Recommendations for the Transition Planning Commission

Educational Priorities for the Unified District

Stand for Children

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For discussion/debate: draft educational themes
Theme descriptions (II)

**Culture and climate of high expectations**
- Students experience a culture where all teachers, leaders, and staff have and display high expectations for all students' learning across content areas. All adults are accountable for their contribution to students' success.

**Effective instructional leaders**
- Students served by a System that attracts, develops, supports, and retains effective leaders, particularly principals

**Effective teachers**
- Students served by a System that attracts, develops, supports, and retains effective teachers, and system measures and rewards effective teaching

**Rigorous implementation of standards**
- Student learning guided by rigorous state and Common Core standards that are implemented as a holistic, data-driven instructional system including: curriculum, supports (incorporating technology), formative assessment, and professional development

**Tailored interventions/support**
- Students and schools have access to a range of effective supports and interventions to meet specific needs, including special education and ELL students, highly mobility, and students performing below grade level

**Quality & accessible educational choices**
- Students have diverse, high-quality school and programmatic options available (e.g. STEM curriculum, fine arts, foreign language, etc.)

**Engaged parents**
- Students’ well-being and academic achievement are supported by a system that partners with parents who are informed and engaged in students’ education
Put Education First Overview

Stand for Children has been leading a campaign called Put Education First – as an effort to demand a plan for the consolidation of Memphis and Shelby County Schools that will comprehensively improve education and student outcomes in Shelby County and ensure that the needs of all students remain at the forefront of the political process. This consolidation must result in a system that offers all students rigorous high quality education that prepares them for college and career.

Stand for Children’s goal for the Put Education First campaign is to serve as a vehicle through which parents, teachers, and community residents’ hopes and concerns about consolidation will be heard and addressed throughout the schools’ merger planning and transition process; that the community is educated around the work of the Transition Planning Commission and the Shelby County School Board; a comprehensive plan to raise college and career readiness and student achievement is adopted; and school board members are elected in August 2012, who support and advocate for the plan, and will ensure its implementation.

This work has been driven by a committee of Stand for Children volunteer leaders who have dedicated significant time to the research and discussion of ideas and policies that we believe will make a difference for all students. The following is the result of this committee’s work.

The Put Education First committee has taken the accepted priorities of the Transition Planning Commission and filled in background information, research, and has made policy recommendations in each priority.
Executive Summary

**Every Child Ready for School**

It is imperative for our community that we view early childhood as a critical component to later school and life success. To do this effectively the Transition Planning Commission and other community agencies must work together to create a comprehensive strategy for children from 0-5. This will require cooperation and high level collaboration among all public sector stakeholders, private operators, early childhood experts, and philanthropic supporters.

**Policy recommendations**

-The TPC should make a recommendation for a comprehensive early childhood investment strategy for Shelby County that would offer a range of interventions in order to reach children most at-risk. This agenda should also be linked between municipal, county, and state government and private entities through a comprehensive data sharing system, emphasizing both program evaluations and related assessments of child outcomes.

Examples include:

**Boston’s Thrive in Five Initiative** [http://thrivein5boston.org/](http://thrivein5boston.org/)

Boston’s Mayor Thomas M. Menino and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley launched Thrive in 5 in 2008 with the goal of ensuring universal school readiness for all of Boston’s children. Designed through a year-long community planning process involving a diverse team of 65 professionals and 35 parents, [Boston’s School Readiness Roadmap](http://www.thrivein5boston.org/roadmap) outlines the vision and strategies that drive Thrive in 5’s work.

Their approach is illustrated by Boston’s School Readiness Equation, recognizing that a child’s success relies on the concerted effort of everyone involved in their lives.


Tulsa’s partnership is part of a statewide network of community partnerships under the Smart Start Oklahoma umbrella. Smart Start Oklahoma is a grassroots initiative with a shared vision that all Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. [http://www.smartstartoklahoma.org/](http://www.smartstartoklahoma.org/)
Smart Start increases awareness of the developmental needs of young children, connects existing programs for young children, and marshals community resources to focus on early care and education. Smart Start reaches out to support families who want to give their children a good start in life.

