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MEMORANDUM

TO: TACIR Commission Members

FROM: Harry A. Green
           Executive Director

DATE: September 8, 2011

SUBJECT: Online Access to the Public Infrastructure Needs Inventory

At the June commission meeting, interest was expressed in learning more about staff efforts to make information from the Public Infrastructure Needs Inventory accessible to the public via the TACIR web page.   The June 2011 report, *Building Tennessee's Tomorrow*, included the following statement of intent:

> *Improvements in the technological infrastructure of the inventory itself have set the stage for future efforts to make the inventory more accessible and useful to state and local policy makers and to researchers.   Plans include making it possible for anyone with an interest to easily access information about and compare the infrastructure needs of cities, counties, and regions.*

Our plans include three major initiatives, some of which will require more time and resources than others.

Step 1. Provide direct access by local officials to the items in the inventory, including the ability to add and update them.

This will begin with the July 2011 inventory. Inventory forms, including those for existing needs and for submitting new needs, will be made accessible to local officials who wish to review or complete the forms on their own. Development district staff will advise our office of the individuals who desire access, and our staff will set up the accounts they will need to do that.   The system in place for use by the development districts is adequate to ensure security of the information local officials wish to submit. Instructions are available in electronic form, and both development district and TACIR staff are accessible via SharePoint, Microsoft's on-line document sharing and collaboration tool.

Development district staff will remain responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the information at the direction of TACIR staff.

Step 2. Provide access by the general public to summary information from the inventory.

Initially, this form of access will be limited to downloading information in the report appendices in spreadsheet or database form. Staff will have these documents posted by early November. Thereafter, they will be made available when the annual report is published. Within the next year, a web page that will allow users to choose which types of infrastructure needs and which locations they are interested in will be added. Information available will be at the summary level currently provided in the annual report. Functions will include the ability to compare the needs of various locations based on population and land area.

Step 3. Provide the ability to select and compare the infrastructure needs of peer cities and counties.

This more sophisticated functionality is a long-term goal. The model is the U.S. Department of Education's *Public School District Finance Peer Search*, created by the National Center for Education Statistics (see attachments). Several experimental methods for identifying peer counties have been developed by TACIR staff, including spreadsheet-based, rudimentary methods of customizing peer selection based on characteristics that include population data, land area, economic data, tax base data, and so on. All of this data is readily accessible and readily updated. Most of it is found in TACIR's county profiles. Developing peer comparisons for cities is more challenging because less current data is available. Consequently, county peer data access will be provided first.

As noted at the June meeting, TACIR currently has sufficient resources to accomplish at least the first two steps outlined here. Both will be built on existing systems. No new technology will be required, although Step 2 may require some limited programming, which is something that will require contracting through the state's Office for Information Resources. We do this routinely as necessary to keep the current online inventory system up to date. Step 3 will require a development plan. Staff will begin working on the plan after steps 1 and 2 are completed.

How to use the Peer Search tool

What is the Peer Tool for?

The peer tool is intended to compare the financial and demographic characteristics of a single school district with a set of its peers. It displays the information in graphical format in the form of bar charts and pie charts as well as in numeric format. It is intended for simple research and comparisons.

How Does it Choose Peers?

When peers are selected automatically, the peer search tool selects peer districts based on five variables: district type, locale, total enrollment, student/teacher ratio, and the percentage of children in poverty. Peers must be of the same district type and locale. Each of the continuous variables (enrollment, s/t ratio and poverty) are assigned a weight based on the difference of each district's value from the average value and divided by the standard deviation of the variable, or:

weight = (1 + ABS(district value – mean(all values))) / std dev(all values)

All districts in the database are ranked by the sum of these three weights. Peers are the districts with a combined weight closest to the combined weight of the focus district.

The effect of this process is to select peers based on the outstanding characteristic of the district: extremely large districts will be assigned peers based primarily on enrollment, whereas extremely poor schools will be assigned peers based primarily on their poverty level.

What if I Just Want to See My District?

The peer search will always show the values for the district on which you are searching. Enter your district name, hit "search" and take a look at the values. Keep in mind, however, that the data for a single district are not enough to give you a picture of that district's finances or status. A comparison to other districts is necessary to put the values into some context.

How Do I Choose Peers Based on Something Else?

To select your own criteria for peers, select the radio button "Manually". You will then have an opportunity to select multiple school districts for comparison.

Close

ies NATIONAL CENTER FOR
EDUCATION STATISTICS

Education Finance Statistics Center (EDFIN)
Financial Information on public elementary/secondary education

Public School District Finance Peer Search
How to Use Peer Tool | About the Data | School & District Glossary

This application can be used to compare a school district with other districts (peers). Peers can be selected automatically or manually. To start, enter your search criteria below. Click here for more information.

District Search new search

District Name: [   ]

State: [------- Select A State ------- ▾]   Zip Code: [   ]   Distance From Zip: [1 mile ▾]

Select Peers: Automatically ⦿   Manually ○

Peers To Return: [10 ▾]

[Search]

Advanced Search

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Use this form to search for and display information about a group of school districts based on any criteria from the drop-down selections below

General

Criteria	Value
? State:	------- Select A State -------
? Zip Code:	Distance From Zip: 1 mile

School Year 2007-2008 Revenues

Criteria	Value	
? Total Revenue:		In Thousands
? Percent Revenue from Federal Sources:		As Percent of Total Revenue
? Percent Revenue from Local Sources:		As Percent of Total Revenue
? Percent Revenue from State Sources:		As Percent of Total Revenue

School Year 2007-2008 Expenditures

Criteria	Value	
? Total Current Expenditures:		In Thousands
? Instructional Expenditures:		In Thousands
? Student and Staff Support:		In Thousands
? Administrative Expenditures:		In Thousands
? Operations, Food Service and Other:		In Thousands

School Year 2007-2008 Other Expenditures

Criteria	Value	
? Total Expenditures:		In Thousands
? Total Capital Outlay:		In Thousands
? Construction:		In Thousands
? Total Non El-Sec Education and Other:		In Thousands
? Interest On Debt:		In Thousands

School Year 2007-2008 Characteristics

Criteria	Value
? Total Schools:	
? Total Students (Non-Fiscal):	
? Classroom Teachers (FTE):	
? Student Teacher Ratio:	
? Summer Migrant Students:	
? Percent English Language Learners (ELL):	

School Year 2007-2008 Other Characteristics

Criteria	Value	
? Grade Span:	Lowest Grade	Highest Grade
? District Type:		

? District Locale/Code: [   ] [..]
? Percent Kids In Poverty (Calendar Year 2008):   [   ] [..]

[Submit]   [Reset]