, its students, and its teachers.

TSBA believes that strikes, sanctions, boycotts, or other concerted actions that interfere with the orderly functioning of public school districts are improper procedures to be used by public school employees.

TSBA opposes the enactment of any legislation that would require a school board to go to compulsory binding arbitration when handling a grievance.

J. State Funding

All funding components of the Basic Education Program (BEP) should accurately reflect true costs through an annual cost review and cost determination process. The State should fully fund the BEP and ensure that basic state funding and procedures provide equal opportunities for all school districts.

TSBA strongly believes that any future state-mandated programs or added responsibilities must, without exception, be accompanied by 100% state funding for all direct and indirect costs associated therewith and without corresponding reduction of state financial support in any other areas of public education. Waivers of the mandates should occur whenever 100% state funding is not received.

State legislative bodies and regulatory agencies should determine the full impact on local school districts before taking action on proposed legislation, regulations, and guidelines related to education.

K. Education Commission of the States

In order to strengthen the purpose of the Education Commission of the States in bringing together representatives of government, education, and the public in a concerted way to address



common educational issues and formulate models of possible courses of action, TSBA believes the governor should appoint a school board representative as an ECS Commissioner from among the four (4) public members allocated to Tennessee.

L. Charter Schools

TSBA recognizes charter schools as one of many options available to school districts to address student achievement and believes decisions related to charter school creation should be made with thoughtful consideration of the potential impact, both positive and negative, on not only the students eligible to enroll in the charter school but also the overwhelming majority of students who will remain in the traditional public schools. To that end, TSBA believes the local board of education, created by law and elected to manage and oversee public education so that all students and families are represented through the democratic process, should be the sole chartering authority for such schools and have clear decision-making authority relative to charter school applications, with board decisions having a presumption of correctness, and appeals granted only when evidence proves such decisions were made without good cause.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

A. Philosophy of Local Responsibility

TSBA believes that the control and operations of public schools are solely the responsibility of local school boards. In accepting this responsibility, it is important that local school boards recognize the impact that education has on the community and the economic development of a region.

B. School Board Operation

School boards should function in a broadly representative, team-spirited manner and should represent open-mindedly the entire district.

TSBA recognizes that the survival of the concept of lay control of education and the effectiveness and efficiency of educational programs are directly related to the level of competency of the individual school board members.

C. Open and Executive Sessions

School boards recognize that public schools belong to all the people and that they must conduct board business in open sessions in accordance with the statutes. However, TSBA believes that the “Sunshine Law” should be amended to allow private work sessions relative to board and superintendent evaluations and prospective land acquisition.

D. Employment and Compensation of Staff

TSBA affirms its commitment to nondiscrimination in employment in public education.

TSBA supports alternative preparation for licensure in an effort to attract capable individuals with maturity and a variety of work experiences to the teaching profession.



TSBA supports local boards of education having the flexibility to pay salaries other than on a system-wide basis as determined by training and experience.

E. Political Commitment to Education

TSBA believes that local board members should take an active role in developing political support of public education at all levels of government. Local school boards, through their state and national associations, should play an active role in support of appropriate educational legislation.

F. School Board Policies

TSBA believes that local school boards should adopt clearly defined written policies based on a thorough understanding of the educational process.

G. Parental Involvement

TSBA believes that parental and family involvement in the education of each child is essential to academic success. Local boards of education should make every effort to enhance communication between parents and schools and remove any barriers that prevent them from teaming with school boards, administrators, and teachers to improve student achievement.

III. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

A. Accountability

All students should have equal access to a program of quality education which meets their individual needs.

State accountability data should be utilized by school districts to meet the high achievement goals for all children.

B. Mandated Assessments

Students should be the ultimate beneficiary of any testing. All state mandated assessments should value student growth and achievement while providing teachers with the information they need to improve instruction and enhance student learning. The loss of student instructional time should be kept to a minimum, and results should be accurate, valid, reliable, and delivered to districts in a timely manner.

C. Curriculum Offerings

Curriculum offerings should be broad enough to make available to each student an educational opportunity which takes into consideration his/her needs and ability.

D. Educational Environment

School boards should develop policies and programs that provide a learning environment in each school that is safe and free from disruption.



E. Community Use of Public School Facilities

TSBA believes that public school facilities should be used as community centers for the encouragement of family participation in wholesome, character-building activities conducive to good citizenship, in compliance with policies of the local board.

F. Selection of Textbooks and Instructional Materials

TSBA supports the ability of local school boards to select and adopt all textbooks and instructional materials and resists any attempt to infringe on that authority.

G. Extracurricular Activity Eligibility

TSBA supports the position that individual local boards of education shall determine who may participate in extracurricular activities.

H. Early Childhood Education

TSBA recognizes that quality educational experiences in early childhood have positive effects on student achievement and supports a comprehensive preschool program and funding that provides all children with an opportunity to participate in pre-kindergarten education.