Oklahoma currently has eighteen Smart Start communities, including Tulsa. Tulsa Smart Start is also known as JumpStart. Publications: http://www.smartstartoklahoma.org/publications

To accomplish this the TPC should recommended in its plan to:

- provide universal Pre-K with Head Start partnerships where needed within Shelby County Schools and classrooms.

- Expand early education teacher support, recruitment, and compensation, through inclusion of early educators within the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative program expansion.

- After reviewing return on investments of k-12 intervention programs, reallocate funding from less effective programs towards early childhood investments with higher return on investment.

- develop through a strategic partnership with the state of TN, Shelby County, the City of Memphis, and other public and private entities a plan to provide universal access to Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start, Home Visitation Programs (ex.Home Nurse Partnership), and Centering Programs to ensure school readiness.

The earlier we intervene in early childhood, the better.

Effective Instructional Leaders

Effective principals are critical to developing and ensuring effective teaching, improving student achievement, and turning around low-performing schools. Researchers find that about 60% of a school’s impact on student learning is attributable to educators: 25% to principals and 33% to teachers. These figures actually understate principals’ role, because principals are responsible for hiring, developing, and retaining effective teachers. While an individual effective teacher can boost student learning in any given year, only the principal can ensure effective teaching in every classroom. Unless students have multiple effective teachers in a row, nearly all the gains they make in one effective teacher’s classroom are erased in two years with less effective teachers.

Both Memphis City Schools and Shelby County Schools have strategic pathways to ensure effective instructional leaders are in every school. These current best practices should be merged into a system of internal development and external recruitment.
Policy Recommendations:

Stand recommends

- the continuation of MCS’s current partnership with New Leaders and the expansion of strategy four in the TEI work to ensure effective leaders in every school through the Leadership Effectiveness Initiative (LEI).

- Actively recruit talented individuals and organizations nationwide to lead innovative new schools in the new district. (See the Denver Public Schools’ “Call for New Quality Schools.”)

- Forge constructive relationships with the leaders of alternatively-led schools (e.g., charter schools, ASD schools, etc.), beginning with the establishing of a compact along the lines of those signed by cities like Nashville, New Orleans, Baltimore, Boston, etc. (Hopes, Fears & Reality, Chapter 2, Lake and Gross)

Effective Teachers

Teachers are indeed the single most important in classroom element for student achievement. However, single reforms are unlikely to ensure a great teacher in every classroom, every year, unless these reforms are based in a coherent theory of action around teacher evaluation, recruitment, support, and compensation.

We believe this coherent theory of change has begun in Memphis through the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative and must be continued as a critical component in the new district. The initiative should be expanded in a collaborative way that sustains progress to date and incorporates best practices and successes from current Shelby County Schools’ and Memphis City Schools’ practices. This expansion must be focused on the four key strategies to:

1. Create a common, agreed-upon definition of effective teaching;
2. Enable smarter decisions about who teaches students;
3. Better support, utilize and compensate teachers; and,
4. Improve the surrounding context for effective teaching

To accomplish this expansion the TPC should help ensure there is:

- A thorough Needs Assessment across the two school systems to determine the funding requirements as part of the new proposal

- A separate document to be developed as an addendum to the current TEI strategy, addressing Vision, Strategy, Implementation and Milestones for the new work
- Identification of additional funding sources, including other local and national philanthropies and business organizations

- Utilize combined teacher working groups from both districts to ensure teacher voice is included as the new scope of work is developed

Resources: All Teacher Effectiveness Initiative Resources, publications, and policies can be found here

http://www.mcstei.com/resources

Rigorous Implementation of Standards

Rigorous Standards have the potential to improve the quality of instruction and outcomes for Shelby County students—but their impact will ultimately depend on the quality of state and local level implementation. We believe the consolidation provides us an opportunity to start afresh and to design significantly improved systems to support student achievement.

