

Knox County Schools

Findings and Recommendations
from the
**Central Office Review for
Results & Equity**

conducted by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform
at Brown University

in partnership with Knox County Schools
and the Great Schools Partnership

prepared by the



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Central Office Review for Results and Equity

The CORRE Process in Knox County

Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE)

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform's Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) is designed to help a district community – school district leaders and stakeholders – understand its strengths and weaknesses and how well it carries out essential functions. The goal of CORRE is to help a school system transform into a “smart district” – one in which all schools meet high academic performance standards and in which there are no significant differences in achievement based on race, ethnicity, primary language, or family income. Districts that are getting “smart” are supporting better academic performance for all students in all the district's schools – in other words, focusing on and achieving both results and equity. Smart districts have one other essential focus area: community. By collaborating with the community, smart districts expand the notion of who is a district leader, deepen community connections, strengthen external support, and build mutual accountability.

Given this focus on results, equity, and community, it should not be surprising that CORRE is not an audit, a consultant report, an external review, or any other practice commonly done *to* districts. The CORRE review is facilitated by Institute staff and consultants in collaboration *with* a district and community. Districts that participate do so voluntarily, motivated by a strong desire to look closely at their central office practices and improve their work with schools.

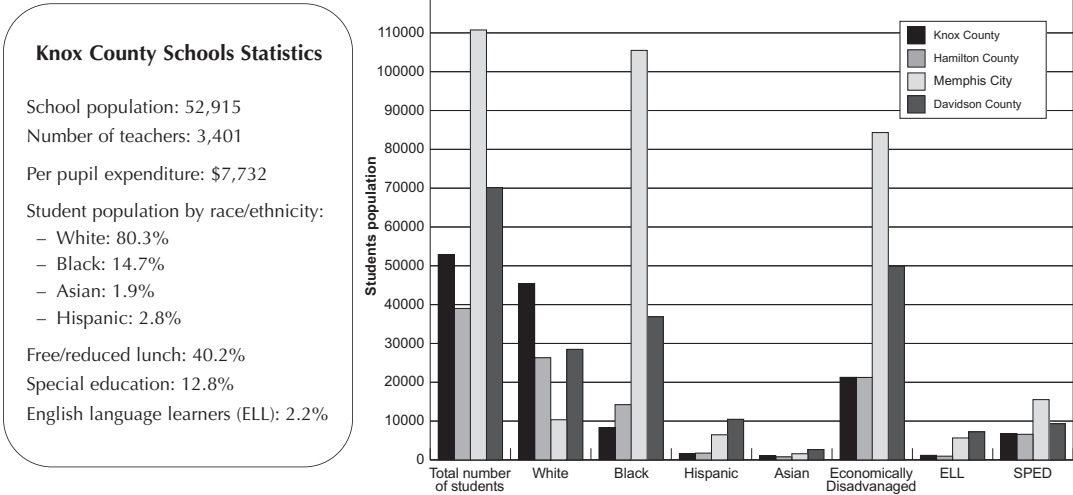
The review starts with the creation of a CORRE Team. Members of the CORRE Team are drawn from multiple stakeholder groups in the educational and broader community, including central office staff, principals, teachers, community and business members, and representatives from higher education. Together, they work to identify high-priority issues in the district, develop the review's inquiry strategy, and then conduct group interviews with stakeholders to collect community and district staff perceptions. The results are analyzed by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, which produces findings in collaboration with the CORRE Team and recommendations based on the data. A more detailed description of CORRE's methodological approach appears in Appendix A.

CORRE in Knox County is a partnership between the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Knox County Schools (KCS), and the Great Schools Partnership. CORRE was introduced to Knox County through its membership in a new multidistrict collaborative focused on high school redesign and coordinated by the School Redesign Network (SRN) at Stanford University. The Annenberg Institute was invited by KCS and SRN in September 2006 to propose an external review of the central office that

would focus on equity issues, central office connections to teaching and learning, and stakeholders’ perceptions. It was determined that the Institute’s CORRE process would address these issues. This review was initiated by former superintendent Charles Lindsey and his senior staff and supported strongly and consistently by interim superintendent Roy Mullins and current superintendent James McIntyre.

Knox County Schools and Its Community

KCS, the eighty-first largest school district in the country with eighty-five schools and almost 53,000 students, has served the city of Knoxville and Knox County as a single school district since the late 1980s.



Knox County is marked by substantial geographic diversity and growing racial and ethnic diversity. It includes an urban central city core, numerous suburbs, and rural communities over a large area. The percentage of White students in the system is higher than other urban districts in Tennessee, but the number of students in other racial and ethnic groups is growing, and more than fifty-six languages are spoken by students in the district. Even with this diversity, the Knox County community strongly identifies with its public school system, as evidenced by its relatively low private school enrollment of 15.8 percent (by contrast, 24.3 percent of the Hamilton County population three years and over are enrolled in private school; in Davidson County, that figure is 28.3 percent). There is also high interest in public education coming from outside the school district, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Education Summit held by the Knoxville Chamber in March 2008. At the Summit, more than 600 community members discussed the current state of the workforce pipeline in Knox County. A follow-up meeting in June 2008 brought together a smaller group of local leaders to discuss initial action steps to create tighter links between educational institutions and businesses, attracting and retaining a highly qualified workforce and engaging the “underutilized” workforce.¹ In addition, a CORRE Advisory Group of business, civic, and community leaders was formed to advocate for and assist in implementing key CORRE recommendations and to help align and connect improvement efforts originating inside the school system and in the larger civic arena.

When it comes to student performance, among urban districts in Tennessee KCS consistently scores high on the state’s proficiency tests in language arts and math, as well as on value-added measures. KCS has also made significant increases in the number of its schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks. With these performance measures, the district’s reputation for innovation, and the strong community identification noted above, Knox County residents have much to take pride in. More important, the community and school system have a strong base upon which to build.

However, there is also significant cause for concern. While student achievement scores are high relative to other urban Tennessee school districts, Tennessee’s state standards are currently rated very low compared to other states (though these standards are being revised).² And this disparity is reflected in student achievement when comparing Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) scores with those on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (see Additional Findings section of this report). Of equal concern are differences within Knox County Schools on TCAP and graduation rates – differences that generally follow a regional pattern.

¹ Knoxville Chamber, *Workforce+Education=Future, Workforce Development and Education Summit-Follow Up, Minutes from June 10, 2008*. Available for download at <www.knoxvillechamber.com/main/chamber_blogs/workforce_blog/chamber_releases_summit_follow_up_meeting_report>

² Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, “Check the Facts: Few States Set World-Class Standards,” *Education Next* 8, no. 3, Summer 2008. Available online at <www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/18845034.html>.

CORRE interviews revealed great variability in perspectives on KCS, not only across but also within stakeholder groups. When CORRE Team members and Institute staff asked people what they were concerned about, some cited serious concerns, but just as many had trouble identifying any system issues. Perhaps this should not be surprising, as the differing perspectives reflect both a range of experiences of KCS and a changing community. Knox County's schools are suburban, urban, and even rural. Its families have lived in Tennessee for generations, migrated from other parts of the U.S., and just arrived from abroad – often in search of political freedom or economic opportunity. And, of course, the central office staff, principals, teachers, parents, students, and community members interviewed saw KCS through the prism of their own individual, family, neighborhood, and work experiences.³

Building Collective Solutions in Knox County Schools

In the pages that follow, this report:

- summarizes key findings and recommendations;
- reports the full findings from the CORRE Team's inquiry;
- presents additional quantitative data analysis to contextualize the findings;
- explains recommendations for improvement based on the analysis.

This report is the concrete result of the CORRE process. But rather than an end, it should be seen as the first step to a more lasting and potentially more important result: the creation of a capacity and shared space to own problems and, together, build solutions for KCS. Capacity and shared ownership, which begin with KCS staff, but do not stop there, are necessary to sustain reforms long enough to get real results in a sector that too often moves from one “solution” to the next without sufficient internal focus and commitment or external community support.

³ See Appendix B for a breakdown of Knox County CORRE participants by stakeholder group, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

The Knox County Schools (KCS) system undertook this central office review of its own work in the spirit of self-reflection and continuous improvement, understanding that the findings would touch on both strengths and areas in need of improvement. The district's willingness to receive and act on recommendations based on these findings signals a commitment to conduct business differently and more effectively for the benefit of the students and families that KCS serves. We encourage interested stakeholders to review the full findings and recommendations in the pages that follow, which provide more information and explanation than can be included in the key points identified below.

Findings from the CORRE Team

Findings were grouped in four major areas: Student Opportunity and Achievement; Instructional Focus and Priorities; Central Office Supports, Culture, and Communication; and Partnerships and Community. The next section of this report, Findings from the CORRE Team, presents the full set of findings developed by the CORRE Team, which directly informed the recommendations.

The Annenberg Institute developed additional findings by analyzing publicly available data in order to provide context for the perceptions outlined in the CORRE Team's findings. These are presented in the section Additional Findings on Knox County Schools.

Recommendations from the Annenberg Institute Based on the Findings

Following is a summary of the recommendations developed from the CORRE process. They are fully described in the body of the report in the section Recommendations from the Annenberg Institute Based on the Findings.

KCS is doing fine by many measures, but it needs to do better. Participants varied widely in their perspectives on the district's performance, priorities, and focus. Building on the district's commitment to inquiry and continuous improvement, we offer suggestions about possible further inquiries, what certain reforms might look like, and how to sustain the collaboration and momentum generated in the CORRE process.

1. Eliminate "program sprawl" by aligning central office resources with Knox County Schools' vision of an effective school system.

Define and communicate an academic vision and a comprehensive strategy for realizing it. Build on the efforts of the collaboration with the School Redesign Network, available data, and stakeholder input to inform the vision. Develop an evaluation framework and institute a systematic, substantive evaluation cycle for all programs and central office services – especially those that directly affect school-based instructional staff. Make programmatic and resource allocation decisions using the vision and the evaluation results.

