



Welcome to Benchmarks, the new, monthly electronic newsletter for employees of the Knox County Schools. Benchmarks replaces what was formerly known as the Administrative Bulletin, and is designed to provide relevant and issues-oriented articles of interest to employees across the district.



A couple of general guidelines:

- Content for Benchmarks is issues-oriented news content, meaning articles regarding trends/matters facing education, outward looking content, analysis, perspective pieces, or innovative happenings at our schools are all welcome submissions.



- We have established an electronic Bulletin Board for items that include merchant discounts, upcoming district or community events, professional development opportunities, retirements, etc. Content for the Bulletin Board is user-driven, meaning employees of the Knox County Schools can post content onto this site. Once approved, your submission will be “live” on the Intranet. Updates are made daily. For more information about submission guidelines, visit the [Bulletin Board](#) on the Intranet. We hope this e-publication will provide you with important information regarding broader topics in education, as well as interesting news within our district. If you have content ideas, please email it to benchmarks@knoxschools.org.



- Additionally, employees can access news specific to Human Resources by reading the HR Insider.

Changes in public education

An open letter to teachers across the Knox County Schools

Dear Colleagues:

It is an exciting and remarkable time for public education in Tennessee. With substantially higher academic standards, a new performance evaluation system, a nascent strategic compensation initiative, and fundamental shifts in tenure and collective bargaining, we have experienced considerable change and reform in a very short period of time. In classrooms throughout the Knox County Schools, and indeed across the state, teachers are educating children professionally and enthusiastically, even as their operating

environment is in transition.

The good news is that most of these changes are extremely positive and productive. They are aligned to our strategic plan, Excellence for All Children, they build upon the instructional improvement work that we have been doing for the past several years in the Knox County Schools, and they are intended to help enhance the quality of instruction in our classrooms and ultimately to increase student academic success.

One new statute, the Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act (PECCA) significantly redefines the relationship between the Board of Education and teacher representative organizations. While this necessarily means that the structures of our collaborative relationship with the Knox County Education Association will change, it does not lessen our interest in engaging teachers in meaningful dialogue about topics that are important to the profession. Teacher insight, input, and perspective are incredibly important to us, and we will continue to ensure that teachers have a strong voice in the Knox County Schools.

Please know that we are carefully and deliberately reviewing all of the new statutes and regulations to ensure that we remain true to the letter and the spirit of the law. In some cases we may be able to make a gradual transition to meet our legal requirements, and in other cases, the timeline will have to be more aggressive. In all cases, our intent will be to keep you informed and engaged in the process throughout the transition.

We are proud to be a part of this innovative school system where our success has been made possible by the talent and dedication of our teachers and staff. Tennessee has taken bold measures to enhance public education, and I know that together we will embrace this opportunity to ensure a bright future for our children and our community. Thank you for all that you do on behalf of our students, and we look forward to our continued collaboration as we seek to achieve our ambitious goal of Excellence for All Children.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jim McIntyre, Indya Kincannon
Superintendent Board Chair

August 2011

KCS adopts new parent/employee messaging system

The Knox County Schools has adopted a new parent - employee contact system that will replace ParentLink in mid-September. SchoolMessenger



SCHOOLMESSENGER®

will go live September 19. The new system will provide a more robust communication tool and feature set including text messaging, e-mail, multiple phones per contact if needed and more.



TEAM, APEX underscore Excellence for All Children

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, the State of Tennessee will require an evaluation of every certified educator on an annual basis. This evaluation process is called TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model), and is specifically designed to improve student academic success by identifying and supporting effective instruction. TEAM determines where teachers are working effectively, then appropriately harnesses and shares best practices through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that provide opportunities for real and meaningful support.

TEAM evaluations include multiple measures and are made up of three components:

Knox County STEM Academy officially opens

The Knox County Schools officially opened the new STEM Academy Friday with a ribbon cutting ceremony on the site which is the historic L&N Railroad Station on Henley Street.

The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics high school will begin the year with only freshmen and sophomores.



Students, city, county, and school officials cut the ribbon to officially open the Knox County STEM Academy.

- 35 percent student growth results; and
- 15 percent student achievement data.

