JUST THE FACTS
Memphis, Tennessee
The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America’s greatest economic resource, its workforce.

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The National Chamber Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is dedicated to identifying and fostering public debate on emerging critical issues. We provide business and government leaders with insight and resources to address tomorrow’s challenges.
Are ALL children receiving a high-quality education in Memphis?
Not Yet.

There is an urgent need to do more to increase the supply of high-quality schools in the Memphis City School District. Memphis has a number of promising education reform initiatives underway, such as its partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement its new evaluation system, the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM). Unfortunately overall student achievement levels are low and the vast majority of Memphis students are not graduating ready for college or the workforce. There is still much more work that needs to be done to ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education, especially as the district prepares for its merger with Shelby County Schools.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memphis at a Glance²</th>
<th>Memphis City Schools</th>
<th>Unified School District (Memphis City + Shelby County Schools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>149,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the state received a No Child Left Behind Waiver?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race to the Top grant recipient</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How is Memphis City Schools (MCS) failing its students and Tennessee?

Tennessee needs more educated workers to fill high-skill jobs.

- 81% of jobs in Tennessee require a career certificate or degree, but only 32% of adults in the state currently have these qualifications.
- Even though high school graduation rates have been improving, Tennessee’s educational pipeline productivity ranks low: Only 19 of 100 ninth graders eventually graduate from college within 150% of their normal degree time.
- Only 56% students from Tennessee who enroll in a four-year public college or university will graduate from a four-year college within six years.
- 45% of Tennessee public college freshman were required to take at least one remedial or developmental course. 73% of students entering community colleges require remediation. 81% of low-income students require remediation.

Not enough MCS students are graduating from high school prepared for college or the workforce.

- Only 73% of MCS students graduated on time in the class of 2011, compared to 85% of all students in the state.
- 40% of MCS students from the class of 2010 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college immediately following graduation. Statewide, 62% entered college.
- As of 2010, only 16% of MCS 2004 graduates have earned a college degree.

Most MCS students fail to meet state standards for proficiency in reading and math and too many attend substandard schools.

- As Tennessee prepares to complete the implementation of college- and career-ready standards and aligned assessments, most students in MCS schools are not proficient in reading and math. In 2012, only 28% of MCS students in grades 3–8 are proficient or advanced in math, compared to 47% statewide; 29% of students in grades 3–8 are proficient or advanced in reading, compared to 50% statewide.
- Only 20% of economically disadvantaged MCS students are proficient or advanced in math, and 21% in reading.
- Out of 83 of the lowest performing “priority” schools in the state, 69 are located in MCS, roughly one third of the total number of schools in the district.
• As a result of low student achievement, from 2009-2011 MCS was rated “F” in most subjects tested on the Tennessee State Report Card.  
• Tennessee’s measure of college readiness, the ACT College Readiness Benchmark, shows that only 15% of all Tennessee high school students are meeting college readiness standards in English, mathematics, reading, and science. The college readiness rate is even lower for MCS—5%, and is only 2% for disadvantaged students in the Unified School District.

2012 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MCS</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is MCS doing to improve schools and prepare students to meet college- and career-ready standards?

Implementing State Standards and Assessments Aligned to College- and Career-Ready Standards

In 2009, Tennessee’s academic standards and graduation requirements were revised to better prepare students for college- and career-readiness. The state is in the process of implementing revised standards aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Transition to the new Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP) Academic Standards is expected to be complete in all local school districts by the 2013–14 school year.

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✓ State has adopted Common Core Standards in reading and math.
✓ State has engaged in a public awareness campaign. As standards have increased, test scores have gone down. To explain the importance of higher standards, Tennessee has partnered with business, community, and education organizations that support high standards to educate the public and prepare students and parents for the changes.
✓ State and district are supporting implementation of new standards. Tennessee has begun training for K–2 teachers since the new standards were adopted in those grades first. The state has created a “Leadership Cabinet,” comprised of district leaders, which will oversee the design of teacher training and communication across the state.
✓ State is implementing assessments aligned to CCSS. Tennessee plans to administer the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment aligned to the CCSS starting in 2014–15. New, online assessments will be administered four times a year in grades 3–8 in reading and math. Annual science assessments will be administered after key courses.
Memphis, Tennessee

What to Watch:

- Implementation of a curriculum aligned to new standards. While the state plays an important role in the implementation of the new TDP standards, MCS, as part of the new unified school district, will need to implement curriculum and instruction to the new standards.

Holding all schools accountable for meeting state standards

Tennessee and MCS have an accountability structure in place that is designed to recognize results and provide interventions to turnaround struggling schools, focusing on achievement gains and narrowing achievement gaps.