2. Build an equitable system of supports to serve all students in Knox County Schools effectively.

Study equity factors such as the average experience and qualifications of teachers in high-need schools compared with highest-achieving schools, the impact of special programs currently in place in high-need schools, etc. Ensure that programs targeting the needs of specific student groups are fully integrated into the district's operations and accountability structure. Promote transparency about how district, state, federal, and private funds are allocated to break down myths that interfere with confronting equity issues. Develop strategies and curricular programs to meet the needs of a growing population of ELL and newcomer populations. Consider differing levels of autonomy and resource expenditure authority for different schools.

3. Prioritize human capital management as one of the district's key functions in everyday practice.

Separate the responsibilities of human resources operations and human capital management strategy and implementation. Create a senior leadership position overseeing human capital management strategy and the coordination of activities impacting human capital management. Partner with external entities such as the teachers association, local higher-education institutions, reform support organizations, and service providers to effectively administer different components of the human capital management system.

4. Institutionalize high expectations and provide meaningful choices to lead to post-high school success.

Increase access to, availability of, and information about advanced and dual-credit course offerings, as well as high-quality career and technical training. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones with area higher-education institutions and employers to prepare students for post-secondary life, help them navigate the transition from high school, and provide them with high-quality post-secondary opportunities. Emphasize academic, career, and college counseling as early as middle school – especially for middle- and low-performing students. Help students and families keep track of where they are, concretely, on the pathway to college and career.

5. Leverage the resources and capacity of the Knox County community (universities, businesses, community groups, etc.) through more effective partnerships and advocate for the creation of a local education fund.

Advocate for the conversion of the Great Schools Partnership into a local education fund (LEF) to serve as the district's external partner in public education, provide an institutional home for interactions among civic and business organizations, and serve as a grassroots base for engaging ordinary citizens. Create a KCS external partnerships office to coordinate and facilitate existing partnerships; create new, high-quality partnerships that fill district needs (including partnerships with youth services providers); and hold district partnerships accountable.

6. Increase accountability for education on the part of both KCS and the Knox County community by building a culture of communications and engagement.

Regarding *internal* communication, build on existing online resources for predictable information requests; provide a single contact for information requests from school staff; clarify responsibility for each type of school-staff need; put service protocols in place to assure consistency, quality, and timeliness of response; and provide systematic opportunities for teachers and principals to share feedback with high-level district staff.

Regarding *external* communication, work with the proposed LEF to create or contribute to forums that engage a wide range of stakeholder groups – including those who are less often heard than are the business and higher-education communities – in debating differing perspectives on public education issues. To promote this public debate and system accountability, make disaggregated data widely available in user-friendly formats.

Findings from the CORRE Team

Student Opportunity and Achievement

1. Positive academic attributes of the Knox County Schools (KCS) were identified in virtually every stakeholder group, from Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-credit course opportunities to Project AVID. However, there was no agreement within or across stakeholder groups about how the system is performing for students overall.
2. Individuals from each stakeholder group who felt that KCS is doing well overall cited TCAP scores, ACT scores, and the district's performance compared to other urban districts in Tennessee. Many central office staff who felt this way expressed the belief that KCS was a good system trying to improve, citing high-quality staff, continuous efforts to improve the system, and professional development opportunities. These sentiments were echoed by individuals in the community, principals, and school board member stakeholder groups as well.
3. Individuals from each stakeholder group who felt that KCS is not doing well overall pointed to the relative weakness of the Tennessee state standards, the district's low graduation rate, and the fact that KCS is less poor and serves fewer minority, ELL, and special needs students than other major urban districts in the state.
4. A number of people in all constituencies referred to a group of students they called "non-college bound." Those who commented on how to best serve this group focused on preparation for immediate entry into the workforce. These individuals discussed possibilities ranging from specific vocational training to critical thinking skills, basic literacy, and numeracy.
5. There was a fairly widespread perception that students with strong advocates, particularly engaged parents, are being well served. Beyond that, there was no widespread agreement. While unique resources and supports were identified for both high-performing students (e.g., AP courses, dual-credit courses, magnet schools) and low-performing or disadvantaged students (e.g., Project GRAD, Title I funding, magnet schools), there was no consensus among stakeholders on which student groups are particularly well served or underserved. Some of various perspectives expressed were:
 - ✧ High-achieving students are not being challenged enough.
 - ✧ Average students are not pushed to advance to the next level (getting better grades, applying to college, etc.).
 - ✧ Low-achieving students are not getting what they need to succeed on grade level.
 - ✧ Poor, minority, and ELL students are particularly underserved.
 - ✧ Students in suburban schools are better served than those in urban schools.
 - ✧ Special education students are well served relative to opportunities for special needs students in surrounding communities.
 - ✧ Special education students are underserved considering the high student-teacher ratio.

6. A consistent theme across stakeholder groups was that there was a relationship between school-level performance and a school's location within the county. Participants across stakeholder groups described location-related disparities in instructional and physical plant resources, teaching quality, and students' overall educational experiences and achievement. West Knox County was associated with higher achievement, more resources, and higher quality overall. Availability of AP courses and instructional technology were two frequently cited examples of such disparities.
7. Many of those interviewed acknowledged resources were being devoted to high-need, inner-city schools, but raised concerns about other sources of inequity, such as higher proportions of inexperienced teachers in those schools.
8. A number of participants across stakeholder groups identified the election of school board members by individual districts as contributing to district challenges in matching resources to student needs. Specifically, they expressed concern that board members acted exclusively in the interests of their own districts and did not act in the interests of the school system as a whole.
9. A theme articulated across stakeholder groups – though by a limited number of interviewees – was that there is a relationship between racial, linguistic, and cultural differences and the lack of equitable access and high achievement for minority children, immigrant children, poor children, and those children attending inner-city schools.
10. Interviewees across the teacher, parent, community, and central office stakeholder groups indicated that the needs of poor, minority, immigrant, and inner-city students were addressed through specific programs such as Title I and Project GRAD. However, they noted that these programs seemed to function as separate from the larger school system. A number of higher-education interviewees, board members, and community leaders believed that many initiatives to assist minority students were responses to mandates rather than part of a comprehensive approach to serving these students.
11. Many of the students interviewed indicated they did not feel challenged or that low expectations were held for them, especially among students from the lowest-performing high schools. Many of these students stated that instruction was too focused on test preparation and not connected to real-life applications. They stated that this type of instruction did not make them feel challenged.

Instructional Focus and Priorities

12. In most stakeholder groups, KCS was described as attempting to be a leader in instructional practice by learning about and adopting effective research-based programs and best practices. Examples included:
 - ✧ The literacy initiative
 - ✧ Implementation of special education Response to Intervention

- ✧ The Teacher Advancement Program
- ✧ Project GRAD's attention to wraparound services

However, this perspective was not shared by the business community.

13. All stakeholder groups praised the quality of KCS's strong capacity for data collection, analysis, and use as a guide for making instructional decisions.
14. Across stakeholder groups, raising KCS's graduation rate was identified as a district priority. Other than this, the only specific academic priorities cited in most stakeholder groups were related to complying with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation or raising test scores.
15. The 100/90/90/90 initiative⁴ was a clearly articulated priority in some stakeholder groups, particularly the central office, board, business community, and principals.
16. There was significant agreement across stakeholder groups that KCS suffers from program sprawl. Specifically:
 - ✧ New programs are often added without regard to how they fit with existing programs.
 - ✧ Programs are not systematically evaluated for effectiveness or eliminated when they are not effective.
 - ✧ Funding for programs is limited and spread thin and resources are often taken from an older program to fund newer ones.
 - ✧ School-based staff expressed concern that multiple programs are implemented that have conflicting values and perspectives and that this can fragment a school's instructional program.
17. Many principals expressed that rather than additional programming, they needed more people, including teachers, instructional aides, and administrative support.
18. Across stakeholder groups there was a concern that KCS overemphasizes compliance with state and federal mandates, having high test scores, and "looking good." In this latter view, many individuals contend that this emphasis comes at the expense of maintaining long-term focus on programs and approaches that are truly effective for all students.
19. Teachers specifically mention the focus on testing, test preparation, and coverage of a packed curriculum as discouraging in-depth exploration of content. Some also state that attempts to standardize classroom experiences across schools hinder their ability to provide the individualized instruction that they see as right for their students.
20. The majority of central office staff and many students were positive about the support and dedication of their teachers.

⁴ The goal of the 100/90/90/90 initiative is for 100 percent of KCS students to complete school; for 90 percent to graduate with a regular diploma; for 90 percent of those students to take the ACT; and for 90 percent of those students to score 21 or better.

Central Office Supports, Culture, and Communication

21. Many central office and school-based staff agree that a culture shift is taking place, from a closed, uncommunicative culture, to one that is breaking down silos within central office and emphasizing collaboration throughout the system. Weekly directors' meetings were cited as an example of this by many central office staff, while school-based staff pointed to the establishment of professional learning communities in schools.
22. There is wide agreement among teachers, principals, and central office staff that the high quality of the professional development offered by central office is a strength. Many said central office needs to offer more.
23. In all stakeholder groups, there are people who praise the commitment and hard work of central office staff, citing the long hours they put in and their commitment to students.
24. Many principals and teachers feel well supported by supervisors, praising their service orientation and time spent in schools. However, a larger group feels unsupported, noting they never see their supervisors unless it is for a routine evaluation or there is a problem.
25. A large number of teachers and principals – as well as some central office staff members – expressed that central office staff members do not have a clear picture of the day-to-day realities faced by school-based staff. People who expressed this view felt that this lack of perspective often leads to a “one-size-fits-all” approach from central office.
26. Some members of the business community questioned whether central office staff possessed all of the management and business skills necessary to run a successful organization. Those who expressed this opinion said that administrators are mainly internally promoted teachers and that central office staff are mainly promoted administrators.
27. Central office staff generally seem to believe that internal communication – across central office and between central office and schools – is good, but many teachers and principals did not agree.
 - ✧ Many teachers had concerns about being passed around when calling central office for answers and said that no one could tell them who could get them the information they needed.
 - ✧ School-based staff complained of redundant requests for information from central office.
 - ✧ Principals talked about receiving conflicting memos from different central office departments. Some required their attendance at two different meetings held by two different departments at the same time.