Going forward, personnel decisions—including promotion, retention, tenure and compensation—will be based in part on TEAM evaluations. The Tennessee Department of Education is committed to refining the new evaluation framework through feedback and careful study over time, particularly during the first year of implementation.

Through Race to the Top and Innovation Acceleration Fund, the Knox County Schools were fortunate to secure more than \$10 million in federal competitive-grant funding to use in the design and implementation of a district-wide strategic compensation plan. The program is called APEX: Advance. Perform. EXcel The grant funding is available over the next three to five years, with a goal of incorporating APEX in our general operating budget if proven successful.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is Strategic Compensation?

Using compensation “strategically” means aligning the finite resources a school organization has with its desired goals. In most schools across the country, 70–80 percent of expenditures are dedicated, in some way, to personnel costs. How these monies are allocated and spent shapes schools and our ability to achieve our goals.

Knox County Schools’ (KCS) [APEX strategic compensation system](#) reflects our belief that our compensation system should be aligned to our most important instructional goals and that we must continue to focus on high-level student learning through effective classroom teaching.

In our next issue, we will review eligibility for APEX and the award amounts.

Reminder: Don’t Miss These Opportunities to Learn About APEX!

We’ll be keeping you up-to-date on APEX happenings through the human resources department newsletter entitled HR Insider. Additionally, please check back to APEX website often for more information, at apex.knoxschools.org.

Knox County STEM Academy pioneering new ventures in historic setting



Set in a building that served for a century as a transportation hub for the region, on a site that brought the world to the "scruffy little city" in 1982 for a Worlds Fair, the Knox County Schools STEM Academy prepares to lead the region on a new journey to serve the future.

Thank you . . .

Thank you's to the donors who are supporting our efforts with significant contributions:

Randy Boyd, local businessman (Pet

Safe) contributed 100 iPad2s for students (and also 100 more that are divided into labs in Sarah Moore Greene and Pond Gap).

ORAU (Oak Ridge Associated Universities) donated \$25,000 toward iPad purchases.

ProVision Health donated \$500,000

BW-Y12 Plant in Oak Ridge (part of the National Lab system) donated \$400,000.

The **ProVision** and **BW-Y12** donations will go toward technology purchases and renovations of lab spaces in the Depot building.

Becky Ashe, who serves the dual role as principal of the new STEM academy and as STEM Coordinator for Knox County Schools, sees the former transportation hub as once again being a center of influence for the region and perhaps even the nation.

"This job's responsibilities include setting up the first STEM magnet school, then turning my attention to disseminating best practices in STEM education across the whole PK-12 system," said Ashe. "The position will eventually involve the STEM Network Hub for our region." The STEM regional hub is part of the Race to the Top funding awarded the state of Tennessee by the Federal government.

"We will continue toward the Strategic Plan indicator of branding Knox County Schools as a STEM district," she added.

Ashe hopes to achieve the first goal - regional hub - within the first three years and then work to make the academy a national model in five years.

Why is STEM important?

"STEM is important because it is not an educational issue, but an economic one," explains Ashe. "Thomas Friedman pointed out in *The World is Flat, Hot, and Crowded* (2007), America is losing its edge as a leader in innovation. Along with the outsourcing of manufacturing and low-level technology jobs has been the outflow of ideas from American-educated foreigners who return to their native countries and put to use what they've learned." She points out the only way for the U.S. to compete is to refocus our efforts not just on competing with foreign development, but to once again lead the world in research and development "like the days of the Apollo missions and creation of IBM, Apple, and other world-changing technology companies".

We've moved past the Information Age

"We are no longer in the 'information age,'" said Ashe. "That era is behind us now." she cites Daniel Pink's work *A Whole New Mind* (2005), in which he describes the next iteration of global competition as the knowledge age/economy, as opposed to the information age which we are leaving.

"His point is that for the last two decades, it was all about getting equal access to information," she explains. "The people with the information could predict future trends and innovate for it. By comparison, the knowledge age/economy is the ability of the group to take the information and do something with it."

Ashe points out that this is also the difference between information and knowledge. STEM education is well-suited for the transition to knowledge economies because it emphasizes the applications of content knowledge from all disciplines as part of the design process to create new technologies and innovations to solve current and future real-world problems.

