



Community Guide To School Funding

Fiscal Year 2005

Dear Community Member,

The Community Task Force on Funding Public Education is a group of government, business and community leaders who have come together around the issue of school funding and governance. Our specific purpose is to identify school funding and governance solutions that offer the most efficient, equitable, effective methods for supporting quality public education. We have agreed that our recommendations must take into account the County's and City's fiscal challenges and at the same time recognize that adequately funded quality public education is essential for job growth, economic health and quality of life for our community.

We began our work in April 2005 and expect to conclude by the end of 2006. At that time, and throughout our process, we want to hear your ideas and concerns as well as to be in communication with you about our thinking.

To that end, we would like to begin by sharing with you the same education that we have given ourselves about how school funding works. We believe that a well-informed citizenry is essential to governing our communities and sustaining school improvement, and so we offer you the *Community Guide to School Funding* as a tool to become informed on this complex issue of school funding and governance.

Very simply, the Guide explains the big picture of school funding—where it comes from, how it is distributed and who is accountable for how it is spent. Most of the information in the Guide is from the 2004–2005 school year. We hope you will find it useful.

Sincerely,

Ron Belz Belz Enterprises	Wanda Halbert Board Chair, Memphis City Schools	David Lillard Commissioner, Shelby County	TaJuan Stout Mitchell Councilwoman, City of Memphis	Dr. Bobby G. Webb Superintendent, Shelby County Schools
Beth Dixon Memphis Rotary Club	Lee Harris Black Business Association	Robert Lipscomb Executive Director, Memphis Housing Authority	Tom Moss Commissioner, Shelby County	Ex Officio Willie W. Herenton Mayor, City of Memphis
Bobbi Gillis Vice Chair, Memphis Regional Chamber	Dr. Carol Johnson Superintendent, Memphis City Schools	Deidre Malone Commissioner, Shelby County	David Pickler Chair, Board of Education Shelby County Schools	A C Wharton Mayor, Shelby County
Sharon Goldsworthy Mayor of Germantown	Terry Jones Mayor of Millington	Keith McDonald Mayor of Bartlett	Blair Taylor President, Memphis Tomorrow	
Russell Gwatney Gwatney Chevrolet	Linda Kerley Mayor of Collierville			

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Overview of Our Schools

There are two public school systems in Shelby County—Memphis City Schools (MCS) serving residents inside the City of Memphis, and Shelby County Schools (SCS) serving residents in all other areas of Shelby County. In the 2004–2005 school year MCS and SCS spent more than \$1.2 billion¹ on operating, building, renovating and maintaining public schools. These schools serve a combined total of 166,000 children, representing nearly 18% of all children in Tennessee’s public elementary, middle and high schools.

Snapshot of SCS

SCS educates more than 46,000 students. It is the fourth largest school district in the state and 85th in the country. SCS serves its students in 46 schools, all of which are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

SCS employs just over 3000 teachers and 2000 other employees. Over half of SCS teachers have at least a master’s degree. Teacher salaries start at \$36,108 and average \$47,060. Total compensation including benefits ranges from \$44,052 at the low end to \$75,812 at the high end.²

Distribution of Schools (SCS)

26	Elementary
13	Middle
7	High Schools

The U.S. average public school teacher’s salary for 2003–2004 was \$46,752. State averages ranged from \$57,337 (Connecticut) to \$33,236 (South Dakota). At \$40,318, Tennessee ranked 33rd³.

SCS teachers participate in a professional association called the Shelby County Education Association but are not engaged in any formal collective bargaining with the SCS.

¹ MCS 2004–2005 Budget Submitted to State; SCS 2004–2005 Budget Submitted to State; City of Memphis Office of Finance and Administration; Shelby County Division of Finance and Administration

² SCS Chief Financial Officer

³ National Education Association

Overview of Our Schools

Snapshot of SCS (cont.)

SCS, like MCS, is governed by an elected Board of Education. The seven members of the SCS Board reside in seven special election districts located within the Shelby County school district and serve four year terms. The SCS superintendent is employed by the Board as the system's top administrator.

SCS students have access to extracurricular activities through the support of booster clubs and other community organizations. School services such as health and mental health services are offered only on a very limited basis as required by law. Exceptional children, both those with developmental delays and disabilities and those who are particularly gifted, have access to special curricula and classrooms as required by law.

