



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
9<sup>th</sup> FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER  
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR

**KEVIN HUFFMAN**  
COMMISSIONER

October 1, 2014

Dr. Mike Looney  
Director of Schools  
Williamson County Schools  
1320 West Main Street, Suite 202  
Franklin, TN 37064-3700

Dear Dr. Looney,

Thank you for your letter dated September 12, 2014. Williamson County Schools (WCS) has a strong record of achievement in this state and I commend you and your staff for the tremendous work to improve student outcomes in your community. Your success serves as a model for the rest of the state in proving both high achievement and strong growth can take place in each of Tennessee's school districts.

Your letter asked me to consider a number of requests to assist WCS with the delivery of its services to students. Below, I have addressed each request individually:

1. *We request permission to develop independent rigorous local standards meeting or exceeding Tennessee curriculum expectations and aligned to state assessments.*

The state's academic standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in multiple subject areas, establish a set of expectations for learning and represent a baseline or minimum requirement from which local school districts operate. Districts, of course, then have the authority and responsibility to develop their own curriculum, shape instruction, and select textbooks and other instructional materials. Although WCS must ensure the state's minimum standards are met, you have the flexibility to determine how to structure your work and certainly are welcome to operate in a manner that exceeds the minimum requirements set by the state.

2. *We request permission to make local adjustments to the school calendar. This would include daily, monthly, and annual school schedules and calendars based on local needs relating to parent conferences, seat time requirements, activity requirements and length of school day, professional development, and inclement weather day management.*

We are certainly open to further discussions on this request; however, additional information is needed. As you know, Tennessee law requires a minimum of 180 student instructional days with a minimum of six and one-half (6 ½) hours of instruction per day. It is assumed your request would maintain the minimum instructional times; however, this is not clear. In addition, more information is needed to determine what specific relief you are requesting relative to parent conferences, activity requirements, professional development and inclement weather day management.

3. *We request streamlined approval of school/district improvement plans and Federal Program plans to include any related amendments.*

This request is approved.

4. *We request permission to manage the improvement process of the district's single "Focus School" (Fairview Middle School) without external oversight and support.*

Based on WCS' strong record of achievement and achievement growth, this request is approved for the 2014-15 school year.

5. *We request the authority to grant teachers tenure at the end of their fifth year of employment with or without consideration of TVAAS data.*

The reform of Tennessee's teacher tenure law in 2011 helped solidify Tennessee at the forefront of education reform in the country and was the end product of the work of many education stakeholders in Tennessee, including boards of education and directors of schools. The key component of this reform was to associate tenure with performance that exceeds expectations and to include, for the first time, student achievement as part of the equation.

It's important to note, at most, TVAAS data accounts for 35 percent of a teacher's overall evaluation and it's the overall evaluation score that factors into tenure decisions. Furthermore, nothing in the teacher tenure law or the teacher evaluation law mandates any particular personnel decision to local school districts. To the contrary – while the former tenure law forced any eligible teacher not receiving tenure to be dismissed, today's law permits a local school district to employ a non-tenured teacher indefinitely. In other words, while the law does prohibit a school district from granting tenure to teachers not meeting the requisite evaluation scores, it does not prevent you, as a director of schools, from continuing to make your own decisions about how to utilize the evaluation to inform your decisions.

For these reasons, this request is denied.

I commend you for your continued efforts to seek relief from state requirements you believe are impeding your ability to serve your students in the most efficient and high quality manner. The department looks forward to partnering with WCS to provide flexibility where possible and hopes to learn from your related work to assist other districts throughout the state.

Sincerely,



Kevin Huffman

Mike Looney, Ed.D., Superintendent  
1320 West Main Street, Suite 202  
Franklin, Tennessee 37064-3700  
Phone (615) 472-4000  
Fax (615) 595-4943



September 12, 2014

Commissioner Kevin Huffman  
State of Tennessee  
Department of Education  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Andrew Johnson Tower, 9th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Commissioner Huffman:

Pursuant to our conversation, please consider this letter as an official request of relief in accordance with your statutory authority to waive rules, regulations, and laws impeding Williamson County Schools' service delivery as a High Performing School District.

1. We request permission to develop independent rigorous local standards meeting or exceeding Tennessee curriculum expectations and aligned to state assessments.
2. We request permission to make local adjustments to the school calendar. This would include daily, monthly, and annual school schedules and calendars based on local needs relating to parent conferences, seat time requirements, activity requirements and length of school day, professional development, and inclement weather day management.
3. We request streamlined approval of school/district improvement plans and Federal Program plans to include any related amendments.
4. We request permission to manage the improvement process of the district's single "Focus School" (Fairview Middle School) without external oversight and support.
5. We request the authority to grant teachers tenure at the end of their fifth year of employment with or without consideration of TVAAS data.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Looney", is written over a white rectangular background.

Mike Looney, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Williamson County Schools