Workforce must meet global challenges

The President has twice called for a plan to grow STEM workforces across our country in his State of the Union addresses in order to meet this new global challenge. He has called his plans "Change the equation" and "All hands on deck." In both initiatives, the importance of creating a workforce with heightened problem solving skills, ability to work collaboratively in research environments, and apply trans-disciplinary thinking to challenges has been identified as being paramount to our country's present and future success. According to the Tennessee Department of Labor, in the next decade, 7 out of 10 new jobs will be in a STEM field.

And then with a typical cheerful grin, she adds. "And STEM is important because it is fun!"

Becky Ashe STEM Coordinator

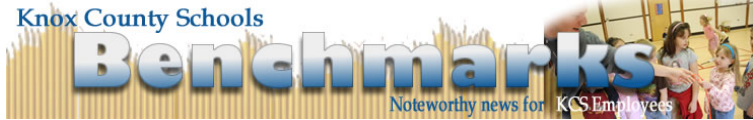


Take away her hands and she couldn't speak, but her animated enthusiasm for STEM education is contagious.



Teacher Feature:

Cedar Bluff teacher spends summer visiting Turkey, Greece after being selected to participate in the Fulbright-Hayes Seminar Abroad



Amy Melendy, Cedar Bluff Middle School social studies teacher, was selected to participate in the Fulbright-Hayes Seminars Abroad program this past summer. This is her story.

Receiving the news that I had been selected for the [Fulbright Hayes Seminar Abroad](#) program to travel to Greece and Turkey is a moment in my life that I will cherish forever. I have loved teaching about Ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire for the past thirty years. Being given the opportunity to experience them first hand was a gift of unbelievable proportion.

The trip itself was an incredible experience beginning with seminars in New York at Columbia University and ending 38 days later in Istanbul Turkey. The directors of both programs made sure that we had a balance of educational seminars, meetings with local educators, museum visits, opportunities to gather information for our own projects, visiting Byzantine churches and mosques, along with exploring ancient ruins with the help of private tour guides in both countries. This was framed by wonderful food at every meal and opportunities to experience the local culture in the areas we were visiting. We stayed in 14 hotels in 38 days, which meant we were on the road quite a bit of the trip. It was a wonderful way to see the landscapes of the countries, the villages between the larger cities, and get to



Amy Melendy, Social Studies teacher at Cedar Bluff Middle School, traces part of her tour of Turkey. "Being given the opportunity to experience ancient Greece and the Byzantine empire first hand was a gift of unbelievable proportion," said Melendy.

know my fifteen wonderful traveling companions and our tour guides and Fulbright Directors.



The Parthenon: I was a bit disappointed with the scaffolding and the crowd, but I had no control over either.

The memories of my trip are numerous, but it was certainly a thrill when I first spotted the [Parthenon](#) as we were walking down the street in [Athens](#). Delphi, the site of the famous oracle, was also a highlight in Greece as our guide took us through the site using the ancient mythology of the era.

In Turkey, there were many wonders that were new to me. One of these was the [Fairy Chimneys in Cappadocia](#). Taking a hot air balloon ride over the canyon to see these wonders was spectacular. Turkey was a delight because of its mix of ancient and modern

worlds. The people of Greece and Turkey were open and welcoming even in the midst of crisis and hardship that both countries were experiencing during my visit. My fellow travelers and I enjoyed many conversations and experiences with the local people. They always tried to help us even if we weren't speaking the same language.

Impact on Classroom

The impact on my classroom will be vast. The trip covered the majority of the curriculum that I teach, so I have an abundance of materials and knowledge to share with my students. I am also required to create a project to share on the Fulbright website. I know my students benefit from this project and hope that other teachers will be able to use the project to enhance their classroom lessons.



Hot air balloon rides over the Fairy Chimneys in [Cappadocia, Turkey](#).

Additionally, positive gains in achievement were seen in 18 of the 24 grade level/subject combinations announced by the state.

“Given our new higher academic standards, we are pleased with the progress that we are making, and we are grateful to our teachers, students, parents and staff for all their hard work that has contributed to increased student learning.” said Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent of the Knox County Schools. “We

obviously have more work to do to ensure academic success for all students, but this is excellent diagnostic data, and we will use it to determine where our strengths are, and to focus our improvement efforts for the future.”

For more information, please visit tennessee.gov/education.