To ensure we have the best local level implementation of rigorous standards we believe we need a comprehensive system designed by recommendation from the TPC to ensure rigorous implementation of standards that could be modeled after one of the following four “Next Generation Assessment Models”:

An Internationally Comparable Balanced Assessment System that Supports High-Quality Learning

This model proposes a balanced assessment system that integrates curriculum and assessments, both formative and summative, and is designed to support higher-quality, more coherent instruction. It would be implemented by consortia of states committed to developing curriculum frameworks based on the Common Core Standards and learning progressions. The components of the assessment system—all designed to go beyond recall of facts and show students’ abilities to evaluate evidence, problem solve, and understand contexts—include analytic selected-response items, short and extended constructed response items, and standardized performance tasks in each grade level tested. The results of on demand tests (which include the first two types of items) combined with weighted results of reliably scored curriculum-embedded performance tasks would provide student achievement data that could be compared across schools, districts, and states (summative assessments). The system also would be able to show student growth along multiple dimensions. Technology would be used to deliver tests, collect student work for teacher/scorer use and for training scorers, manage the scoring/reporting processes, and eventually help teachers to manage classroom practice. Technology would also support computer adaptive testing and computer scoring of some open-ended items. This system, properly implemented, would provide a more performance-based and useful assessment system at potentially no more cost than the present less rich and less helpful systems in use.
An Assessment System based on the National Center on Education and the Economy’s State Consortium for Board Examination Systems

http://www.k12center.org/publications.html.

The model that underlies the National Center on Education and the Economy’s State Consortium for Board Examination Systems is based on exams in countries with the best-performing education systems, the model consists of high-school programs of study covering the whole core curriculum. Each course has a well-constructed syllabus with matching instructional materials, high quality examinations, and high-quality training for the teachers of the courses. The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has identified the world’s best board examination systems available in English for use in the United States and negotiated the alignment with the Common Core Standards.

The states in the consortium will pilot the use of these exams in their high schools. NCEE will set the pass points for the lower division exams to the level of literacy required to be successful in the initial credit bearing courses in open admissions colleges. Students who pass their lower division exams by the end of their sophomore year will be certified for a special diploma and enrollment in an open admissions college without having to take remedial courses. Or they can stay in high school to take an upper division program designed to get them into a selective college. Students who do not pass will receive help in those areas in which they did not do well on the exam. The aim is for virtually all students to be ready to pass their exams and therefore ready to succeed in programs leading to industry qualifications or in 4-year colleges.

High-Level Model for an assessment of Common Standards

http://www.k12center.org/publications.html.

This model proposes an integrated assessment system, not a single test, and focuses on the technical details of a summative system for elementary and middle schools. Using the Common Core Standards, it calls for end-of-year tests for Grades 3–8, which could be used to measure student growth if the standards cohere across grade levels. The summative/accountability components of the integrated assessment system might also include periodic classroom tests and collections of student work, which will be easier to implement if the common standards lead to a common sequence of learning objectives.

Summative tests also could be used to provide information to subsequent diagnostic and formative assessments, particularly for students performing above or below grade level. The end-of-year and periodic components of the assessment should be computer-based. An assessment system for high schools would contain some of the same elements as the K–8 system. However, rather than choosing a specific approach, the paper offers policymakers two models: end-of-domain assessment or end-of course assessment.
Educators generally agree on the need for improved assessment systems, but there is far less consensus on the priorities for uses of the new assessments. It is impossible for one assessment or even one assessment system to fulfill everyone’s goals, but there are some goals that are shared by various stakeholders. Other goals will require choices; an assessment system cannot do everything equally well.

**An American Examination System**

[http://www.k12center.org/publications.html](http://www.k12center.org/publications.html)

This model focuses on designing an assessment system that works to improve instruction. The model reflects key aspects of the substantive, cognitively demanding European systems, while maintaining standards of psychometric rigor necessary to support America’s accountability, comparability, and equity agendas.

The model aligns standards, assessment, and curriculum through three principal innovations: distributed accountability exams that have a high degree of content and instructional validity; a system of “mass personalized” formative assessments that become an integral part of each teacher’s instructional routine; and a technology platform with broad uses, especially to help teachers manage the assessment process and have ready access to insights from the assessment data. A major aspect of the technology is the creation of a honeycomb, or interactive map, that visually explains the instruction and assessment goals in each grade as well as across grades, tracking the progress of individual students, classes, schools, and districts. A substantial amount of work has already been done to develop the content and tools needed to implement the American Examination System.

