



**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR  
STATE OF TENNESSEE

September 16, 2013

Dear Superintendents:

I am grateful for the opportunity to have joined you recently for the superintendents' conference in Gatlinburg and was honored to receive the Friend of Education Award. In working together, we are making real progress in preparing our children for the future.

Although we have a long way to go to ensure every child in Tennessee can fulfill his or her potential, we should all be proud of the tremendous improvements being made across the state. Our graduation rate is up considerably. State test scores have gone up in every area – in many cases substantially. We're now seeing through PLAN and Explore test results that these gains are not limited to state assessments but are beginning to show up on national tests as well.

There's no question that this progress is driven largely by the folks on the ground in our districts and schools, and the hard work demonstrated by you, your school principals and your teachers has been essential. You've overseen many significant changes in your school systems over the past few years, and we would not be seeing the results we are today without your efforts and your commitment to implement these reforms with fidelity.

Continued progress also requires a commitment from the state to support your efforts, which has included significant investments in education – even in tough fiscal times. Over our first three budgets since coming into office, state education spending has increased by more than \$400 million. This includes nearly \$130 million toward teacher salaries as well as major investments in capital outlay and technology that superintendents requested.

As I've traveled the state over the summer, I've met with groups of you and feel we've had productive conversations. I value the input I receive from superintendents, and I plan to continue those meetings and will also sit down with appropriate leadership in the near future to better understand any concerns you may have. However, after spending time with you last weekend in Gatlinburg and visiting with many of you over the past weeks and months, I was disappointed when I learned from the media about a letter that was signed by some superintendents and apparently is making its way to me.

I am grateful for your efforts at the district level to improve outcomes for our students, and I want you to know that I am also very grateful for Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman's vision and leadership. He has brought a new perspective and dynamic energy to education reform in Tennessee, and while you may not always agree with some of our administration's specific initiatives, there is no doubt that we're improving the future for more Tennessee children.

The bottom line is that we are at a critical point in the implementation of key reforms that I believe will lead to continued progress in education, and this work is simply too important to get sidetracked. That's why I hope you'll join me in taking a fresh approach to communication between the state and school districts and work together as partners as we seek to build on the momentum that's been generated.

As governor, I deal with many issues, but few are as important as education. Student outcomes and educational attainment tie into economic development, health outcomes, public safety, and the overall well-being of our state. You understand as well as anyone that the education of our children really will determine our state's future. Thank you for all that you do, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this critical mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Haslam", with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Haslam  
Governor

cc: Kevin Huffman, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Education