The project involves the history and culture of the Byzantine Empire. I have also connected with educators in both countries and will be setting up a collaboration between our classrooms. My intention is for our students to share information toward a common goal using a wiki format. I am excited to share all that I have learned with my students and other educators. It is going to be a good year!





FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TIP:

"Could you please read this to me? I don't have time, but I would like to hear it..."

A great idea to engage all school-age children...

Select an age-appropriate book or other reading material. You might select a book you always wanted to read as a child, one that you most enjoyed, a magazine article or even a news story. Explain to your child that you don't have time to read it, then ask your child to please read it to you while you do the dishes, drive, fold the

laundry or whatever task has you 'busy'.

This will empower your child through a personally relevant purpose for reading. An added bonus? It also presents the opportunity to enrich their vocabulary as they read to you.

Enjoy an engaging discussion about what you're sharing and how it applies to your family.

Parent tested, parent approved tip

AYP, ACT, TCAP News...

The State of Tennessee recently released district-level 2010-2011 results for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), ACT (formerly known as American College Testing), and the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

Adequate Yearly Progress

The Knox County Schools made significant progress in AYP in several areas, including:

- Belle Morris Elementary advanced from High Priority status to Good Standing
- Christenberry Elementary advanced from High Priority to Good Standing
- Fulton High School achieved AYP in all categories
- Austin-East Magnet High School achieved AYP in English/reading, which improves their accountability status to "Restructuring I (Improving)" and greatly reduces the risk of Austin-East being taken over and

placed in the state's Achievement School District.

- Middle School mathematics – while 12 out of 14 middle schools did not make AYP in mathematics, there was a 9 percent growth in proficiency in 8th grade math, a 5 percent increase in 7th grade math, and a 3 percent increase in 6th grade math.

Of the 77 schools that qualify to receive AYP results in the Knox County Schools, 16 schools were listed as High Priority (an increase of one over 2010). Of those 16 High Priority schools, 5 made AYP and are now listed as Improving. Two High Priority schools were moved to Good Standing (Belle Morris and Christenberry Elementary Schools).

“After rightfully moving to much higher academic standards in Tennessee, the benchmarks for making AYP are continuing to increase significantly,” said Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent of the Knox County Schools. “We certainly have a good deal more work to do, but we are encouraged by our progress in increasing student academic achievement.”

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools and school districts are measured on whether the students meet performance benchmarks in math, reading and attendance for grades 3-8 and math, English and graduation rate for high schools. Schools that do not meet the achievement standards for two years are deemed high priority.

AYP status is also calculated each year for the following student subgroups: White, Hispanic, African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.

NCLB identifies schools that have missed a federal benchmark in the same category for two consecutive years. Tennessee elects to alert schools and districts that are at-risk of becoming a high priority school under NCLB. These schools receive additional support and assistance from the state in order to avoid the NCLB high priority list. Schools that have missed one or more benchmarks for one year are considered target schools.

ACT:

Tennessee's results from the April 2011 test show the state's public high school students' composite ACT score dropped from 19.1 in 2010 to 19.0 out of 36 in 2011, highlighting the ongoing need for education reform to achieve the state's Race to the Top goal of broader college readiness. Tennessee is one of eight states that require all of its graduates — 68,524 students in 2011 — to take the test.

The Knox County Schools went from a 20.5 in 2010 to a 20.4 in 2011.

“Our goal is to ensure that after students have been with us after 13 years that they have received an outstanding education, as well as acquired the level of knowledge and skills they need to be successful and competitive in their futures,” said Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent of the Knox County Schools.

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program

The Knox County Schools results included overall increases in the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced in all four subject areas: reading, math, science, and social studies. Specifically, the percentage of Knox County School students who were Proficient or Advanced improved by 1.5 percentage points in reading, 5.8% in mathematics, 2.8% in science and 1.9% in social studies.

Additionally, positive gains in achievement were seen in 18 of the 24 grade level/subject combinations announced by the state.

“Given our new higher academic standards, we are pleased with the progress that we are making, and we are grateful to our teachers, students, parents and staff for all their hard work that has contributed to increased student learning.” said Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent of the Knox County Schools. “We obviously have more work to do to ensure academic success for all students, but this is excellent diagnostic

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