Quick Facts About SCS Students

- 20.13% of students (9,092) are eligible for free/reduced priced meals based on family income
- 18.5% of students (8,313) are enrolled in special education. This includes 5.23% of students (2,351) that are considered "gifted and talented"
- 1.27% of students participate in English as Second Language programs
- 2004 SCS graduation percentage was 87.6%⁴
- 2004 SCS per pupil expenditure was \$6,479⁵

Ethnic Breakdown:

- 25.3% African-American/Black
- 68.2% White
- 2.8% Hispanic
- 3.2% Asian
- 0.4% Native American
- 0.1% Pacific Islander

⁴ The Graduation Rate is a federally required benchmark which calculates the percent of on-time graduates with a regular high school diploma. GED and Special Education diplomas, as well as those diplomas awarded to Seniors following summer school coursework, are not allowed to count as a regular high school diploma under regulations from the U.S. Department of Education.

⁵ Expenditure per student reflects the school system's annual operating expenditures divided by its Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Operating expenditures are comprised of expenditures documented in system's annual financial reports, expenditures by the state of behalf of the school system, and the value of commodities provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for school food service programs. National average per pupil expenditure for 2004 was \$8,724. Tennessee's average was \$6,997.

Overview of Our Schools

Snapshot of MCS

At 120,000 students in K-12, MCS is the largest school system in the state of Tennessee and the 21st largest school system in the nation. MCS serves those students in 191 schools, all of which are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Distribution of Schools (MCS)

112	Elementary
25	Middle
4	Junior High
31	High Schools
6	Career and Technology
7	Special Schools
6	Charters

For the past 25 years, MCS has also provided a variety of specialized optional school programs both as stand alone schools and programs within other schools. In the 2005–2006 school year, 31 MCS schools will offer optional programs in elementary, middle and high schools with focuses ranging from enriched academics to science and technology to creative and performing arts.

Nearly half of MCS teachers, 49 percent, hold a master's degree or higher. Salaries start at \$36,107 and average \$45,501. Teacher compensation including benefits ranges from \$45,133 at the low end to \$77,675 at the high end⁵.

With approximately 16,500 employees, including about 8000 teachers, MCS is the second largest employer in the City of Memphis.

Overview of Our Schools

Snapshot of MCS (cont.)

MCS teachers participate as members of the Memphis Education Association (MEA), a collective bargaining unit. The MEA negotiates agreements with the school system for such issues as working conditions, salaries and benefits for teachers.

A nine-member elected Board of Education governs MCS. Board members serve four year terms and represent seven districts, with two at-large positions, within the Memphis City limits. The Board employs a superintendent who serves as the top administrator for the system.

MCS funds other student services such as after school programs, mental health services, health services and alternative schools in order to meet the wide range of student needs. Exceptional children, both those with developmental delays and disabilities and those who are particularly gifted, have access to special curricula and classrooms as required by law.

⁶ The Graduation Rate is a federally required benchmark which calculates the percent of on-time graduates with a regular high school diploma. GED and Special Education diplomas, as well as those diplomas awarded to Seniors following summer school coursework, are not allowed to count as a regular high school diploma under regulations from the U.S. Department of Education.

⁷ Expenditure per student reflects the school system's annual operating expenditures divided by its Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Operating expenditures are comprised of expenditures documented in system's annual financial reports, expenditures by the state of behalf of the school system, and the value of commodities provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for school food service programs. National average per pupil expenditure for 2004 was \$8,724. Tennessee's average was \$6,997.

Quick Facts About MCS Students

- **77% of students (92,400) are eligible for free/reduced priced meals based on family income**
- **Approximately 14% of students (17,338) are enrolled in special education. This includes 1.7% of students (2,078) that are considered "gifted and talented"**
- **Approximately 4% of students (4,740) participate in English as Second Language programs**
- **2004 MCS graduation percentage was 60.4% ⁶**
- **2004 MCS per pupil expenditure was \$8,326 ⁷**

Ethnic Breakdown:

- **86.4% African-American/Black**
- **8.9% White**
- **3.4% Hispanic**
- **0.1% Native American**
- **1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander**

School Funding Foundation Concepts

Before examining school funding in detail there are several foundational concepts that must be understood regarding types of school funding and school system structures.

