Identification of the Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools Policy

The Background:

Tennessee aligned its state accountability model to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability model that was authorized under President Bush's administration. Through the grant requirements in the Race to the Top, State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and Title I School Improvement Grants, the Obama administration has changed the definition and approach to the nation's most struggling schools. These grants are primarily funded with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds and brought significant funds to the State of Tennessee.

Under the NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model, some schools that are consistently struggling were not identified to receive the most rigorous interventions. This is because NCLB AYP contains safe harbor and other provisions which allow schools to show improvement but still have very low achievement. President Obama and Secretary Duncan want to address this inconsistency in the current NCLB accountability model. To do this, they have defined the most struggling schools as "persistently lowest-achieving" in the current Race to the Top and school improvement grant programs. In 2011, the President and Secretary will likely refocus our efforts on the "persistently lowest-achieving" schools by including this new definition in their proposals for the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Two "tiers" of low achieving schools compose the persistently lowest-achieving schools.

- **Tier 1 –** Any Title I high priority school (a Title I school in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring as defined in ESEA) that is either in the lowest five percent of all Title I high priority schools in the ALL subgroup for math and reading/language arts combined achievement or is a Title I secondary school (defined as a high school in TN) with a graduation rate of less than 60% (for two out of the last three years).

- **Tier 2 –** Any Title I secondary school eligible but not "served" by Title I that is either in the lowest five percent of these schools in the ALL subgroup for math and reading/language arts combined achievement or has a graduation rate of less than 60% (for two out of the last three years).

Tier 1 and Tier 2 are considered to be the State's "persistently lowest-achieving" schools and should be prioritized for rigorous interventions and resources.

This new categorization of persistently lowest-achieving (i.e. Tier 1 and Tier 2) does not always conform to the old AYP statuses of school improvement 1 and 2, corrective action, and restructuring in our state/NCLB accountability system. States applying for Title I School Improvement Funds and other federal funds must specifically define the criteria used to identify the state's "persistently lowest-achieving schools".

The one change from the prior definition is the deletion of the multiplier for a lack of progress:

7) If a school has failed adequate yearly progress (AYP) 6 years or more, the combined rank index is multiplied times 6 (lack of progress factor) for the final rank index.

This specific lack of progress factor is deleted because it heavily weights the current AYP system and we expect that the current AYP system to change with the reauthorization of ESEA.

The Master Plan Connection:

This item supports the Board's *Master Plan* of effective school leaders, effective teachers, and rigorous, relevant curriculum, and resources sufficient to achieve the vision.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends adoption of the policy on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

Policy on the Identification of Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools

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The State of Tennessee has the following process for identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools, referred to as Tier 1 and Tier 2 schools. The lowest-achieving five percent is calculated by the numerical rank within each pool of schools (Title I high priority schools and Title I eligible but not served high schools). The numerical rank index is determined based upon the following series of calculations:

1) The current year math score for all students is ranked by sorting schools from highest to lowest math percent proficient and advanced;

2) The current year reading/language arts score for all students is ranked by sorting schools from highest to lowest reading/language arts percent proficient and advanced;

3) The math and reading/language arts ranks are summed for current year rank index;

4) Two prior years are ranked using the same method;

5) Two prior year ranks are averaged for prior years rank index;

6) Current year rank index and prior years rank index are summed to create the combined rank index;

7) Lastly, five percent of schools with the highest numerical final rank index are identified.

Notes: High priority schools are defined as schools with an improvement status or those in improvement, corrective action, or any form of restructuring as specified in ESEA. Elementary and secondary schools are weighted equally. For schools serving both grade spans, high school achievement data is used. Secondary schools are defined as high schools.