

TENNESSEE

Alternative Education Association

MEMORANDUM

To: **The Honorable Bill Haslam, Governor of Tennessee**
The Honorable Ron Ramsey, Lt. Governor of Tennessee
The Honorable Kevin Huffman, Commissioner of Education
The Honorable Dolores Gresham, Chair (Senate Education Committee)
The Honorable Harry Brooks, Chair (House Education Committee)

From: **Mr. Paul Thacker, TAEA President**
Dr. James Vince Witty, TAEA Vice-President

Re: **Public Chapter 1020**

Date: **January 22, 2013**

In 1992, the Tennessee General Assembly mandated that at least one alternative school or program be established for each local education agency (LEA) to serve suspended and expelled youth. Since that time, alternative education has grown in services and quality across the state with national recognition for Tennessee's innovation in the field. Alternative schools and programs provide our most at-risk students with an opportunity to continue their education in a non-traditional venue. The enrollment varies on the student's individual needs. The placement is traditionally not permanent, but rather to assist learners with their present difficulties whether social, emotional, and/or behavioral while allowing students to remain enrolled in school and continue obtaining credits for graduation purposes. The goal of alternative education is to ultimately transition the student back to their zoned school while addressing the underlining reasons that the learner was placed in the alternative setting. Our organization, the Tennessee Alternative Education Association or TAEA represents the thousands of alternative educators across the state of Tennessee.

In 2012, Public Chapter 1020 was adopted by the Tennessee General Assembly and had unintended consequences for many alternative educators. The law requires all teachers-of-record for courses where there is a state-level End-of-Course (EOC) exam to carry a subject-specific endorsement. The law further states that teachers of the EOC courses who do not have the required endorsement demonstrate sufficient content knowledge in the course material by taking, at the teacher's expense, the standardized or criterion-referenced test for the content area. It is estimated by the Tennessee Department of Education that as many as a thousand teachers may be affected by the law. One group of educators impacted greatly by the new law is alternative educators.

Our organization is extremely troubled by the new law's impact on the success and livelihood of alternative education in Tennessee. Consider that most alternative education

TENNESSEE

Alternative Education Association

programs and schools have difficulty in identifying teachers willing to work with the most at-risk of learners. In fact, in smaller school districts, one or two teacher(s) serve the entire population of students placed in an alternative setting with extensive teaching responsibilities. It is not feasible for an alternative teacher to be endorsed in EVERY subject area ***without adequate time, training, and resources*** to comply with the new law. As written, PC 1020 will limit the number of alternative educators who have the appropriate endorsements to continue to assist these students. Couple that with the fact that it is already difficult to identify teachers willing to work with these high-need learners. **Further consider that state law will continue to require districts to have a school or program while PC 1020 will limit the district's ability to identify willing and qualified educators.**

We all want the highest quality of education for every Tennessee student. However, flexibility is also essential if our intention is to continue providing the same level of alternative education services in Tennessee and eventually grow and expand those services. Our association, therefore, respectfully requests that the Tennessee General Assembly either (1) make alternative educators exempt from the new law, or (2) allow additional time and resources for alternative educators to come into compliance with the new law. Both would require immediate legislative action from the Tennessee General Assembly.

We invite you to visit your local alternative education program or school and to see our educators in action. If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please feel free to contact our President, Mr. Paul Thacker at (731) 293-4388 or via email to pwthacker@jmcass.org. You may also contact our Vice-President, Dr. James Vince Witty at (615) 692-4439 or via email to james.witty@mnps.org. To learn more about the Tennessee Alternative Education Association (TAEA) we invite you to visit our website at www.the-taea.org. We also want to thank you for your time, attention, and immediate action relative to this matter.