The Two Sides of School Funding

There are two major categories of school funding that pay for different things and are handled entirely differently: operating funds and capital funds.

Operating funds pay for the school systems' day-to-day expenses like salaries, supplies, transportation, and utilities. Operations expenses are paid out of the school system's annual budget. MCS and SCS have annual budgets that are funded through a mix of County, State and federal tax dollars.

Capital funds pay for design and construction of new schools, expansion of existing schools, and major renovation and replacement of older facilities to meet educational standards. Capital expenses are mostly paid from funds raised from bonds, which are issued by the County or City. The bonds are then paid for over a number of years through local taxes.

MCS & SCS: Different Types of School Systems

In Tennessee county governments are mandated by the State constitution to ensure that public education is provided to all county residents—everyone who lives in all cities, towns and unincorporated areas within the county. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. **A county must have at least one public school system, but it can have more than one.**

Tennessee has three different types of school systems: county school systems, city school systems, and special school systems. **In Shelby County, SCS is a *county school system* and MCS is a *special school system*.** However, MCS is different from all other special school systems in Tennessee, and in many ways operates more like a *city school system*.

School Funding Foundation Concepts

School Systems in Tennessee

To understand the “who, how and why” of school funding in Shelby County, it is important first to understand the taxing authority and governance for the different types of school systems in Tennessee.

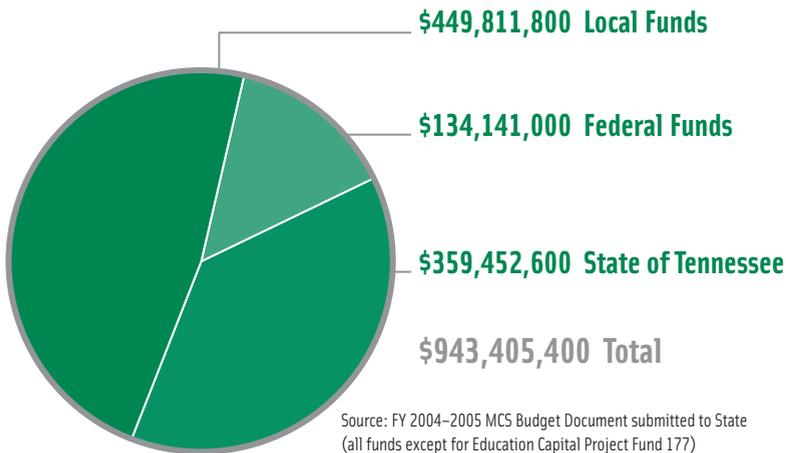
	Shelby County Schools		Memphis City Schools	
	County School System	City School System	Special School System	Non-traditional Special School System
Established by	County Commission	City Council	State General Assembly	State General Assembly
Serves	County residents not served by any other public school systems	City residents	Residents of a specified geographic area/district	City of Memphis residents
Governed by	Elected County School Board	Elected City School Board	Elected District School Board	Elected District School Board
Taxing Authority	County Commission	City Council	State General Assembly	City Council*
Operating and Capital Budget Approval	County School Board approves the budgets. County Commission authorizes funding but does not have authority over specific budget line items.	City School Board approves the budgets. City Council authorizes funding but does not have authority over specific budget line items.	District School Board approves the budgets. Funding comes from the revenue generated by the school tax imposed on district residents by the State General Assembly. The tax is usually set by the GA as a rate not to be exceeded. The District School Board is then authorized to set a tax rate up to that amount.	District School Board approves the the budgets. County Commission and City Council authorize funding but do not have authority over specific budget line items.

*Every school system has a *taxing authority*. This is the elected body responsible for imposing taxes on residents of a school district to pay the local share for their schools. There is presently legal ambiguity as to whether the City of Memphis funding for schools is obligatory or simply discretionary.