28. School-based staff cited support they received from central office in providing information to constituents, particularly timely information regarding problems and crises.
29. Across stakeholder groups, there were concerns with many management functions, which were mostly attributed to human resources. Problems cited were late hiring timelines, restrictions on teacher hiring, teacher transfer policies, late teacher contracts, and a lack of customer service orientation.
30. A significant proportion of participants from teacher and community groups felt that management in KCS hands down decisions without adequate explanation of the reasons for those decisions. In both stakeholder groups, individuals said that while central office sometimes asks for feedback and input, it does not factor that feedback and input into its decisions.
31. When asked how they measured the impact of the services and supports they offered, some central office staff mentioned periodic surveys and informal, anecdotal feedback, but no systematic evaluation of central office's supports and services was described.

Partnerships and Community

32. Principals, teachers, and community members recognized that KCS is making efforts to reach out more to parents. Examples of this include KCS's new online parent portal, the district report card, and newsletters. Some community members expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of those efforts, pointing out that there is a difference between disseminating information and actually engaging the public in a substantive way. In addition, parents and some central office staff indicated that parent outreach at the secondary level is lacking.
33. Many in the community stakeholder groups and members of the higher-education stakeholder groups felt that KCS does not actively seek support from or partnerships with key community resources such as higher-education institutions, membership organizations, or community groups or facilitate partnerships when offered by key community organizations.
34. Many central office employees, principals, and community leaders perceive a lack of will to adequately fund the public schools in Knox County.
35. Many community members, central office staff, and principals also feel that there is significant community complacency around student achievement at all performance levels.
36. Interviewees in many stakeholder groups noted that the relationship between the school board and local elected officials – particularly the county commission – have improved in recent years.

37. Some community members, central office staff, and board members point to the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) as a useful vehicle for district/community collaboration; however, opinions on its effectiveness and the clarity of its role are mixed.
- ✧ Many indicated that GSP's purpose was to pilot new programs and pointed to programs like the Teacher Advancement Program and early childhood initiatives as examples.
 - ✧ Some claimed that GSP had only a token role as a mechanism to collect community input and foster district/community collaboration.
 - ✧ Others pointed to the teacher induction program as an example of GSP's capacity to bring research-based best practices to effective community collaboration that supports the district.
 - ✧ A number of individuals referred to the fact that GSP was originally intended to raise private funds for KCS and that it has never effectively been able to do this.
 - ✧ Across stakeholder groups there were differing opinions about to whom GSP answers. The mayor, the board, and the schools system were all mentioned as possibilities.

Additional Findings on Knox County Schools

The previous section on CORRE Findings reflects stakeholder perceptions of Knox County Schools (KCS). In some cases, it has been possible for the Annenberg Institute to engage in additional quantitative data analysis to provide additional context. These data were either publicly available on state and district Web sites or were specifically requested from KCS.⁵

The funding of local schools was one concern reflected in the findings of many Knox County stakeholders. According to the State of Tennessee, KCS is funded at nearly the same amount per pupil as the state average. However, compared with the other large, urban school districts in the state, KCS is funded at a lower rate (see Figure 2).

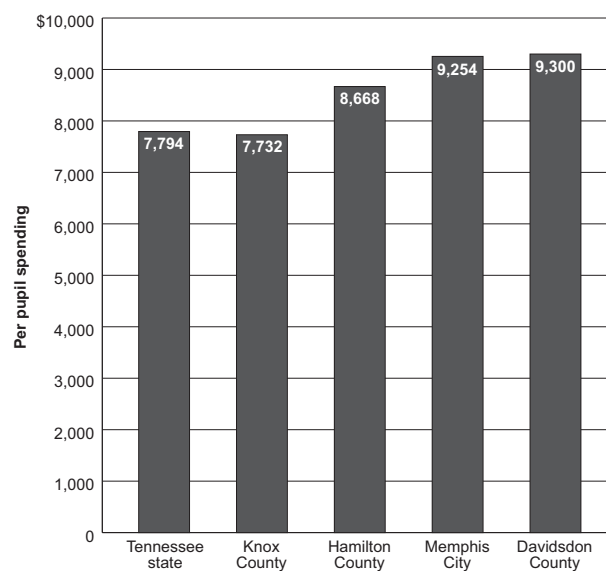


FIGURE 2
Per pupil spending, Tennessee state and urban school districts

Student achievement in KCS was also discussed frequently by stakeholders in CORRE. Many pointed to the fact that KCS has higher TCAP scores than other similar districts in Tennessee. This perception is accurate, as is shown in figures 3 and 4. We chose to show fourth- and eighth-grade TCAP scores, as these grades are crucial transition years for students. Figures 3 and 4 show fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

⁵ Sources for this analysis are:
<<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/profile.asp>>;
<www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd05>;
<www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/3211601.html>.

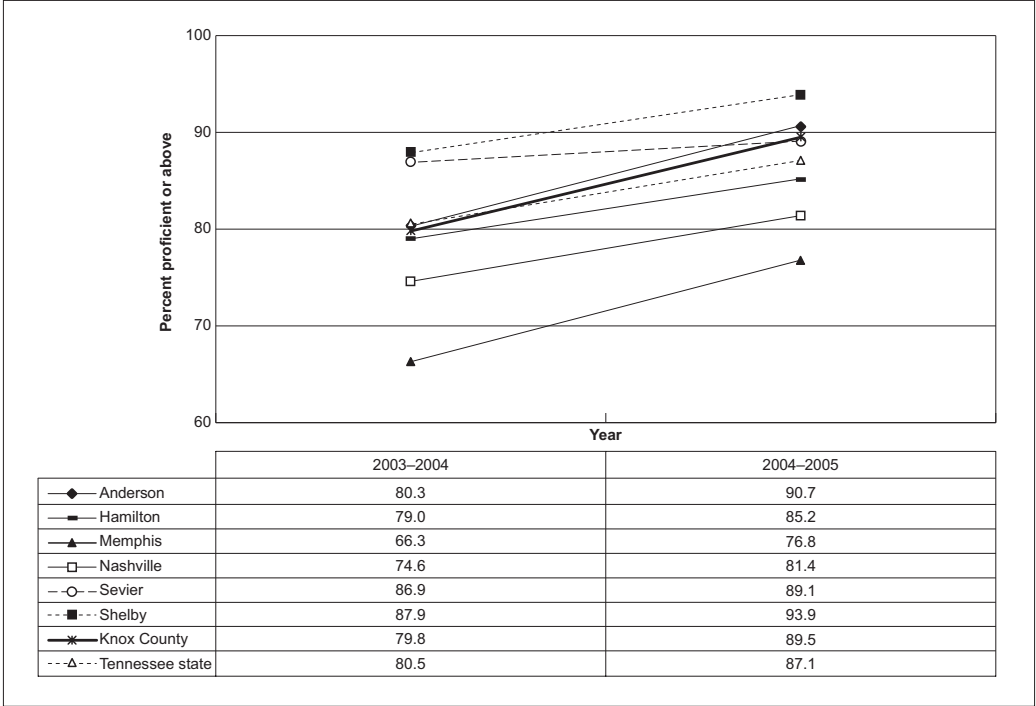


FIGURE 3
Comparison of Tennessee urban districts, TCAP Grade 4 Reading Achievement

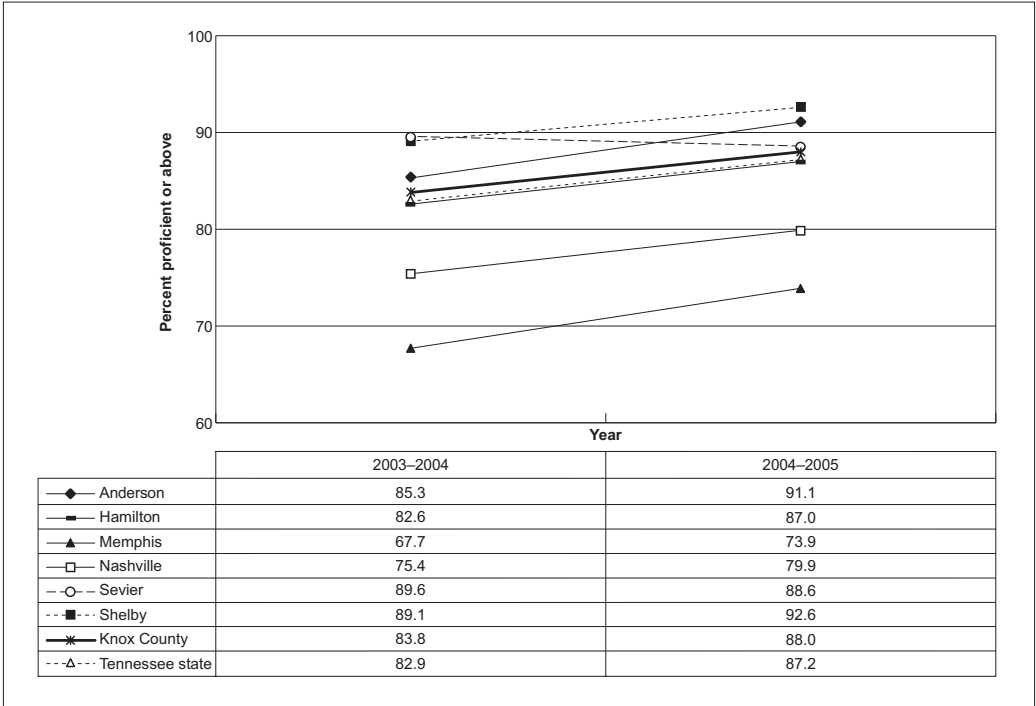


FIGURE 4
Comparison of Tennessee urban districts, TCAP Grade 8 Math Achievement

ACT scores of Knox County students have risen modestly over the past five years (see Figure 5).

