

TN taps new pipeline for top teachers

Students in the state's worst schools will find themselves led by teachers who didn't graduate with education degrees.

Instead, Tennessee education leaders plan to invest \$10 million on two national programs that recruit the brightest graduates in other fields, put them through intensive training and send them into classrooms — where they typically outperform peers who took the traditional route.

In its successful Race to the Top grant application, the state promised to build a pipeline to produce great teachers, said Chris Barbic, hired to head the Achievement School District and turn around Tennessee's lowest performers. It will use money from the \$501 million federal grant to hire up to 580 teachers from nonprofits Teach for America and the New Teacher Project, which will split the contract.

"Obviously, we want great teachers in schools that need them the most, and that is the mission of both of those organizations," Barbic said. "The single most important factor in every school is a great school leader and great staff, and we believe both organizations create a good pipeline for great people."

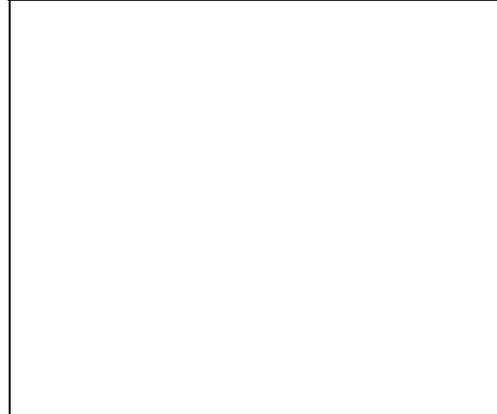
Barbic and Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman are Teach for America alums, and Huffman came to Tennessee from being the organization's spokesman. The contract with both nonprofits was set before either took their jobs, but some veteran teachers are frustrated with the suggestion that they're not doing their jobs well enough.

"I'm really tired of working very, very hard, with relative success, and yet being told I'm insufficient in some way," said Nashville School of Arts English teacher Sheri Johnson, who has taught for 27 years. "It feels like every three days, there is some perception that what teachers are doing is incorrect."

The Tennessee Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, has heard a few complaints, mostly out of Memphis. There, the district laid off teachers while recruiting new ones from the nonprofits, said union President Gera Summerford.

"In general, there is a concern among

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professional educators that what really helps schools is stability and connection with the community," she said.

Some fear those alternatively licensed teachers — who didn't always want to be teachers — may not have a sense of commitment and leave after the two-year contracts they sign are up. The news about the contract comes in addition to a new evaluation system some teachers feel is too subjective and threatens their tenure and potential changes to salary schedules and class sizes.

Non-education majors popular

The federal grant has placed 330 of the non-traditionally licensed teachers into the state's largest two school districts — Memphis and Nashville — this school year, with plans for them to fill vacancies and replace ineffective teachers within the state's lowest 5 percent of schools. They're also going to Achievement School District schools, which are expected to number 35 by 2014-15.

Other states are following suit. North Carolina will spend \$7.3 million to expand Teach for America teachers from 395 to 550 over four years. Georgia dedicated \$9 million to the New Teacher Project and \$15.6 million to Teach for America. It's all Race to the Top funds being used to pump teachers into Atlanta City schools and six other districts.

"The main reason for the state choosing to partner with (them) is based upon their

level of experience and success," said Jon Rogers, Georgia's Race to the Top communications director.

The results of hiring those teachers are apparent in Nashville. At Cane Ridge High School, only 16 percent of students tested on grade level in algebra in 2009-10.

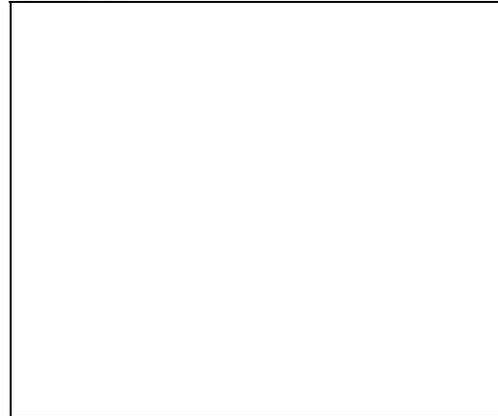
The school hired Teach for America corps members, which now make up the school's entire ninth grade algebra department. More than half of Cane Ridge students tested on grade level in algebra in 2010-11.

One of those corps members, Cari Turner, 24, almost didn't become a teacher.

The economics and business graduate — who earned nearly a 4.0 grade point average from Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa. — figured out her junior year that she was supposed to be teaching.

"My parents are employed at a private school for underprivileged children," she

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said. "Being raised and seeing the achievement gap, I knew I wanted to go into the classroom. I think all students deserve a good education and an effective teacher."

A Teach for America recruiter on her campus signed her up and, after a summer of training in Atlanta, Turner had her alternative teacher certification and a Cane Ridge classroom full of freshman algebra students. She has a personal mentor who observes her once a month to offer constructive criticism and whom she calls about every week for support.