**Policy Recommendations**

The work to ensure there is a rigorous implementation of quality standards will require the TPC to make recommendations that build a coherent system of assessment, support, and accountability linked to a set of common standards. Stand recommends that the TPC take advantage of the progress already made through RTTT and work with researchers to design a local system of implementation to fulfill the desired outcome of this guiding principle.

**Tailored Interventions and supports**

Though current policy debates on school reform and improvement focus primarily on academic standards, a broader focus on supporting student success is necessary to give all students an equal chance to succeed. This is particularly important for schools serving students living in poverty, a disproportionate number of whom are also students of color, English Language Learners (EELs), and students with disabilities. The impact of poverty and student characteristics on achievement has been well-documented. However, these are not insurmountable problems. Research on high-performing schools serving these children finds that these schools take direct action to support student success and
proactively address barriers to student achievement. These interventions should be focused around promising strategies that work.

Policy Recommendations

Stand recommends targeted interventions that meet the needs of individual students and schools, these should include:

Promising strategies for teaching students to read

- Support readers effectively in the early grades, including:
  - Introducing literacy in prekindergarten programs,
  - Identifying struggling readers early and provide additional, proven supports
  - Spending additional time on reading in the early grades
- Support readers effectively in adolescence, including:
  - Providing effective professional development for upper-grade teachers, including content-area teachers on strategies to teach reading,
  - Developing collaborative teacher teams to reinforce literacy strategies across the content,
  - Instructing students in explicit reading strategies on content-specific materials in upper grades,
  - Supporting struggling readers in upper grades with supplemental instruction from a specialist,
  - Ensuring engaging and motivating texts, discussion, and writing, and
  - Coordination between teachers in different subject areas to reinforce key literacy concepts across subject areas
- Prepare teachers to teach key components of reading during teacher preparation programs
- Ensure access to high-quality formative and summative reading assessments and useful data-systems
- Invest adequately in developing and implementing comprehensive, systemic approaches to improving literacy

Promising strategies for encouraging science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

- Adopt fewer, deeper, well-sequenced standards for mathematics education, aligned assessments, and professional development aligned to standards (like Common Core)
- Diversify participation in STEM coursework, with a special emphasis on students of color and girls
- Increase the number of students who complete Algebra II by high school graduation so they will be prepared for college-level math
- Teach direct instruction and problem solving strategies together
- Recruit and retain STEM teachers with college degrees in STEM subject areas
- Provide equity in access to teachers with college degrees in STEM for students of color and low-income students

Promising strategies for students designated as Special Education

- Monitor and respond to over-representation of students of color in special education
• Increase federal reimbursements for IDEA costs
• Intervene early into the education of students with disabilities
• Implement response to intervention programs to prevent students from falling behind and ending up in special education
• Implement Universal Design for Learning, an effective strategy for mainstreaming special education students while designing instruction that benefits the whole class
• Ensure special education students are included in state/federal accountability systems
• Integrate special education teachers with regular education teachers in colleges of education to develop a culture of working together and to learn from each other
• Use technology effectively to individualize instruction
• Provide adequate financial resources targeted at the most effective practices for improving learning for special education students

Promising strategies for students learning English

• Provide students learning English access to quality preschool, bilingual or English immersion
• Ensure education for students learning English is guided by teachers who have received specialized training to meet students unique needs
• Dedicate time explicitly to learning English vocabulary and time explicitly dedicated to learning academic content
• Implement sheltered English instructional strategies
• Assess and properly identify the academic levels of students learning English, including:
  o Native language assessments and ‘plain English’ assessments to make sure assessment results are capturing actual knowledge, not language ability;
  o Additional time for assessments;
  o Allowed use of a dictionary or glossary; and
  o Multiple sources of information about student abilities.
• Track outcomes for students learning English after they have been reclassified to ensure students learning English as successful as native English speakers
• Provide additional learning time to students learning English

Implement technology in way that supports teaching and learning

• Create a task force that works to continually research and pilot cutting-edge instructional technology that can be used by schools (as they see fit) to allow for highly differentiated learning for every student.