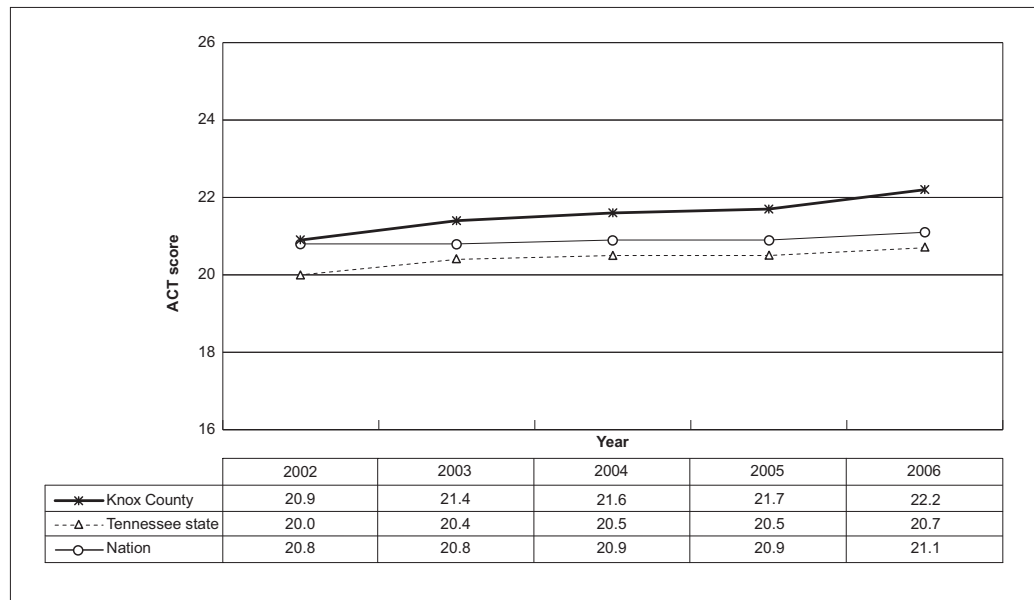


FIGURE 5
ACT mean composite score, 2002–2006

However, a separate group of interviewees noted that while Knox County performs well on TCAP compared with other urban Tennessee districts, the Tennessee standards are low compared with other states, meaning that high TCAP scores may not be indicative of high student achievement. Indeed, when we compared TCAP scores in Tennessee with scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a national assessment that allows for state comparisons, Tennessee performs poorly.

Overall, Knox County public school students are performing just about on par with the state as a whole, as shown in Figure 6.

	Knox County TCAP	State TCAP
Grade 4 Math	87.8	86.6
Grade 4 Reading	89.5	87.1
Grade 8 Math	88.0	87.2
Grade 8 Reading	84.6	86.9

FIGURE 6
Comparison of Knox County and Tennessee statewide TCAP achievement scores

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)⁶ is the federal test of proficiency. The NAEP does not provide results for individual cities. But because Knox County’s scores are so similar to overall Tennessee performance, it seems reasonable to let the state NAEP performance “stand in” for what Knox students would likely score.

Figure 7 shows that while upwards of 80 percent of students score “proficient or above” on the TCAP, the NAEP standards for proficiency are much different. For example, only 27 percent of Tennessee fourth-graders are proficient or above in fourth-grade reading, while 87 percent of fourth-graders score proficient on the TCAP.

In 2006, Paul Peterson and Frederick Hess (2008) published an analysis of state performance on state-developed tests (such as the TCAP) versus the performance of their students on the NAEP in 2005. Then they graded the rigor of state proficiency standards based on the discrepancies between the state tests and the national test. States that had small discrepancies got the highest grades; those with large discrepancies received the lowest. Tennessee received the lowest grade: F. Only two other states received as low a score: Oklahoma and North Carolina.

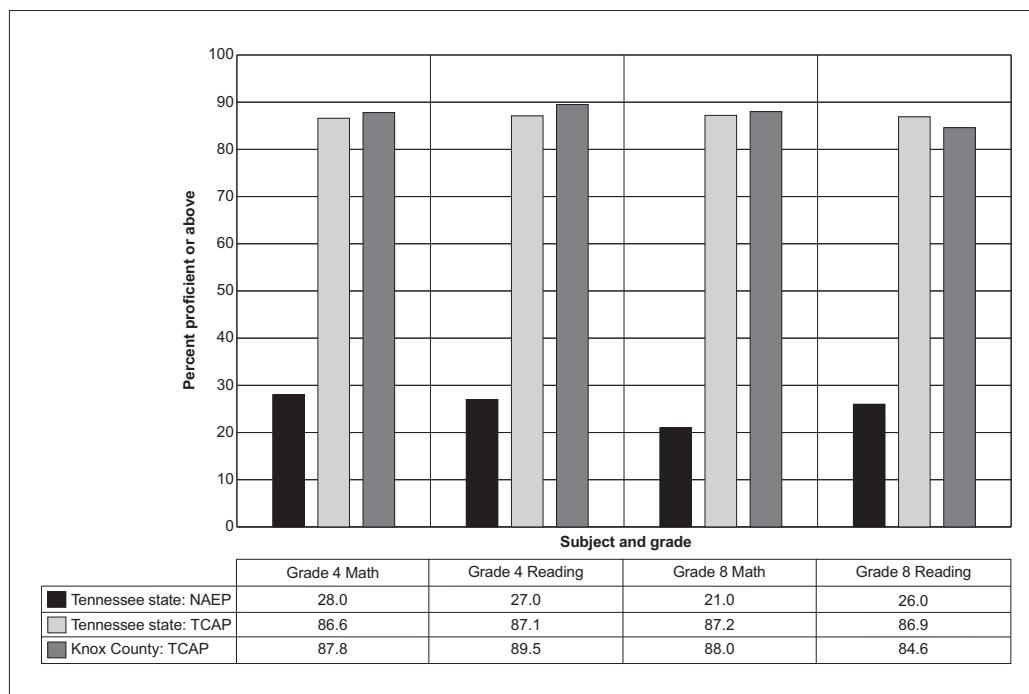


FIGURE 7
Comparison of achievement on state and national tests: Knox County and Tennessee, 2004–2005

⁶ The National Assessment of Education Progress is a nationally representative and longitudinal assessment of American students’ academic performance. Over the last forty years, assessments have been conducted periodically in grades 4, 8, and 12 in reading, mathematics, science, writing, and other subjects.

Within KCS itself, there was a belief expressed by some interviewees that teacher turnover is higher at schools with higher poverty and that the teachers are less experienced. While we were unable to obtain data on teacher experience by school, we were able to analyze teacher turnover data for the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years.

Over three years, from 2004 to 2007, 40 percent of KCS’s certified staff left the school they started in. About 10 percent of staff turnover was the result of retirements. The data does not detail the reasons the other 30 percent left; it is likely that some transferred to other schools within the district, some are teaching outside the district, and some left teaching altogether. Still, when designing districtwide policy, it is important to note how much the composition of the staff of each school changes from year to year. This is particularly important in high-poverty schools, as the proportion of staff leaving these schools is typically higher.

As shown in Figure 8, the three-year turnover rate grows as the proportion of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch gets higher.

Overall for KCS, the correlation between poverty and teacher transfers is 0.61, which means there is a strong, positive, statistically significant relationship between the two variables. It suggests that a school with higher poverty will have higher teacher transfers, and that more than a third of the variation in teacher transfers can be explained by the school’s poverty rate. The relationship is strongest at the secondary level, as shown in the Figure 9.

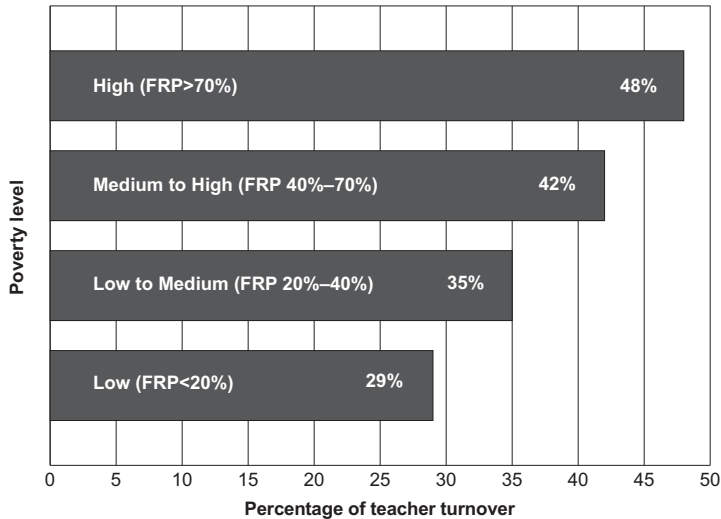


FIGURE 8
 Three-year turnover rate by poverty level of school: Knox County Schools, 2004–2005 to 2006–2007

When retirements are included in the ratio, the relationship decreases somewhat but remains statistically significant. This suggests that a greater proportion of teacher turnover at lower-poverty schools is made up of retirements.

School level	3-year average		Correlation between poverty and...	
	Teacher transfers	Teacher transfers and retirements	Teacher transfers	Teacher transfers and retirements
Elementary school	30%	40%	.59*	.38*
Middle school	29%	38%	.69*	.38*
High school	28%	39%	.69*	.40*
Overall	29%	40%	.61*	.39*

FIGURE 9
Teacher turnover by level and correlation between school poverty and teacher turnover by level†, Knox County Public Schools, 2004–2005 to 2006–2007

† Poverty is measured by the proportion of students at each school who were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch as of February 2007 (source: Tennessee Department of Education, <<http://eratey10.k12tn.net>>). Teacher turnover is based on the three-year average rate of transfers, or the sum of transfers and retirements, as a proportion of the total staff each year.