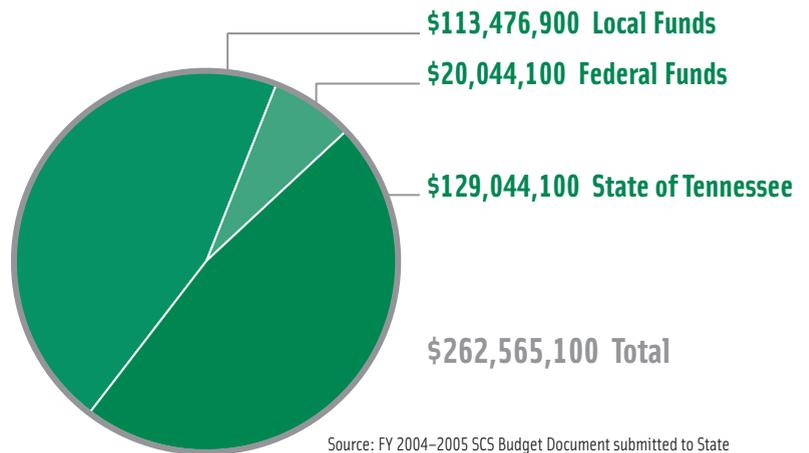
Operations Funding

Funding for operations for both school systems comes from three sources—federal, state and local dollars—with state and local dollars representing most of the funding.

Revenues for Operating Activity from All Sources for Memphis City Schools, 2004–2005



Revenues for Operating Activity from All Sources for Shelby County Schools, 2004–2005



Federal Funds for Operations

Both MCS and SCS receive funds from the federal government. The schools can use these funds *only* for specific programs such as free/ reduced meals for economically disadvantaged children. Substantially more federal dollars go to MCS than to SCS due to the comparatively large percentage of poor and at-risk children enrolled in MCS.

State Funds for Operations

Tennessee education funds are mainly generated from the State sales tax and distributed to local school systems through the **Tennessee Basic Education Program (BEP)**. The BEP determines the amount of money each local school system needs in order to provide a *basic level of education* that is consistent with other school systems in the state.

Local Funds for Operations

The majority of local school funds come from local property and local option sales taxes. Both SCS and MCS receive funding from Shelby County taxes collected from all Shelby County residents, including residents of the City of Memphis. MCS receives *additional* funding from taxes collected only from City of Memphis residents.

Operations Funding

State Operations Funding and the BEP

The State requires that each local school system fund its schools at a specific amount, called *the BEP funding level*.

The State contributes part of this amount. The local school system is required to provide the rest—called the *local match*.

In 2004, the State contributed 56% of the BEP funding level to both MCS and SCS. Both systems were obligated to provide a 44% local match to cover the balance.

How does the State figure out *the BEP funding level* for each local school system?

The BEP funding level for each system is calculated through a complex formula. This formula starts with a statewide set of standards which the state Board of Education says are necessary for a *basic level of education*. These standards include more than 40 different components such as teacher/student ratios and amount per student for supplies. The formula then factors in the number of students enrolled in each school system—Average Daily Membership (ADM)—to determine the BEP funding level for each of the school systems in Tennessee.

How does the State decide how much it will contribute to each school system's funding level?

The State pays for a percentage of each school system's BEP funding level, while local governments are expected to fund the rest through what is called the *local match*. The state's contribution percentage is higher or lower based on the *fiscal capacity* of the County where the system is located. *Fiscal capacity* is the County's ability to provide funding to the school districts within its boundaries.

Even though MCS and SCS provided a 44% local match to meet their required BEP funding levels, this amount wasn't enough to fund *actual* education needs. The BEP funding level only pays for a *common basic level of education*. All school systems in Tennessee, including the MCS and SCS, provide funds *above* their BEP match requirement to pay for their *actual* educational needs.

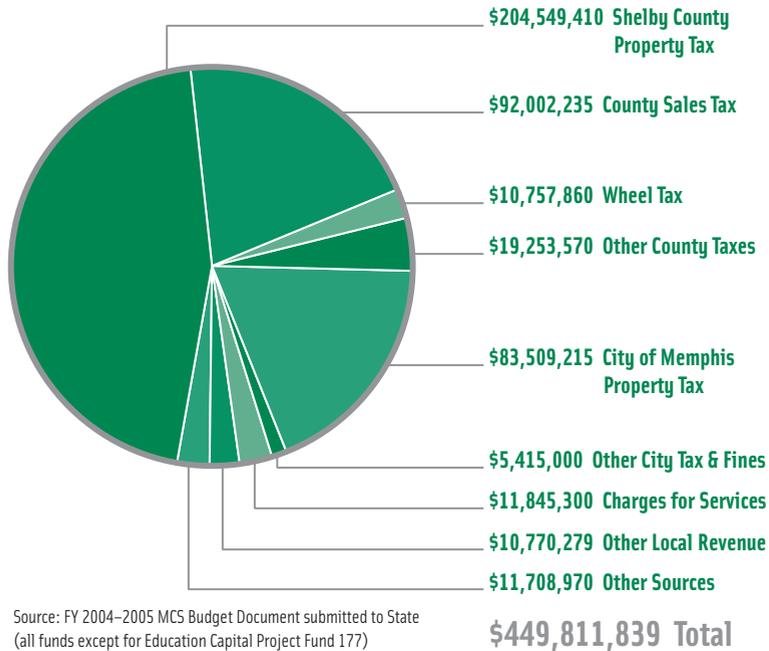
Many people contend that the state should increase funding levels to more accurately reflect actual need.

