

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS

ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Dr. James P. McIntyre Jr., Superintendent



MEMORANDUM

To: Chair and Members
Knox County Board of Education

From: Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr.
Superintendent

Date: January 21, 2014

Subject: Teacher Professional Support

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James P. McIntyre Jr.", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The past several years have been remarkable ones for public education in our community and across the state of Tennessee. We have experienced considerable change, significantly higher standards, a number of challenges, and some impressive successes in the Knox County Schools.

In recent months, we have heard a variety of concerns articulated by our teachers. We have reached out to our educators in a number of ways to better understand these issues, including through facilitated large meetings (Insight Sessions), small group conversations, a Working Group on Teacher Professional Support, and a survey of our teachers. Through all of these avenues, I have heard many teachers express considerable frustration and anxiety resulting from the tremendous pace of change we have experienced over the past several years.

Based on listening carefully to the feedback from our educators, I am convinced that it would be beneficial to make a few adjustments in order to better support our teachers in the terrific work they are doing in educating our children, and to sustain the impressive gains in student academic success we have experienced in the Knox County Schools. Ultimately, to best serve our students and our community, we will need to ensure that our teachers have the level of support, professional responsibility, and resources needed to continue do their jobs effectively.

A few of the general themes that we have heard in the recent conversation relate to ensuring that teachers have adequate time for planning and doing their jobs effectively, some specific suggestions about implementation of the teacher evaluation system, a critique around too great an emphasis on assessment, and a desire to feel more valued as professional educators.

I am certainly interested in consulting with the School Board on these important issues, and so I will hold off on any final decisions until after the discussion at the January 21st meeting of the Board of Education. However, please know that I am prepared to move forward with the following eleven action steps:

Assessment

- Decline to participate in the PARCC Field Test this spring.
- Decline to participate in the optional Writing Assessments this spring.
- Make Discovery Education Assessments a **choice** for teachers at the Professional Learning Community (PLC) level.

Evaluation

- In the 2014-15 school year and beyond, give professionally licensed teachers the **choice** to have all classroom observations visits be unannounced or to have an equal number of announced and unannounced observations. (for professionally licensed teachers in TEAM schools this would mean one announced and one unannounced classroom observation visit)
- In the 2014-15 school year and beyond, give professionally licensed teachers in TEAM schools who earn a Level 5 summative evaluation score the **choice** to have one formal unannounced observation visit and two walk-throughs, or to remain with the traditional observation structure. (This is allowed by TN DOE guidelines for teachers scoring level 5)
- In the current spring semester ONLY, allow professionally licensed teachers who have not been observed in January to be notified of the **month** in which their second unannounced classroom observation visit will occur. (This strategy is in response to the unique circumstances associated with the current school year, and therefore would **not** be repeated in future years)

Time, Feedback, & Support

- Half of our February 17th In-service day will now be dedicated to teacher planning time in their classrooms.
- We will not administer the TRIPOD student perception survey in the primary grades (K-2) this spring. We will complete the administration of the survey for developmental feedback only in grades 3 -12 this spring, and teachers with multiple classes will be given the **choice** to select which class completes the survey for this semester.
- Enhance the quality and frequency of our professional development on the nineteen indicators of effective instruction that are embedded in the teacher evaluation instrument (the “rubric”) for both teachers and observers/evaluators.

- I had previously committed to clarifying our guidance on Professional Learning Communities, and to taking a different approach to the Conferences of Concern for performance reasons next year.
- I have asked the Working Group to serve as a Teacher Advisory Committee for me and meet monthly for the remainder of this school year. In particular, we will further explore the issue of teacher instructional autonomy and limitations on professional judgment. I will continue with a Teacher Advisory Committee structure next year, and will develop a nomination / selection process this spring.

As teachers have consistently requested, these potential action steps reinforce teacher professionalism by providing voice and choice to our teachers in several critical areas, such as unannounced classroom observation visits and assessment. I appreciate the talent and expertise that our teachers bring to the classroom, and will continue to seek ways to include teacher voice in our decision-making, as well as continuing to embrace teacher leadership as a means of allowing outstanding educators to have a greater role in shaping our instructional work.

As we potentially move forward with these adjustments, I believe it is important to reiterate two critical commitments. First, our teacher evaluation work has always been about creating a culture of constructive feedback, professional growth, and continuous improvement. We must embrace the concept that receiving performance-based feedback is an important part of how we grow as professionals, and therefore better educate our students. It is my expectation that these adjustments will enable our school system to renew our emphasis on teacher evaluation as a developmental system that facilitates teacher professional growth and seeks to enhance the quality of instruction for all our children.

Second, while I am certainly amenable to making some changes to our systems based on teacher input, I want to be very clear that **we will not compromise our high standards and rigorous expectations for our children and for our staff.** We have collectively worked too hard, come too far, and seen too much student academic progress to allow ourselves to slip backward. Therefore, we will move to the future together with ambitious educational aspirations, a deep commitment to meeting our students' learning needs, and a renewed focus on achieving our goal of *Excellence for All Children*.

I look forward to the discussion with the Board of education regarding these potential strategies. Please let me know if you have any questions.

cc: KCS Executive Team
Working Group on Teacher Professional Support