* Statistically significant at the .05 level

Finally, a few stakeholders perceived that academic opportunities for high school students were unevenly dispersed across KCS. While we were not able to examine all curricular opportunities for students, we did examine opportunities for students to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Figure 10 shows the number of AP courses offered at each school, each course’s student enrollment, and the number of students who sit for the actual AP exam. It is clear that there are disparities among KCS high schools in AP course offerings and enrollment.

We did additional analyses with AP data. Figures 11 and 12 highlight several pieces of information. Figure 11 shows, by high school, race/ethnicity, and gender, how many students took AP courses and tests. There are clear differences across these groups of students. Figure 12 shows AP enrollment, test taking, and test scores by school. To account for the difference in school size, we divided the number of tests taken by the total school population. While this is not a perfect measure of test taking (since most ninth- and tenth-graders do not sit for AP exams), it clearly shows disparities among high schools.

Knox County High Schools	TOTAL Number of AP Course Offerings	Student Enrollment and Number Taking Test	Subjects														
			Art History	Art Drawing	Art: 2-D	Art: 3-D	Biology	Calculus AB	Calculus BC	Chemistry	Computer Science A	Computer Science AB	Economics: Micro	Economics: Macro	English III / AP	English IV / AP	Environmental Science
Austin-East	13	COURSE ENROLLMENT		5			7	4					13	13	29	21	19
		NUMBER TESTING		0			5	4					2	2	16	8	14
Bearden	19	COURSE ENROLLMENT		0	22		13	23	56					33	56	43	87
		NUMBER TESTING		4	22		13	2	34					0	18	34	21
Carter	5	COURSE ENROLLMENT						12	10							6	16
		NUMBER TESTING						0	10							0	2
Central	12	COURSE ENROLLMENT					44	13	10						26	18	
		NUMBER TESTING					3	0	10						0	4	
Farragut	25	COURSE ENROLLMENT		6	5	7	48	38	20	17	22	3	30		30	11	
		NUMBER TESTING		6	5	7	41	34	16	12	6	3	21	5	1	12	
Fulton	6	COURSE ENROLLMENT					10	8	7						13	14	
		NUMBER TESTING					8	0	6						0	3	
Gibbs	6	COURSE ENROLLMENT					17								22	8	
		NUMBER TESTING					0								5	2	
Halls	8	COURSE ENROLLMENT					21	12	7			24		20	11		
		NUMBER TESTING					0	9	6			0		0	13		
Karns	14	COURSE ENROLLMENT					9	24	19	3		15		17	15		
		NUMBER TESTING					9	0	19	3		0		0	3		
Powell	9	COURSE ENROLLMENT					19	10						29	25		
		NUMBER TESTING					1	10						0	8		
South-Doyle	11	COURSE ENROLLMENT		23			6	32	20			20		17	20		
		NUMBER TESTING		1			6	6	13			1		11	6		
West	18	COURSE ENROLLMENT		1			7	38	24	25	2		22		21	29	
		NUMBER TESTING		0			0	2	23	25	1		0		0	23	

FIGURE 10
AP course offerings, enrollment, and test taking by school

Source: Knox County Schools

		European History	French Language IV	French Literature V	German Language	Government: Comparative Politics	Government: US	Latin Literature	Latin Vergil	Music Theory	Physics B	Physics C	Spanish Language	Spanish Literature	Statistics	US History	TOTAL of Number of Students
Austin-East	COURSE ENROLLMENT		6			13	13				1					20	164
	NUMBER TESTING		6			1	3				0					8	69
Bearden	COURSE ENROLLMENT	23	21	12	1	0	33	9	0		9		21	10	51	23	546
	NUMBER TESTING	20	2	0	0	1	13	9	1		7		7	0	45	23	276
Carter	COURSE ENROLLMENT															9	53
	NUMBER TESTING															9	21
Central	COURSE ENROLLMENT	9	10					1		19			5		15	21	191
	NUMBER TESTING	2	0					1		0			0		4	8	32
Farragut	COURSE ENROLLMENT	18	9	3	13		34	17	3	12		4	18	5	54	47	474
	NUMBER TESTING	12	0	0	1		17	0	17	2		4	8	0	43	45	318
Fulton	COURSE ENROLLMENT															4	56
	NUMBER TESTING															4	21
Gibbs	COURSE ENROLLMENT	16													4	25	92
	NUMBER TESTING	1													0	11	19
Halls	COURSE ENROLLMENT						24									36	155
	NUMBER TESTING						1									34	63
Karns	COURSE ENROLLMENT		10	7			15						19	15	24	11	203
	NUMBER TESTING		0	0			0						16	0	23	5	78
Powell	COURSE ENROLLMENT		8	4			0						3	1	0	22	121
	NUMBER TESTING		6	0			1						1	0	1	21	49
South-Doyle	COURSE ENROLLMENT	13					20								22	25	218
	NUMBER TESTING	2					1								13	7	67
West	COURSE ENROLLMENT	33	21	3			22	1					32	10	51	21	363
	NUMBER TESTING	32	0	0			9	1					3	0	34	18	171

School	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Native American/Alaskan	White	Female	Male	TOTAL
Austin-East	784	2	6	0	73	433	432	865
Bearden	175	82	65	4	1,769	1,016	1,079	2,095
Carter	115	5	5	3	900	497	531	1,028
Central	326	13	48	1	1,109	747	750	1,447
Farragut	79	105	49	11	2,008	1,066	1,186	2,252
Fulton	384	3	30	2	775	553	641	1,194
Gibbs	64	14	11	1	962	519	533	1,052
Halls	4	6	14	0	1,187	573	638	1,211
Karns	142	33	37	5	1,846	998	1,065	2,063
Powell	31	7	19	0	1,212	629	640	1,269
South Doyle	149	6	28	12	1,263	701	757	1,458
West	359	30	46	2	1,081	741	777	1,518
TOTAL	2,612	306	358	41	14,185	8,473	9,029	17,452
Number of AP students	40	58	22	4	844	618	513	1,131
Number of AP exams	66	162	42	6	1,807	1,139	1,010	2,149
Percentage of students taking AP courses	1.5%	19.0%	6.1%	9.8%	5.9%	7.3%	5.7%	6.5%

FIGURE 11
AP enrollment and exam taking by school and by race/ethnicity and gender

Source: Knox County Schools

School	Total Enrollment	AP Students	AP Exams	Number scoring 3 or higher	Percentage scoring 3 or higher	Number scoring 5	Percentage scoring 5	Percentage of AP students per school
Austin-East	865	20	34	17	50.0%	2	5.9%	2.3%
Bearden	2,095	203	393	303	77.1%	63	16.0%	9.7%
Carter	1,028	21	27	21	77.8%	5	18.5%	2.0%
Central	1,447	71	127	74	58.3%	7	5.5%	4.9%
Farragut	2,252	300	719	584	81.2%	164	22.8%	13.3%
Fulton	1,194	23	37	9	24.3%	0	0.0%	1.9%
Gibbs	1,052	24	41	25	61.0%	3	7.3%	2.3%
Halls	1,211	60	102	62	60.8%	4	3.9%	5.0%
Karns	2,063	104	151	106	70.2%	38	25.2%	5.0%
Powell	1,269	51	90	52	57.8%	5	5.6%	4.0%
South Doyle	1,458	33	42	12	28.6%	2	4.8%	2.3%
West	1,518	178	386	311	80.6%	96	24.9%	11.7%
TOTAL	17,452	1,088	2,149	1,576	73.3%	389	18.1%	6.2%

FIGURE 12
AP enrollment, exam taking, and scores by school

Source: Knox County Schools

Recommendations from the Annenberg Institute Based on the Findings

By many measures, Knox County Schools is doing fine. Indeed, that is a message we heard repeated in group and individual interviews across stakeholder groups. Its students perform better on state achievement tests than their peers in other large Tennessee districts. A majority of its students achieve proficient scores on those tests. And the system's mean ACT score is better than the national average. But doing "fine" may be the biggest obstacle KCS has to becoming a truly great school system.

The bottom line is that KCS does relatively well – and very well for some. But given that Tennessee is a state that gets the lowest rating nationally in the rigor of its proficiency standards (Peterson & Hess 2006) and that Knox County serves lower percentages of poor, minority, special education, and ELL students than other large urban districts in the state, KCS simply needs to do better. Moreover, its successes should impact all students' opportunities and results across the school system. KCS does have much to be proud of, including its ongoing commitment to reflect on its performance and learn from best practices. That commitment made this report possible. However, for the commitment to actually bring about a truly excellent public school system, there must be a recognition that the district should be doing better.

The wide-ranging viewpoints described in the Findings – the differing perspectives on the district's performance, priorities, and focus – reflect the wide range of real experiences people have with KCS as an important public entity in the community and surrounding region. We hope that this report has pulled insights from these varied experiences and this analysis provides concrete ways to act on the report's recommendations. In turn, we hope that the district's willingness to examine this data and act on the recommendations based on the findings reflects its stated commitment to its students and their families. Finally, we hope – and believe – that the district's desire to create cross-stakeholder ownership of its strengths, weaknesses, problems, and solutions through the CORRE process reflects the potential it has to move from a good school system for many students to a great school system for all students.

In this section, we offer suggestions about how further inquiries might be conducted, what certain reforms might look like, and how to sustain the collaboration and momentum generated in the CORRE process as the KCS community works to improve the education it offers its children. Taken as a whole, the report lays out areas that must be addressed to continue the Knox County Schools' progress toward becoming a "smart district."

The Annenberg Institute describes a *smart district* as one that is focused on *equity*, *results*, and *community* as its primary purposes. Emphasizing *equity* – that is, providing varying supports based on the needs of individual schools, students, and teachers – is the only way to ensure *results* for all children in all schools in a system. Emphasizing *results* – that is, expecting all children to grow up to be knowledgeable, productive, caring adults – is

the only way to ensure *equity* for all children in all schools in a system. Emphasizing *community* is the only way to develop the partnerships, resources, collective will, and shared accountability needed to achieve high levels of results and equity. In practice, focusing on equity, results, and community means performing a limited set of functions nimbly and effectively.⁷

With this in mind we offer the following recommendations for the central office.