Operations Funding

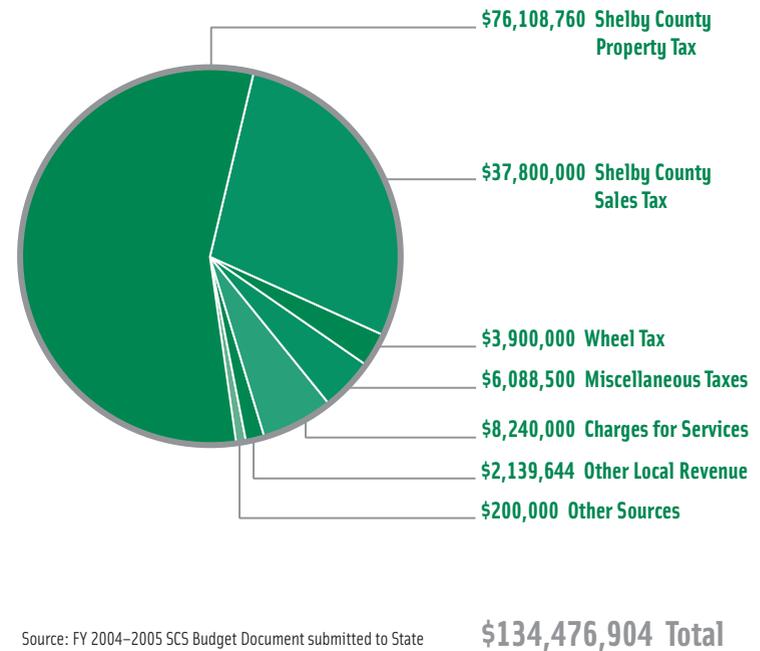
Raising Local Funds for School Operations

In 2004–2005, \$303 million⁵ in school funds were collected from Shelby County property taxes and \$128 million⁶ in school funds were collected from Shelby County sales taxes. In addition, \$84.5 million⁷ in City property taxes were collected for MCS. These taxes make up the major portion of local funds for schools.

Major Sources of Local Funding for Memphis City Schools 2004–2005



Major Sources of Local Funding for Shelby County Schools 2004–2005



⁵ Shelby County Trustee

⁶ Shelby County Trustee

⁷ City of Memphis Division of Finance and Administration

Operations Funding

Local Operations Funding and the ADA Formula

According to state law, each county is required to distribute school funds collected from county taxes to *all* the public school systems within its boundaries. Counties are required to divide these funds based on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of students in the school systems.

ADA, or Average Daily Attendance, is the *actual* number of students attending school.

ADA is different from ADM (Average Daily Membership), which is the number of students that are enrolled in school. ADM is used to determine the BEP Funding Level.

The ADA funding formula was established as a means to ensure that all the public school students in a given County receive an equal portion of that County's taxes collected for education.

Shelby County government must therefore distribute Shelby County taxes collected for schools between MCS and SCS, based on each system's ADA.

Each school system re-calculates and updates its ADA number on an annual basis and submits that number to the County Trustee.

At this time, the ADA of the MCS is 2.6 times larger than the ADA of the SCS. This means that for every County \$1 that is allocated to the SCS, approximately \$2.60 is allocated to the MCS.

School funds from City tax revenues, which are collected only from City residents, are not subject to the ADA distribution requirement.

Capital Funding

While schools' day to day expenses are funded through the operations budget, money for building, renovating, and expanding schools comes from bonds. Bonds allow the community to complete a project now and get full use from the investment while gradually paying back its costs.