Extend the School Day and Year

• Target extended day and year policies, and, these policies should follow the following best practices:
  o Making every minute count or maximizing added time;
  o Prioritizing increased hours that are tailored to the school and their students;
Individualizing the added time for each student based on diverse needs;

- Building a positive school culture of high expectations and mutual accountability;

- Providing new experiences for students that make their education more well-rounded;

- Preparing students for the future by encouraging college readiness and career goals;

- Strengthening instruction by providing increased time for teacher professional development; and

- Evaluating how well goals are met by assessing and analyzing data.

- Funding for these interventions can be leveraged from funding streams for expanded learning time from local, state, and federal sources.

- Local examples like Campus School, KIPP, and Soulsville Academy and national examples like Massachusetts 2020, LA’s BEST, and The Young Scholars Program all provide great examples of how these policies can be implemented.

Quality and Accessible Choices

Government agencies implementing choice programs – whether they are districts overseeing intra-district choice programs or innovation zones, charter school authors overseeing a collection of charter schools, or local agencies overseeing inter-district choice programs – need to take responsibility for ensuring that students have access to a portfolio of high quality choices through high quality screens, rigorous accountability, and strategic efforts to build the supply of high quality schools.

Successful choice programs require thoughtful public oversight. Agencies hoping to build high quality public school choice need to design the programs to target the students with the greatest need, build screens and accountability systems that allow for diverse school options but filter out low quality schools, actively build the supply of schools when needed, create the information and support systems that families need to make good choices, and invest in the transportation systems that allow them to access these choices. Finally, they need to be ever-vigilant to ensure that schools that receive public school students and public resources are playing by the rules, serving students equitably, and maintaining high quality standards for our students.

- Create new magnet school options focused on various themes (e.g., STEM, performing arts, Montessori, etc.) to provide more diverse and innovative academic choices to a more racially and socioeconomically diverse student body. Seek input from the community on what themes are desired. ([Reviving Magnet Schools: Strengthening a Successful Choice Option], Siegel-Hawley and Frankenburg, February 2012; See also [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools’ magnet program specs].)
- Devise a fair enrollment system that ensures that all students have the opportunity to attend a high quality school, ideally in their own neighborhoods, but outside of them if their parents deem other options preferable. (Hopes, Fears & Reality, Chapter 3, Lake and Gross)

Examples:
San Francisco Unified


Denver Public Schools

http://schoolchoice.dpsk12.org/

-Critical attention should also be given to establishing a widely available, outstanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) program throughout the district. Many studies have shown that CTE programs are extremely effective in preparing high school students for success in post-secondary education and careers, especially in the context of an increasingly technology-driven, globalized marketplace (see, e.g., "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/features/2011/Pathways_to_Prosperity_Feb2011.pdf

For some students, high school CTE may lead to certification, to a 2 or 4 year college degree or beyond. For others, CTE may lead directly to a career or to a job after high school graduation that may finance and otherwise enable additional formal education. We believe the broad outline for an outstanding CTE program in the new district should include:

- 21st century CTE curriculums and programs that match our high-tech, globalized economy, as well as our local economy’s needs;
- increased CTE funding to support these important, timely programs;
- wider availability throughout the district for high school students to participate in CTE; and
- cooperation and collaboration among educators, local government officials and locally-based employers and trades to find opportunities for mutually beneficial public-private CTE partnerships and programs (e.g., matching education and student experiences with area employer and trade needs; apprenticeships, internships and pathways to entry-level employment opportunities).
Example of Programs in Tennessee recognized by the TN Council for Career and Technical Education:

- Culinary Arts, Sevierville High School, Sevierville
- Automotive Academy, Anderson County High School, Clinton
- Project Lead the Way, Cleveland High School, Cleveland
- Virtual Enterprise, Blackman High School, Murfreesboro

Engaged Parents

Children whose families who are involved in their education are much more likely to succeed in school and life. Specifically, children from engaged families are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher level programs, graduate high school and go onto college, and have better social skills. They are also less likely to have behavioral problems and more likely to easily adapt to school. The relationship between family involvement and improved achievement prevails across differences in family income or racial/ethnic background and appears to be particularly important for low income students and African American or Hispanic students.

In light of this evidence, strategies that engage families to support their students’ learning are an important lever for improving student achievement.