1. Eliminate program sprawl by aligning central office resources with Knox County Schools’ vision of an effective school system.

- a. Define and communicate an academic vision and comprehensive strategy for realizing it. With the leadership and perspective of the new superintendent, build on the work already done by the district and key partners in conjunction with the School Redesign Network at Stanford University, on available data (e.g., CORRE, district surveys) and on internal and external stakeholder input to inform the vision.
- b. Build on KCS’s data capacity to create evaluation tools, develop an evaluation framework, and institute a systematic, substantive evaluation cycle for *all* programs and central office services – especially those that directly affect school-based instructional staff.
- c. Develop a uniform program evaluation calendar so that staff members know what to expect, when to expect it, and when and how their feedback will be used.
- d. Employ varied and transparent methods to measure the value of programs and services. For example:
 - ✦ Hold programs accountable for the deliverables they propose to produce.
 - ✦ Utilize multiple measures of academic success, including grades and test scores of students, to evaluate specific programs over time.
 - ✦ Use surveys to collect data about stakeholders’ satisfaction with the quality of particular programs.
 - ✦ Conduct group interviews with staff charged with implementing the programs to learn about program successes and challenges.
 - ✦ Compare programs based on both effectiveness and cost.

⁷ The Institute has identified six key central office function and practice areas for smart districts: lead for results and equity; focus on instruction; manage human capital; use data for accountability; build partnerships and community investment; and align infrastructure with vision. (See Appendix C for the Annenberg Institute’s Smart District Framework.) The recommendations are not listed in order of priority or sequence, but each can be correlated with these smart district function and practice areas.

Rationale

School districts that care about results must have central offices that focus on instruction. More specifically, this means that a central office must devote as many of the district's human and financial resources as possible to supporting the interactions that happen in schools between teachers, students, and content. This can only be accomplished when district stakeholders agree on a vision of an effective school system. At that point, the role of the district leadership and the central office is to create strategies for achieving that vision, and then to deliberately choose programs and supports with the vision and strategies in mind. Realizing this coherence between vision, strategy, program, and resource allocation can only happen when people in every stakeholder group at all levels of the district understand what the vision is, can easily articulate it, and are truly invested in its substance.

What this means for KCS

The idea of *coherence* consistently surfaced in our stakeholder interviews as something that KCS lacked. One of the most widely voiced critiques of KCS in the CORRE interviews was that it suffered from “program sprawl” and continually shifting priorities. Central office staff, teachers, principals, and community members all indicated that KCS lacked focus in its programmatic approach to teaching and learning and failed to discontinue ineffective programs and services, while continually adding new ones. Moreover, it seemed that some effective programs were underfunded because KCS spread its limited financial resources too thin. Many school-based staff expressed the feeling that dealing with the demands of so many programs simultaneously made it hard to do any of them well. During discussions of this weakness it became clear that KCS needs more focus.

Like so many other public school districts, KCS faces limited human and financial resources. If the academic achievement of all the district's children is to be raised, people, programs, vision, and strategy in all areas of the organization must be carefully coordinated. KCS is good at asking, “What works? How does that impact what we should do?” It must get equally good at asking, “What doesn't work? Who is and is not being served? What should we stop doing?”

The district must weigh the value of providing many services and supports at an average level against the value of providing a few select supports and services at a high level. This can mean hard decisions, like cutting some valuable programs and channeling all resources to the three to five initiatives best aligned with KCS's vision and strategy. KCS must also ensure that school-based staff have the time and flexibility to do their jobs effectively.

The district must build on its commitment to continuous learning and its ongoing improvement efforts by finishing its work on developing and communicating an academic vision that supports outstanding instruction. Then KCS must align the central office's time, energy, and resources with its vision.

2. Build an equitable system of supports to serve all students in Knox County Schools effectively.

- a. Conduct further study of important aspects of the equity question, including:
 - ✦ average experience and qualifications of teachers in high-need schools relative to the highest-achieving schools;
 - ✦ supports and preparation provided for teachers in schools serving student populations with specific needs;
 - ✦ the impact of parent association fundraising on overall per pupil expenditures in every school;
 - ✦ the actual impact of special programs – both district and community administered – currently in place in high-need schools.
- b. Ensure that special programs targeting the needs of specific groups of students do not operate in isolation from the rest of the district and that they are fully integrated into the district’s senior management and accountability structure.
- c. Promote transparency about how district, state, federal, and private (e.g., coupon book sales revenue) funds are allocated as a way to break down the myths about funding that keep KCS and its community members from confronting equity issues directly and ensuring that students get what they need to be successful.
- d. Look closely at the needs of a growing ELL student population and those students who have newly immigrated to the United States in order to develop specific strategies and curricular programs to meet their linguistic and cultural needs.
- e. Consider differing levels of autonomy and resource expenditure authority for different schools based on factors like school-specific issues, school performance, and experience of school leaders.

Rationale

Coherence does not necessarily imply that one size fits all. Any smart district must develop and articulate a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of all students that goes beyond necessary responses to state and federal mandates, reactions to pressure from vocal advocates, or blanket solutions that cover an entire district. Equity, in such an approach, does not mean treating all schools and students the same or simply ensuring that per pupil expenditures in dollars are equal. Rather, equity requires strategic variation in how all resources are deployed, including curricular choices, instructional supports, teachers, technology, and funding. Each school needs different types and combinations of supports to succeed that are based on the resources, strengths, and needs of its students, faculty, and community. An equitable school district is one with an approach that differentiates supports based on needs and assets. Such a district measures its success by how effectively it closes the opportunity and achievement gap for those most in need while challenging all students to do their best.

What this means for KCS

Across stakeholder groups, we heard that the educational opportunities and level of instruction available to different groups of students showed stark contrasts, seen as somehow correlated with geography, race, and socio-economic status. While there was no overwhelming agreement across groups on which students were well served and which were not, some clear realities emerged.

First, whether we look at the perceptions gathered in the CORRE process or test scores, it is clear that all KCS students are not getting what they need to succeed. Second, too many KCS stakeholders define well-served students simply in terms of the amount of money spent on them. Third, while in many cases students in inner-city Knoxville schools may actually receive a higher per pupil expenditure, due to funding from programs such as Title I and Project GRAD, test scores show that they are not getting what they need to achieve at high levels.

While not the only relevant measure of student success, this is telling. A number of possible circumstances could contribute to the problems. All students may not have teachers with the skills and preparation necessary to deal with their students' specific issues. Teachers may not have the right supports. Students may require extra instructional time to catch up or stay on grade level and currently do not have access to the extended learning opportunities needed. Some students may not have access to the AP course offerings that are the concrete manifestation of high expectations. KCS must consider new approaches to building an equitable school system that look across the district and determine how to distribute its resources to meet the needs of all students, whether they are poor, minority, recent immigrants, English language learners, or gifted.

In addition to the equity concerns that were raised by stakeholders, district staff – teachers, principals, and central office personnel – voiced the opinion that KCS needs more support from the community in the form of funding. While there may well be substance to this conviction, addressing it is both beyond the scope of this review and at least partly a matter for public discussion. Moreover, to make the case for more local public investment in education, the district first needs to ensure that it is doing everything possible to provide effective stewardship of its current budget.

3. Prioritize human capital management as one of the district's key functions in everyday practice.

- a. Separate the responsibilities of human resources operations and human capital management strategy and implementation. If these activities were separated and staffed with personnel whose skill sets were best suited to each, KCS could improve the efficiency of its human resources business transactions (such as making changes to benefits) and its responses to its toughest human capital challenges (such as recruiting and developing enough special education teachers for its urban schools).
- b. Create a senior leadership position overseeing human capital management strategy. To truly focus on human capital management year-round and prioritize it as one of the most important things central office does, there must be someone with a cabinet-level position who is responsible for the coordination of human capital management activities.
- c. Coordinate offices that affect key human capital management activities. Human capital management functions like recruitment, hiring, deployment, and evaluation and are too often disconnected from offices responsible for curriculum, professional development, finances and legal counsel – offices that create policy or do work that can have significant impact on human capital functions.
- d. Partner with external entities such as the teachers association, local higher-education institutions, and/or reform support organizations and service providers to effectively administer each element of the human capital management continuum.⁸ A district serious about managing human capital effectively must seek outside sources of expertise and build or augment key partnerships to help them fill in the capacity gaps that inevitably exist around human capital management.

Rationale

Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to a school system's success is the quality of people working in its schools and central office. In fact, research shows that the factor that has the greatest impact on students' academic success is an effective teacher. Acquiring, deploying, and developing talent are arguably the most crucial things a central office can do to support schools. These activities, known collectively as *human capital management*, impact all aspects of a district's work. Often the biggest challenge to understanding this central office function and prioritizing it is recognizing that it is not limited to the work of the human resources department.

In the CORRE process, some of the most widely articulated concerns across stakeholder groups were about principal recruitment; personnel performance evaluations; and teacher hiring, placement, transfers, and professional development. Most people associated these issues with the human resources department.

⁸ For more information on the human capital management continuum and human capital management in education, see David Sigler and Marla Ucelli Kashyap (2008).

What this means for KCS

While further inquiry into the nature of these concerns, their causes, and their connections to human resources policy and practice are warranted, KCS must understand and make clear to all stakeholders that prioritizing these and all human capital management activities goes beyond the day-to-day operations of the human resources department. It requires a coordination of all human capital management activities – not only with each other, but also with the district’s educational improvement strategy, resources, and policies.

The lack of coherence that results when these important human capital activities are not coordinated quickly becomes one of the biggest obstacles to excellence that a school district can face. KCS must reevaluate its approach to human capital management and synchronize the efforts of all departments to ensure it is done well and that it supports the district’s overall vision and strategic plan for achieving that vision.

