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## The 111th General Assembly Addresses Education Issues Amid Revenue Shortfall

The Tennessee General Assembly adjourned in March after making adjustments to the state budget due to the pandemic. On June 1 state legislators returned to Nashville to revisit the state budget based on much lower than expected revenues, and to continue work on other legislation. Across the state communities are facing their own budgetary issues due to decreased sales tax revenues. Nashville has been particularly hard hit, with a 46% decrease in consumer spending since Covid-19 was first reported in our state. This decrease is greater than any other US city during the same time period.

Governor Lee, Lieutenant Governor McNally, and the Senate want all legislative action in this June session to be focused on the budget shortfall and the pandemic. The House leadership has taken up these issues as well, but wants to expand their work beyond the budget and Covid-19.

### Funding for K-12 Education Remains in the Budget

While the Governor's office has asked for an across the board 12% budget cut from all departments, **Governor Lee remains committed to K-12 education and will not allow the funding the state provides for schools to be reduced.** Tennessee ranks 45th when compared to other states in per pupil expenditure. However, the last two administrations have consistently raised the state's spending for K-12 education. The Lee administration has continued this trend, and in each of the last two budgets Governor Lee has increased funding for education. Other budget items:

- The Basic Education Program (BEP), the funding formula for K-12 education, will see a \$50 million increase over last year's amount. As of this writing, there has been no discussion to cut this increase.
- Cut from the budget was the proposed raise for teachers. Originally, the Governor's budget proposal included a 4% teacher raise. As statewide sales tax revenues fell, in March the legislature cut the raise to 2%. Now facing a one billion dollar shortfall, the 2% pay increase was eliminated.
- Most of the funding for the ESA (Educational Savings Account) program, the Governor's voucher plan, will be cut. The amount of this decrease has not yet been finalized.

ArtsEd Tennessee will closely follow legislative deliberations for the remainder of this session, and will keep you informed as things continue to develop. We anticipate this session will end within the next 7 to 10 days, when the state budget is finalized and key legislation has been addressed.



## Governor Lee Signs Joint Resolution 759 Supporting Arts Education

ArtsEd Tennessee is pleased to announce our coalition's resolution in support of arts education for all Tennessee students has unanimously passed both the House and Senate, and was signed by Governor Lee on March 17. In Joint Resolution 759, which can be seen [HERE](#), the 111th General Assembly joins ArtsEdTN in recognizing the arts as an essential element of a complete education, and a vitally important component of the curriculum in the state's schools. **The resolution establishes September 13-19, 2020, as "Arts in Education Week" in Tennessee.**

The primary work writing the resolution was done by one of the founding members of the ArtsEdTN coalition, Laurie Schell. The resolution was sponsored in the House by Rep. Terri Lynn Weaver (R, Lancaster); the Senate sponsors were Sen. Steven Dickerson (R, Nashville), Sen. Becky Massey (R, Knoxville), and Sen. Dolores Gresham (R, Somerville). We encourage everyone to send an email thanking these legislators for their support of the resolution and arts education. Their email addresses are:

rep.terri.lynn.weaver@capitol.tn.gov  
sen.steven.dickerson@capitol.tn.gov  
sen.becky.massey@capitol.tn.gov  
sen.dolores.gresham@capitol.tn.gov

**This is the first time in the history of our state that such a resolution in support of arts education has been passed by the General Assembly,** and is the result of legislative efforts by the ArtsEdTN coalition. This resolution is a further demonstration of the strength the unified arts education community has when we work together across all content areas and geographic regions to achieve our goals.

## BEP? MOE? School Funding Explained

Many educators are confused about how school funding actually works, and for good reason – it can be complicated. However, with a better understanding of how state and local money is allocated to your school, you will be more equipped to advocate for your program.

### Basic Education Program (BEP)

The Basic Education Program is the funding formula that the state uses to distribute education dollars to Tennessee schools. It is the amount of money the state defines as sufficient to provide a basic level of education in four major components: instruction, benefits, classroom and non-classroom. The driver of funds granted by the BEP is a school's student enrollment, or average daily membership (ADM).

Key to understanding the BEP is realizing that it is **a funding formula and not a spending plan.** For example, if a school system receives \$100,000 for the classroom supplies component, the district is not forced to spend that money on supplies, but could put it toward whatever is deemed most beneficial to the system, such as teacher salaries or classroom-related travel. This provides each school system greater latitude to determine how best to use BEP funds.

While such spending flexibility can be an advantage to local school systems by allowing education dollars to be used where most needed, it also carries the risk of creating inequities for students. The BEP includes money for elementary music and visual art specialists, but not all elementary schools in Tennessee use these funds for those positions. Only through local and state level advocacy can we ensure all students have equal access to the arts.

### Maintenance of Effort in Education Funding (MOE)

The MOE law requires the local governing body to allocate at least an equal amount for education as was provided the previous year. County commissioners, city councils, and special school districts **must budget no less than the same total dollars per pupil for schools as was allocated in the previous year to comply with the MOE law.** In addition to the MOE laws for education, there are also MOE laws for county law enforcement, libraries, highways, and election commissions.

If a local budget does not meet MOE requirements for education spending, the Department of Education can withhold state BEP funds until the local funding body passes a budget that is in compliance.

This information is provided as a brief overview, and not an extensive explanation. If you would like to have more depth on BEP or MOE, we encourage you to search these and other related topics [HERE](#).

## Call to Action

**U.S. Congress:** National Association for Music Education, NAMM Foundation, and other arts education affiliates urge us to reach out to our members of Congress to request \$200 billion in the next legislative relief package to backfill state education budgets.

Congress must appropriate at least \$200 billion specifically for education for states to avoid drastic negative consequences. **Without this funding, music and arts programs will be jeopardized, and students will not have the access to a well-rounded education that they need and deserve.**

Click [HERE](#) to make your voice heard.

## The Coming School Year

As school leaders across the state make plans for reopening, discussions in most school districts are centered around three general possibilities:

1. Students and faculty will return to school with social distancing guidelines, and revised scheduling that will limit the number of students in classes at any given time
2. Classes will be taught via a virtual learning platform
3. A hybrid plan would be implemented, utilizing some form of both on-site and virtual instruction

Many school systems are currently examining all three as very real possibilities and are developing strategies for each option.

### What You Can Do

Since visual and performing arts education programs vary greatly in staffing, facilities, class size, and more, a one size fits all approach to arts course program delivery will not work statewide. You are the expert in your content area, and you are best equipped to formulate the plan forward that will work for your students with the resources you have available. When administrative discussions begin on school opening plans, make sure you are at the table and your voice is heard.

### Be Solutions Oriented

Quite likely, your administration will welcome your input when it comes to your program, so be prepared with a workable solution. Things to consider as you plan:

- Consult your state and national professional organizations for potential strategies and solutions. Work with your colleagues in your district to create a plan that will work best for your students.
- Let your administrators and local elected officials know that planning for school re-opening must include arts education – the heart and soul of student learning.
- Seize this moment to re-invent your program. Anne Fennell, the national chair for the NAME Innovations Council says, "Let me be perfectly clear when I say that an individual's growth can only be beneficial to music education programs and ensembles. I have never heard of an ensemble weaken because its members were independent and confident learners. In fact, I can only imagine exponential growth with this." The same is true for all arts disciplines.

With the proper mindset and planning, you will emerge from this a more creative teacher, and your students and program will be the ultimate beneficiaries of your growth.

Stephen Coleman  
Director, ArtsEd Tennessee

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Click [HERE](#) to find your legislator.

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