



METROPOLITAN  
**Nashville**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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September 19, 2012

Mr. Kevin Huffman, Commissioner  
Tennessee Department of Education  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Dear Commissioner Huffman,

The Metropolitan Nashville Board of Public Education is in receipt of your notice to withhold a portion of our school system's next scheduled Basic Education Program (BEP) payment. As the newly elected board chair, I am disappointed that you are taking this punitive step toward our system of 81,000 students. While I understand your position, I respectfully disagree and request a meeting with you to revisit this matter and avert this action.

Our local School Board had legitimate concerns about the diversity plan, or lack thereof, put forward by Great Hearts. Allow me to share with you some information about our community and its history. We are an urban school system that only emerged from federal court-ordered desegregation in 1998. As recently as this past summer, our rezoning plan was the subject of a federal lawsuit. Nashville has eight percent of the total public school students in Tennessee, but 29 percent of the English language learners in our state and 75% of our students are FARM-eligible.

For us, "diversity" is not a political term. Diversity is a real concern in our community, and we take seriously our obligation to promote it. While you assert the local School Board broke the law, we were acting as responsible, duly-elected and duly-sworn public officials upholding the U.S. Constitution and its Equal Protection Clause.

I know Metro Schools must do a better job of articulating diversity guidelines for new charter schools. We are in the process of developing policies that will allow us to clearly communicate our priorities going forward. Additionally, we must continue working to promote diversity within our own schools of choice, and are striving toward that goal as well. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility, in the meantime, to press new charter operators on these questions.

We understand the State Department of Education is a partner in our efforts, and we embrace the privilege of helping to lead Tennessee's bold reform strategies. While the matter at hand today is Great Hearts, there no doubt will be another school or issue in the future that has the potential to put us at odds. I would like very much for us to think through ways we can work together. I look forward to meeting with you at the earliest possible opportunity.

Sincerely,

Cheryl D. Mayes, Chairwoman

cc: Governor Bill Haslam  
Mayor Karl Dean