4. Institutionalize high expectations and provide meaningful choices to lead to post-high school success.

- a. Increase access to, availability of, and information about advanced and dual-credit course offerings, as well as high-quality career and technical training, so that students can make meaningful choices, with support from their families and school staff.
- b. Build partnerships with area higher-education institutions to create interest in and build skills to navigate the transition to college and to address remediation needs before high school graduation.
- c. Strengthen existing partnerships with area employers and create new ones to increase awareness, skill building, internship, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities for students.
- d. Emphasize academic, career, and college counseling as early as middle school – especially for middle- and low-performing students and for students who are less likely to learn about career and higher-education options in their home environments.
- e. Help students and families increase their own accountability and agency by tracking where they are on the pathway to college and career in real terms – e.g., number of credits needed, grades, performance in “gatekeeping courses,” and scores from early administration of the ACT.

Rationale

A smart district recognizes that achieving equitable outcomes is built on two pillars. One is the differentiated approach to supports discussed in recommendation two, and the other is holding high expectations for all. Genuine high expectations for all students are one of the most important – and elusive – elements of a great public school system. Incorporating them into a school district’s culture means doing everything

from providing high-quality career and technical training and AP and advanced course offerings to all students, to ensuring educators speak to all students in a way that communicates high expectations and avoids assumptions about students' futures.

What this means for KCS

To its credit, the CORRE Team wanted to be sure it heard the voices of students on some of the critical issues addressed in this review, and nearly 200 students participated in group interviews. Many students reported that they do not feel challenged by their coursework or by the adults charged with supporting their learning. This was more evident in the responses of students from low-performing high schools, but was not limited to them. We also heard from some young people and adults that senior year can be more about “coasting” than addressing content gaps or preparing for college or the workforce. Across all stakeholder groups, there were comments about a group of students it was assumed would just not be going to college. At the same time, there was at least some common ground around a set of skills that are essential for all graduates.

It would be easy to allow the voices that perceive KCS to be doing fine to drown out the more diffuse voices indicating that opportunities, challenges, and expectations for students are uneven at best. But perhaps more than anything else recommended in this report, it is critical that KCS and all of its stakeholders listen to these voices and consider the implications of their message.

To rely on a demand-driven approach to where AP courses are offered, or to deploy the most guidance support to students for whom college going is a given, or even to let average students coast through senior year can all be indications that KCS still has work to do when it comes to ensuring truly high expectations all of its students. Knox County cannot afford – literally or figuratively – for its school system to send mixed messages to its students, whatever their income or achievement level. And, while acknowledging that not all students will go on to college, the district – and community – must also recognize that all individual children should be able to make their own decisions about their future, supported by the adults responsible for their education.

Livable wages are increasingly hard to come by without some form of post-secondary education or targeted training or apprenticeship. The Tennessee graduation requirements that will go into effect with the freshman class of 2010 are based on the idea that “college ready” and “work ready” require the same skills and knowledge. Taking these realities into account, KCS must reexamine what it means to hold and institutionalize high expectations and acknowledge the importance of keeping these expectations consistent across schools, families, employers, and higher education.

5. Leverage the resources and capacity of the Knox County community (universities, businesses, community groups, etc.) through more effective partnerships and advocate for the creation of a local education fund.

- a. Advocate for the conversion of the Great Schools Partnership into a local education fund (LEF) – a strong, independent, external entity that can raise public and private resources, incubate ideas and programs, add capacity to the school district, and introduce critical issues in education for the community’s consideration – to serve as its external partner in public education. Such an entity would also provide an institutional home for the interaction of high-profile civic and business organizations, as well as a grassroots base for engaging ordinary citizens – both of which are essential to building civic and school district capacity.⁹
- b. Create a KCS external partnerships office to coordinate and facilitate existing partnerships, explore the potential for new partnerships to fill district needs, and hold district partnerships accountable.
- c. Institute high-quality and meaningful partnerships that:
 - ✧ leverage community capacity to provide important teaching and learning supports that the district cannot provide on its own (either because of internal capacity issues or deliberate decisions to focus central office resources on other areas);
 - ✧ cede both authority and accountability for these supports to entities external to the school district with clear district expectations for the impact these supports will provide;
 - ✧ actively solicit the input and expertise of multiple youth-serving community entities to identify what schools, school-based staff, and students need and develop ways to meet those needs.

Rationale

To have any hope of fulfilling their goal of educating all students at high levels, mid-to large-sized school districts with large urban populations must work in partnership with the community. Young people need more than high-quality schools to be successful. They also need a web of supports and services that stretch beyond the school day. Smart districts recognize this and work to create and sustain a range of supports for young people and their families provided by schools, city agencies, community organizations, cultural institutions, and businesses. A smart district does not work with just anyone. It carefully chooses partnerships that are in line with its overall vision and that provide important supports for schools, students, and their families that are not provided by the district to the extent necessary.

⁹ Public Education Network (PEN) is a national resource for developing and supporting LEFs and there are successful LEFs from which to learn within the state and region. For information on LEFs’ missions and functions and research on their accomplishments, see, for example, http://publiceducation.org/members_about_what.asp and Simon et al., n.d.

What this means for KCS

This recommendation does not imply that KCS currently lacks partnerships with the community. In fact, there are many partnerships in place. However, in Knox County, there are substantive, untapped reservoirs of community capacity and resources that must be accessed if KCS wants to maximize its effectiveness. It is clear that recent reform efforts in KCS have led to a greater focus on the community, and efforts to improve in this area are ongoing. However, to fully access the capacity and resources available, which include an engaged business community, a robust higher-education sector willing to offer many different types of support, and a host of community organizations and cultural institutions with specialized areas of expertise, KCS must improve its own internal competence around partnering effectively.

In addition, KCS must provide for the creation of an LEF, as described in Recommendation 5a. This recommendation challenges KCS's central office to take the nature and impact of its partnerships to the next level, open itself up to unexplored partnership opportunities, and act more deliberately regarding how partnerships combine to create the web of supports and services necessary for students to succeed in school.

6. Increase accountability for education on the part of both KCS and the Knox County community by building a culture of communications and engagement.

Regarding *internal* communication, we recommend that the central office:

- a. Build on existing online resources to include predictable information requests, reporting deadlines, etc., in an easily accessible master calendar.
- b. Centralize requests for information from school staff, particularly principals, through one central office contact point to avoid conflict and redundancy.
- c. Make clear who is responsible for addressing which types of school-staff needs and put service protocols in place to assure consistency, quality, and timeliness of response.
- d. Provide systematic opportunities to get feedback from teachers and principals through meetings, advisory groups, and issue-based forums. In addition to the superintendent, key central office staff (e.g., assistant superintendents and department heads), whose coordination and collaboration greatly impact the supports provided to teachers and principals, should be present to receive the feedback.

Regarding *external* communication, we recommend that the central office:

- e. In partnership with the proposed LEF, create or contribute to forums around important public education issues that invite debate over differing perspectives and engage more diffuse stakeholder groups whose voices are not as audible as those of the business and higher-education communities.

- f. To promote both public debate and system accountability, make meaningful equity, opportunity, and performance data widely available in user-friendly formats, including the results of the inquiries suggested in Recommendation 2a, as well as data about course taking (e.g., AP courses) and test taking. Report such data by location within the county, as well as by race, ethnicity, language, immigrant status, and socio-economic status of students.

Rationale

Effective communication is the bedrock of well-functioning partnerships and relationships within and outside a school system. Smart districts develop routine and strong two-way communication with stakeholders, especially parents. They also work to build a shared understanding about district goals and priorities and communicate them beyond the central office. Smart districts promote a high level of transparency in sharing their data-informed decisions, and they organize their communication efforts with a service orientation toward principals and teachers, as well as parents and community.

What this means for KCS

When communications is cited as a concern in the performance of a school district's central office, it is often a proxy for issues that go beyond communication itself to organizational culture and relationships. KCS is no exception. In fact, as noted in the findings, the district gets some high marks from internal and external stakeholder groups for the quality and timeliness of its information provision and for efforts to use technology to make information more accessible. Yet, within the school system, CORRE findings showed that school-based staff were less sanguine than central office staff about the communications and contacts that impact their daily work.

And, even with laudable efforts to improve collaboration within areas of the central office, Annenberg Institute staff's interviews with central office staff revealed remnants of separate camps, and we encountered reluctance to speak about central office relationships in front of colleagues. Externally, while KCS cannot be solely responsible for engaging the Knox community around important issues impacting public education, it can use its wide reach and data capacity to shine a light on critical issues in ways that encourage forward thinking about how educational experiences and opportunities must change in the global society and workplace of the twenty-first century.

Moving to Action

The diverse membership of the Knox CORRE Team has shown perseverance through an extended period of superintendent transition. Throughout, the team remained determined to understand KCS's strengths and problems and open to making needed changes. Superintendent McIntyre, as the system's new leader, embraced the idea of a central office review and expressed early commitment to incorporating the learning from CORRE into his strategic direction for KCS. Hundreds of people gave their time to participate in CORRE interviews. All these are signs that KCS has the potential to be a much better system than it is – to be as great as its children and residents deserve.

Dr. McIntyre has already identified some key areas for action. Some of the necessary action steps are management prerogatives; others will be better undertaken with the collaborative team approach that has been exemplified in this review. Still others may be beyond the scope of the district's current resources and control, but deserve to be discussed, debated, and aspired to by the school board, by the county's political leadership, and by all sectors of the community. For all stakeholders in public education in Knox County, this should be the beginning of collective ownership of KCS's challenges, collective commitment to finding their solutions, and collective will for making the solutions work.

CORRE Methodology

The Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) is a group inquiry process that focuses on central office practices.

