

August 6, 2025

# “A little less conversation, and a little more transparency, please”

Several concerns expressed by certain members of our Shelby County delegation to our General Assembly delegation are in the recent but failed state bill [SB714/HB662](#). This bill aimed to increase state government oversight of the Memphis Shelby County Schools district in the areas of student achievement, district finances, and leadership effectiveness. This bill sought to create an “advisory board” to oversee or control the Memphis Shelby County School Board, including influence over removing elected school board members. It did not pass as the bill diverged on the details in the House and the Senate. This makes no sense to those possessing professional Memphis Title I teaching experience.

The bill’s Senate version stated the appointed “advisory board” would be exempt from both oversight and Tennessee’s public meeting laws. Such exemptions prohibit public comment and attendance of in-person or virtual advisory board meetings. Furthermore, the State of Tennessee doesn’t have a good track record with creating “advisory boards.” Another bell weather state advisory board is the almost five (5) year inactive Advisory Committee on Open Government (ACOG). Though state taxpayer funded and required by law to meet at least once every calendar year, these Open Government oversight expert appointees haven’t met since 2020, have never posted their ACOG agendas, minutes, meeting notifications, and have never allowed voter public comment.

**“Open government” is defined as a model of governance that emphasizes transparency, accountability, and participation.**

We have always heard that “all politics is local.” Well, so is public K12 instruction, voting, and oversight. Many of the members of our General Assembly are aware of the state’s current and most recent attempt at improving oversight, student achievement, district finances, and leadership effectiveness. We are talking about the Achievement School District (ASD). Almost two (2) billion dollars and ten + years of state oversight later, the state’s Achievement School District actually reduced student achievement and (for several years) had trouble even recruiting and retaining its own leadership. One main lesson from our state’s efforts to bring oversight is the state’s own leadership decisions within the ASD. Though the state’s 30 of 32 ASD member schools and students were located in Memphis, state ASD leadership offices remained in Nashville. Just as politics are local, so are both public education and oversight.

Memphians uniquely know firsthand how cost prohibitive it is for us to inspect state and Nashville-based public education teacher training vendor contracts, state standardized assessment records, attend or present public comment in state government public education meetings, and simply to follow the money. In my opinion, Nashville (and the rest of the state) lacks the experience and history to fully understand civil rights, abject poverty, teacher vacancies, teacher turnover rates, and charter schools, to any level comparative to Memphis. We can’t afford another state government public education experiment on Memphis’s most valuable asset, our children. History shows it does not work. We all wish the state understood public education, but it simply does not. These have been very expensive lessons to learn. This time (and in our next General Assembly) let’s first try

the oversight advisory board project in [SB714/HB662](#) in East Tennessee. And since Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) have always been both our nation and our state's frontline for teacher shortages, teacher turnover, vacancies, fewest teacher assistant positions (per child), and athletic coaches, perhaps members of our Shelby County General Assembly delegation can apply, interview, and accept a full-time role with any MSCS Title I public school.

Let's first make sure each of our current state advisory boards' appointees are qualified, holding virtual and recorded open meetings, posting agendas, and are welcoming to parents' and voters' participation. A simple AI search says Tennessee's voters and taxpayers are paying for an approximate and whopping **271** different appointed advisory boards and commissions. State government needs to get back to basics and baby steps.

Let's make sure all of Tennessee's public education is the most transparent in the nation. Our state could start by allowing public comment in our state's Advisory Committee on Open Government (ACOG) meetings. It's no surprise that a recent and informal audit reflected that 16 of the 17 ACOG appointees hail from Middle and East Tennessee. That's right, only one (1) member of the state's appointed advisory board for transparency represents any of West Tennessee's 21 counties.

And lest our state government forget, a properly functioning democracy depends on an informed electorate. This isn't a quote from Elvis, it's from Thomas Jefferson.

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