Policy Recommendations

- Create a “Parent Coordinator” position at every school to ensure that there is someone in each school who is directly responsible for supporting families. (See example in New York City school system.)

- Provide training for Teachers and Principals to effectively improve Family Engagement

- The new school district should enter into meaningful partnerships with outside organizations such as non-profits, churches and community associations’ organizations to reach parents who are otherwise difficult to engage.

- Provide clear, easy-to-understand and accessible information about schools and enrollment procedures so that all parents are equipped to make good decisions for their children. Consider a collaboration with a third-party organization for the dissemination of information and educating parents on options. (Hopes, Fears & Reality, Chapter 7, Lake and Gross. See Indy School Chooser or New Orleans Parent Organizing Network as examples.)

- View parents as partners in the education process and provide them opportunities for meaningful input into what is happening in their schools, such as positions on Site-Based Decision Making Councils that have legitimate decision-making authority. There should also be a system of checks and balances to see that the decided-upon structure and process for parent engagement is actually working.
Culture and Climate of High Expectations

Every SCS employee, regardless of position, should strive to help make every student ready for college and career and should be held accountable for transparently striving toward fulfillment of this mission.

Throughout the system, from the classroom, throughout the school and all supporting departments, there is an academic press for achievement, a safe and positive school environment, focus on social and emotional learning, a climate of high expectations, support for teacher influence and a well-defined structure with clear student goals and strong classroom management.

Policy Recommendations

- Implement a ‘best practices’ holistic positive behavior system throughout the district

- Implement a ‘best practices’ Social and Emotional Learning System

  The most effective programs follow four recommended practices, described by the acronym SAFE:

  • Sequenced: A connected and coordinated set of activities
  • Active: Use of active forms of learning
  • Focused: At least one component dedicated to personal and social skills
  • Explicit: Targets specific SEL skills rather than general development

- Use the Tennessee Tell Survey to improve school culture

  The purpose of the survey is to support sound educational policies and practices based on the views of teachers, principals and other certificated educators in our public schools. This survey data should be used along with the corresponding materials from The New Teacher Center to improve climate and expectations.

  http://www.telltennessee.org/Using_Your_Data

Every Student Ready for Success in College and Career

Improving access to and success in higher education—particularly for low-income and first generation college-going students—is a multi-faceted task. The most promising efforts combine academic preparation, counseling, and financial assistance to provide students with all of the tools they need to enroll in and graduate from college, in order to address all of aspects of college readiness.
Policy Recommendations

Fulfilling the recommendation of the other guiding principles should result in a system that graduates more students prepared for and with access to a college education.

Additional Recommendations

- Align High School and College Expectations throughout curriculum and standards with multiple pathways to college, i.e. expansion of dual enrollment and early college programs (ex. Hollis Price at Lemoyne Owen and Middle College at Christian Brothers University)

- Expand Access to College-Preparatory Curricula

- Strengthen Counseling and Support for Students

- Improve Access for Low-Income Students

- With regard to CTE issues, in addition to counseling regarding admission to 4 year college programs, the new district should ensure that outstanding guidance counseling services are available for students about their CTE opportunities and related certification and 2 year post-secondary programs. The district should also coordinate with area certification and post-secondary programs to facilitate seamless transitions from secondary schools to those post-secondary options.

Supportive Community Members and Partners

The TPC should recommend a Cradle to Career framework that aligns community support with student outcomes.

Policy Recommendations

The TPC should recommend that the new district implement the Strive framework to ensure there is a formally aligned role for community members and partners. Building upon lessons learned in five national demonstration sites, Strive has developed a framework for building what is called the Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure. The Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure is the organizational system that is formed within a community to use existing resources to target the needs of every individual child so they have the support they need to succeed along their learning journey.

The process for each community begins with an assessment of the community’s assets across the Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure, which is used to determine where the community is in building its partnership and map out where it needs to go. A customized strategic assistance plan is developed in collaboration with the community and strategic assistance is delivered based upon an individual community’s needs.
Strive has begun in Memphis, but it should be expanded to include Shelby County. Strive should become a formal partner with the new district in order to build capacity for this work immediately.