How Capital Funds are Raised

In Shelby County since 1995, nearly \$800 million⁸ in bonds have been issued by Shelby County Government and Memphis City Government to pay for building new schools, expanding schools, and renovating schools for both SCS and MCS.

Issuing bonds for schools is a lot like the way most families buy their homes—taking out a loan today and repaying it over time. Paying back the loan from bonds is called *debt service*.

The vast majority of bonds for school capital funds for both SCS and MCS have been issued by the County Government. In effect, Shelby County has taken out loans—\$621 million⁹ in the past decade—to pay for school capital costs for both school systems. Shelby County is responsible for this debt.

During the same period, City of Memphis has also issued bonds that provided \$172.3 million¹⁰ in funds specifically for MCS. Of these bond revenues, \$75 million was issued in the form of a loan to MCS which is therefore responsible for paying off the debt. The City of Memphis is responsible for paying off the rest of the debt.

It is noteworthy that of the \$1.67 billion dollar County debt, school debt represents 60% or \$1 billion.¹¹

⁸ Shelby County Division of Administration and Finance;
City of Memphis Division of Finance and Administration

⁹ Shelby County Division of Administration and Finance

¹⁰ City of Memphis Division of Finance and Administration

¹¹ Shelby County Government Division of Administration and Finance – June 30, 2005

Capital Funding

Capital Funding and the ADA Formula

As with operations funding, each county in Tennessee must also distribute capital funds raised from county taxes to all of its public school systems according to the ADA (Average Daily Attendance) ratio.

So, when Shelby County issues a bond to raise money for either SCS or MCS capital expenses, the amount must be large enough to cover those costs PLUS cover the automatic ADA share for the other school system.

With the ADA ratio currently at 2.6 to 1, if the Shelby County Commission decides to raise \$100 million to pay for an SCS capital project, then it must automatically provide \$260 million to MCS for its capital projects. In other words, to get the \$100 million for SCS, it must issue a bond for a total of \$360 million.

There are two exceptions to the ADA distribution requirement.

First, either school system can choose to waive its ADA share of bond revenues from Shelby County. An example of MCS taking this option was in the late 1970s when Shelby County built Kirby High School. At the time MCS knew that the facility would shortly be transferred to MCS when the area was annexed by the City of Memphis.

Second, Shelby County can issue a special kind of bond called a *rural school bond* to raise capital funds for SCS alone. With a rural school bond, the County Commission establishes a tax only on County residents outside the boundaries of the City. In this case, the County is not required to split the bond proceeds between SCS and MCS. Shelby County issued a rural school bond in 2004 to fund the construction of Arlington High School.

In Tennessee, if a city or special school system finds that its automatic ADA share of funding from county bonds won't cover its capital needs, the system can ask its respective taxing authorities to levy a tax on city or special school district residents to pay for additional bonds. The funds raised through these bonds go only to that school system and are not divided among other systems. The taxing authority for a city school system is the city council, and for a special school system it is the Tennessee General Assembly. *(See page 6 for more details).*

When the City of Memphis opts to issue bonds to fund the capital needs of MCS, it taxes City residents only, and the proceeds are not subject to the ADA formula. This approach is comparable to when the County issues a rural school bond to fund SCS capital needs and taxes only those County residents outside of the City limits.

Capital Funding

Key Factors that Influence Capital Needs

Four primary factors have influenced the need for capital school funds in Shelby County: state class size mandates, old or inadequate facilities, population growth and migration, and annexation.

State Class Size Reduction Mandates

In 1992 the Tennessee Education Improvement Act mandated smaller class sizes and required schools systems to be in compliance by 2002. During the 10 year period both MCS and SCS incurred substantial costs to build new schools and expand existing ones to meet this mandate.

Old or Inadequate Facilities

Both school systems have aging facilities that require updating and renovation to comply with construction codes and today's expectations. Because its facilities are older, MCS has the greater need for upgrading. For example, since 1995, MCS has spent more than \$100 million to install and enhance air conditioning systems for its schools.

Population Growth and Migration

Over the past decade both school systems have seen their school populations fluctuate. Population shifts and projected growth have driven the construction of new schools and

expansion of existing ones, especially in areas of new development in the County, and have left many schools operating below capacity. Presently 28 MCS schools and 1 SCS school are operating at less than 60 percent of capacity.