The lowest performing Priority schools in Memphis have become a part of a state-administered Achievement School District (ASD), which currently oversees five campuses in Memphis. Although the schools are physically located in Memphis, they will be run as part of an entirely different school district. By 2014–15 40% of the lowest performing schools in the state will be converted to charters or directly run by the Achievement School District.\(^9\)

- State and district have consequences for low-performing schools. All districts that fail to meet state-established achievement goals will have consequences, but the state limits intervention to the lowest-performing 15% of schools. The lowest-performing schools will become part of the state administered Achievement School District.\(^10\)

- State and district have high achievement goals. Tennessee is expecting its districts to increase the number of students who are proficient or advanced by 20% over five years and close achievement gaps by 50% over eight years. The Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a measure of growth in performance from one year to the next on state tests and is also used in evaluating school progress.\(^11\)

Accountability for all students. Tennessee will report and base accountability decisions on the achievement of all students, and key subgroups of students, including economically disadvantaged students.

Tennessee’s New Accountability System for Schools

\(~\text{Priority} – \text{Bottom 5\% of schools in proficiency/graduation rates}~\)

\(~\text{Focus} – \text{10\% of schools with largest achievement gaps (between within-school sub-groups; persistent underperformance of a subgroup(s); low grad rates but not “priority”)}~\)

\(~\text{Reward} – \text{10\% total with top 5\% “highest performing” and top 5\% “highest progress” schools}~\)

Other 75%

What to Watch:

- State and district provide transparent information about school performance. The state needs to revise its report card to reflect its new accountability system, and the Unified School District will need to ensure it provides transparent data.

- The new Memphis school district will need to follow through with consequences to make accountability meaningful. How will the district ensure that appropriate interventions are implemented in failing schools?
Improving teacher effectiveness

Memphis City Schools are on the leading edge of teacher compensation and evaluation policy, thanks to a major partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2009, the Gates Foundation selected Memphis City Schools to be one of six sites participating in the Gates Foundation’s Measures of Effective Teaching project, which aims to identify and develop effective teachers.

As a result of the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative, the city has been implementing the Teacher Effectiveness Model (TEM). In addition, The New Teacher Project has brought about significant changes in teacher hiring practices in the city’s lowest performing schools and manages teacher recruitment for MCS. Teach for America (TFA) in Memphis has been the highest-performing TFA region for the past two years.

Teachers can be dismissed for ineffectiveness in the classroom. Teachers who receive evaluations demonstrating an overall performance level that is “below expectations” or “significantly below expectations” can be dismissed. Tenured teachers who receive two consecutive years of “below expectations” or “significantly below expectations” will lose their tenure and return to probationary status.

All teachers in the district are evaluated on student results. Thirty-five percent of a teacher’s evaluation is based on Tennessee Value Added Assessment System data, which measures individual student growth, and an additional 15% is tied to student achievement data.

Personnel decisions in the district are required to be tied to teacher performance.

MCS pays teachers for effective teaching.

MCS provides compensation for teachers who teach in high-needs schools or shortage area subjects. Teachers working in “striving schools zone” schools are paid on a higher salary schedule. “striving school zone” schools are low-performing schools that are receiving certain targeted resources for turn around efforts.

What to Watch:

- Teacher evaluation after the merger. Shelby County has implemented the state’s Tennessee Education Acceleration Model (TEAM). The Transition Planning Commission has recommended that both models remain in place for two years to determine which model is working best for the Unified School District.

- Principals lack autonomy to make school staffing decisions. Instead of making hiring decisions based on the needs of students, principals have limited discretion on staffing and are required to interview teachers based on seniority.

- Improved student achievement. When it comes to policy on the books, MCS has real potential on the teacher effectiveness front but it has a long way to go to raise student achievement and school performance district wide.
What options are available for parents who want something better for their child?

Public school choice and charter schools

While MCS does not offer open enrollment, the district has the highest concentration of charter schools in the state. More than 43,000 students were eligible to transfer to another school under federal school choice requirements during the 2010–11 school year. However, fewer than 2,000 students attended a school of choice under those provisions.

Tennessee does not have a “parent trigger” take over option for low-performing schools. However, parents can vote to keep a low-performing school within the ASD at the end of its five years in the ASD and not return it to the control of its local school district.

✓ MCS has a high concentration of charter schools. While charters are growing in MCS, the state only permits local school boards to authorize charter schools, in addition to the Achievement School District.

Who is running Memphis City Schools?

Shelby County Board of Education (SCBE)

• In anticipation of the merged school districts, the Memphis City Schools Board of Education has merged with Shelby County Board of Education. Until the merger is finalized in 2013, there are a total of 23 school board members governing the two school districts, who are each continuing to function separately. When the merger is complete, the board will be reduced to seven members; these members were elected in August 2012.

• The Shelby County Board of Education has been charged with the implementation of a comprehensive transition plan being developed by the Transition Planning Commission (TPC). SCBE is also beginning the process of searching for a new superintendent for the unified district. For current information on the transition, see: www.scsboard.org.

How to get involved:

Contact the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce to connect to organizations that are working for change in Memphis:

www.memphischamber.com
Endnotes

1. Memphis City and Shelby County school districts will be merging in August 2013. Until then, the districts are being governed jointly as separate districts. For purposes of this fact sheet, the merged school district is called the Unified School District.


5. Ibid

6. Ibid


12. Ibid


15. Ibid


17. Ibid