Among 46,000 Teach for America applicants this year, the national organization selected 12 percent — those with the highest grades, who also held leadership positions in college.

Corps members in Nashville, Cheatham County, Rutherford County and Lebanon Special School District average a 3.64 college grade point average and 29 ACT score, according to Teach for America Nashville.

The state's 2010 scorecard on teacher training showed students in Teach for America corps members' classrooms posted higher learning gains than their peers in classrooms led by most traditional education program graduates. Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education was the exception.

Trying to raise classroom standards

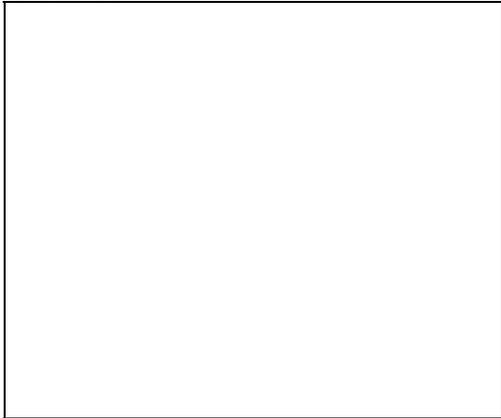
The New Teacher Project, founded by former D.C. Chancellor Michelle Rhee — Huffman's ex-wife and also a Teach for America alum — was first to launch in Tennessee. It has trained 268 teachers in Memphis since opening there in 2007 and 245 teachers in Nashville since opening here in 2009.

States are feeling pressure to compete against high-achieving international students, and have received millions to drastically improve public schools, said Sandi Jacobs, vice president for the National Council for Teacher Quality. That, along with the need to fill voids in math, science and foreign language classrooms, are making the nonprofits appealing.

"It's not just knowing you are getting a good group in, but knowing they are willing to go to more challenged environments," Jacobs said.

Her group said Tennessee was one of the best four states in the nation in its commitment to teacher effectiveness

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policies, awarding it a B- in a report this month.

Metro Director of Schools Jesse Register said teachers who go the traditional teaching route shouldn't think their non-traditional peers are replacing them.

"Let me look at it as a consumer. What we want for our children is the best teachers we can get — from TFA and our colleges and universities — and we hope to have a lot of people to choose from to select the best," he said. "We know that our young people coming into our system from Teach for America are very bright, and student achievement data is very good."

The state's universities are splitting \$23 million to better train teachers, too, said Katrina Miller, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's director of First to the Top. Middle Tennessee State is among four institutions in the UTeach Project using \$1.8 million to help future teachers change the way they deliver math and science instruction.

Barbic said the state has spent only \$2.3 million on Teach for America and \$1.5 million on the New Teacher Project through the end of this school year. Officials are now deciding for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years how many future recruits they will need. They can renegotiate to spend some of the contract money to improve teacher quality in some other way.

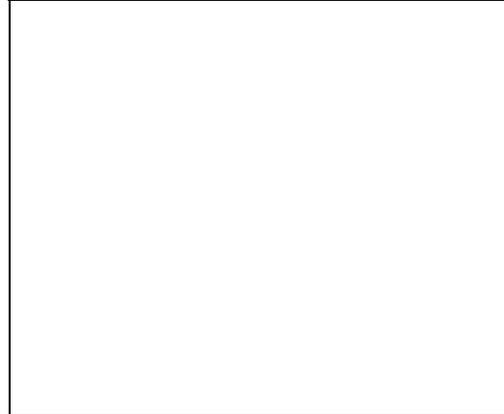
"They hired a good chunk ... and are now sitting down to think through how to work

with them in the future," Barbic said. "We're happy with the progress."



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Teach for America
teacher Anna Bryant , who teaches at Cane Ridge High, talks with student Carlos Pineda during a conference Saturday at Fisk University. / Dipti Vaidya / The Tennessean

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Where they are

Tennessee has spent millions placing teachers from nonprofits Teach for America and the New Teacher Project in the state's high-need schools. Here's where they are this school year.

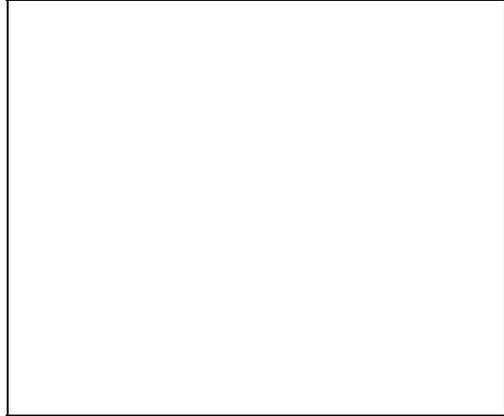
The New Teacher Project: 52 in Memphis and 16 in Nashville

Teach for America: 158 in Memphis and 103 in Nashville



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