Similarities to a Comprehensive Research Study

While it is not a comprehensive research study, the CORRE shares many qualities with such studies. First, it is built around a conceptual framework. The Annenberg Institute and the CORRE Team work together to develop and reach consensus on questions to ask in individual and group interviews. Institute staff review the questions so that they reflect a central office framework that addresses crucial areas for effective central office functioning such as:

- Communicating big ideas
- Service orientation
- Data orientation
- Increasing capacity
- Brokering partnerships
- Advocating and supporting underserved students
- Addressing inequities

CORRE also uses research tools – mainly individual and group interviews – to collect data about central office practices. In developing interview questions and setting the interview schedule, the CORRE Team works extensively to help capture all the district's voices, so that the information gathered will be useful and revealing to the district. We strive for neutral wording, being careful to avoid leading language and ordering the questions carefully. Our goal is to present the questions in clear, easily understandable language.

We also adhere to the strictest research ethics when visiting classrooms, interviewing central office staff, or conducting group interviews of various stakeholders. We get the permission of everyone we speak with or observe as part of the inquiry and all responses are confidential. Notes taken are shared only among Institute staff and no one is identified in written or oral summaries of the data. Group interviews with students are conducted based on the district's standards for data collection with minors and are led by CORRE Team members adhering to those principles.

Differences

Our work differs from a comprehensive study primarily around sampling. Rather than develop our individual and group interview lists using randomized sampling or a related method, we develop them based on the collective wisdom of the members of the CORRE Team. We ask this group – again, not a statistically representative group of the district or community, but one in which many perspectives are represented – to identify the key people to talk to. In all cases our subjects are volunteers. In the case of groups such as parents,

we often have to be very opportunistic about our samples, usually finding that people tend to participate based on their availability and time to do so.

Our samples are not intended to be representative. From both the individual and group interviews, we report perceptions and then, looking across groups, we note similar themes about the role or function of central office. From those themes we build recommendations for improvement.

Basis of Credibility

CORRE's legitimacy stems from the shared criteria of the team members that are part of the process and is validated when findings are shared and the team members confirm that the findings are on target and reasonable. The Institute places a great deal of emphasis on reviewing preliminary findings with the full CORRE Team and with the district's superintendent. We believe the standards of such stakeholders provide a "public lens" that is critical to ensuring that the results of the inquiry are both legitimate and actionable.

Knox County CORRE Participants and Timeline

Appendix B

In October 2007, CORRE Team members participated in observations of elementary, middle, and high schools in Knox County Schools (KCS) to gain a shared understanding of what teaching and learning look like in the district. Following those site visits and with the Annenberg Institute’s support, the CORRE Team agreed on a set of questions designed to yield valuable perspectives about education in KCS. The CORRE Team also took the lead in developing a list of key stakeholders and stakeholder groups and key focus areas for the research.

The CORRE team facilitated and documented all group interviews of principals, teachers, students, community members, and parents. Annenberg Institute staff conducted all individual and group interviews of central office staff, school board members, union personnel, higher-education representatives, and members of the Great Schools Partnership. Figure 13 describes the characteristics of all the people who were interviewed, either individually or in a group. Individuals are not identified due to the promise of confidentiality.

Participant	TOTAL	Race/ethnicity				Gender			Type of interview	
		White	Black	Hispanic	Race/ethnicity not recorded	Male	Female	Gender not recorded	Individual	Group
Central office staff	42	38	3	1		17	25		16	26
KCS Board	9	8	1			7	2		9	
Principals	36	29	6		1	16	20			36
Union	1	1				1			1	
Teachers	100	82	7		11	13	86	1		100 (including 2 assistant principals)
Students: middle school	43	31	11	1		21	22			43
Students: high school	135	93	25	1	17	48	46	41		135
Parents	89	57	19		12	13	74	2		89
Community	57	39	12	6		28	29			57
Great Schools Partnership and higher education	22	14	7	1		10	12		12	10
TOTAL	534	392	91	10	41	174	316	44	38	496
Percentage of TOTAL	100%	73%	17%	2%	8%	33%	59%	10%	7%	93%

FIGURE 13
Characteristics of individual and group interview participants, Knox County CORRE

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

CORRE Team members and Institute site team staff facilitated and documented all of the interviews from November 2007 through March 2008. All interviewees were asked to reflect on the priorities of the district, what the central office does well and does not do well, and which groups of students are best and least well served in the district. Additionally, individuals with knowledge in particular areas (e.g., special education, human resources) were asked questions specific to their expertise. Using a template, all notes from the interviews and focus groups were coded and uploaded into a qualitative database program called NVivo, housed at the Institute, for further coding and analysis.

By March 2008, the NVivo database included about 100 coded documents. Members of the Institute site team, with support from other Institute staff, analyzed the individual and focus group interviews and developed an initial set of findings. These findings were shared with the CORRE Team in April 2008, and CORRE Team members were asked to comment. A revised set of findings was shared with the team in July 2008. Once the findings were vetted and approved by the CORRE Team, Institute staff began to build recommendations based on the findings. These recommendations take into account not only knowledge of KCS gained during CORRE, but also the Institute's experiences in other sites and expertise in districtwide improvement and reform.

CORRE Team

KCS Central Office

Elizabeth Alves, *Director of Middle Schools*

Russ Oaks, *Director for Public Affairs*

Kathy Sims, *Executive Director for Human Resources*

Robert Thomas, *Assistant Superintendent*

Donna Wright, *Assistant Superintendent*

Knox County School Board

Thomas Deakins, *Sixth District*

Knox County Education Association

Athanasios Bayiates, *President*

School Administrators

Amy Brace, *Assistant Principal, Inskip Elementary School*

Clifford Davis, *Principal, Karns High School*

Nancy Maland, *Principal, Halls Elementary School*

Donna Parker, *Principal, Gresham Middle School*

Carmelita Perry, *Principal, West View Elementary School*

Teachers

Gina Byrd, *A. L. Lotts Elementary School*

Shannon Jackson, *West High School*

Denise Neal, *Instructional Coach, Whittle Springs Middle School*

Community-Based Organizations

Jennifer Evans, *Director of Workforce Development and Education, Knoxville Chamber*

Cheryl Kershaw, *Executive Director, Great Schools Partnership*

Gary Spencer, *retired executive, automotive industry*

Loida Velazquez, *retired, University of Tennessee, community leader*

Parents

Debbie Boles, *community volunteer*

Karen Davis, *PTA representative*

Higher Education

Susan Benner, *Chair, Theory and Practice in Teacher Education, University of Tennessee*

Rosalyn Tillman, *Assistant Dean, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, Magnolia Avenue Campus*

Sharon Yarbrough, *Director, Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning, Pellissippi State Technical Community College*

CORRE Advisory Board

Karen Carson, *member, Knox County Board of Education*

Allen Edwards, *President, Pellissippi State Technical Community College*

Mike Edwards, *President and CEO, Knox Chamber*

Roy Mullins, *Deputy Superintendent, Knox County Schools*

Phyllis Nichols, *CEO, Urban League*

Bob Rider, *Dean, College of Education, University of Tennessee*

Rabbi Beth Schwartz, *Temple Bethel of Knoxville*

Mitchell Steenrod, *Senior Vice-President and CFO, Pilot Travel Centers, LLC*

Thomas Strickland, *Knox County Commissioner, First District*

Oliver Thomas, *Executive Director, Niswonger Foundation*

J. Laurens Tullock, *President, Cornerstone Foundation*

Saadia Williams, *retired, Race Relations Center*

Appendix C The Annenberg Institute’s Smart District Framework

Lead for Results and Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with all stakeholder groups to develop a vision for the district and implement a strategic plan for realizing it • Build ownership of and sustain progress toward the vision through effective internal communication • Establish a collaborative organizational culture that balances the prescription and guidance of central office with flexibility and autonomy for schools • Develop substantive leadership at all levels of the organization • Encourage and evaluate new ideas, methods, and partners to ensure the availability of the most effective supports and services for schools • Ensure a service orientation toward schools and the community
Focus on Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a common curricular framework aligned with high academic standards and assessments • Develop and implement valid and useful systems of formative and summative assessment for students • Ensure appropriate supports and interventions for all students while maintaining high expectations • Ensure extended learning opportunities and supports that facilitate learning beyond the classroom • Develop and distribute teaching and learning tools and resources effectively
Manage Human Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract talent from a variety of sources, create a diverse pipeline of quality applicants, and streamline entry into the system • Provide ongoing mentoring and support in varying levels and forms • Deploy human capital to meet the varying needs of schools and students • Evaluate the effectiveness of personnel and provide appropriate recognition and accountability • Ensure that all staff participate in high-quality professional development that is tied to evaluation and, whenever appropriate, supports instruction • Provide competitive compensation and a variety of incentives for excellence and meeting goals • Establish a career track for teachers that provides varied challenges and advancement opportunities for the most effective individuals
Use Data for Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, organize, and act on data • Monitor the student, school, and central office outcomes as well as indicators that impact those outcomes • Assist others throughout the system to analyze and use data effectively • Evaluate the effectiveness of district programs • Ensure technology and support necessary for timely and effective use of data • Promote organizational transparency to the public by consistently providing timely district performance data
Build Partnerships and Community Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broker partnerships and work with outside stakeholders to increase resources for schools and students • Collaborate with multiple sectors of the community to set district priorities and identify strategies for realizing them • Advocate for a web of community supports and coordinate partnerships to provide them • Communicate effectively externally and promote a high level of transparency • Regularly seek community input and feedback
Align Infrastructure with Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the effective, equitable, efficient, and transparent distribution of public and private resources • Ensure clean, safe, and well-maintained facilities that allow for productive learning environments • Develop and implement policies that support the instructional focus of the district while maintaining compliance with established legal and policy regulations • Develop a technology infrastructure that enables the central office and school-based staff to do their jobs efficiently • Attend to the logistical needs of students so that they arrive on time and ready to learn

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Appendix D

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Knox County Government

Knox County Schools

NAACP

Pellissippi State Technical Community College

University of Tennessee College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Urban League

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The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes in urban schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children. The Institute pursues its work through partnerships with school districts and school reform networks in collaboration with national and local organizations skilled in educational research, community organizing, policy, and effective practices. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts and communities strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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