Annexation

In 1998 all of the municipalities in Shelby County and Shelby County Government prepared and adopted the Shelby County Growth Plan. The seven cities formally agreed which unincorporated areas of the County would be reserved for annexation by each city. At this time, the Memphis City Council adopted a schedule for the annexation of particular areas within its reserve area. The schedule is based on criteria that indicate whether a given area's population level is sufficient to warrant an urban level of services.

It is important to note that school attendance zones do not correspond with annexation boundaries. So, upon annexation both MCS and SCS must often make significant capital adjustments to accommodate the adjusted population.

Capital Funding

The Impact of Annexation on Capital Funding

When any municipality other than Memphis completes an annexation, the schools in the annexed area continue to be part of SCS. However, when an annexation by Memphis has taken place, the SCS school facilities in that area become part of the MCS.

MCS must consider whether the existing school buildings have adequate capacity to serve the residents in the newly adjusted MCS school attendance zone, and whether existing facilities meet the instructional and facilities guidelines of MCS.

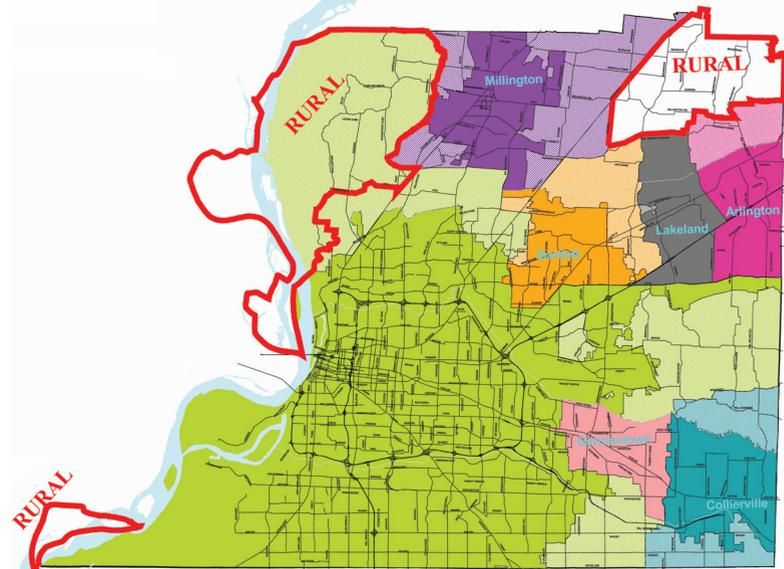
At the same time, SCS must consider whether it needs to build new schools or expand existing ones to accommodate Shelby County residents who were not annexed but who formerly attended the schools that now belong to MCS.

A further consideration for both MCS and SCS is that most of the time the annexation process is delayed by lawsuits seeking to block annexation by the City of Memphis. These lawsuits make it difficult, if not impossible, to predict when an area will actually be annexed and therefore significantly complicate capital planning.

Shelby County Growth Plan

Annexation Reserve Areas

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Arlington Corp. Limits |  Arlington Reserve |
|  Bartlett Corp. Limits |  Bartlett Reserve |
|  Collierville Corp. Limits |  Collierville Reserve |
|  Lakeland Corp. Limits |  Lakeland Reserve |
|  Memphis Corp. Limits |  Memphis Reserve |
|  Millington Corp. Limits |  Millington Reserve |
|  Germantown Corp. Limits |  Designated Rural Area |



December 22, 1999, updated with new Memphis Annexation of Countrywood/Eads, Hillshire, and Southeast Area, January 2003, Getwell West, November 2004. Rural Area amended in 2003 by Consent Decree. Updated annexations of Millington, January 2004, and Bartlett and Lakeland, December 2004.

Capital Funding

Matching Capital Funds to Capital Needs

As discussed previously in this guide, MCS and SCS have their capital budgets approved and funded differently. As a county school district, SCS has its capital budget approved by the SCS School Board and then submits it for funding to the Shelby County Commission. The County Commission then typically issues bonds to pay for whatever portion of the budget it decides to fund.

MCS may make capital funding requests to either the County Commission or the City Council. Historically, it has received some capital funding from the City but relies on the County for most of its funding.

As noted previously, County funding for schools is governed by the ADA formula. This means that any time the County Commission decides to fund a capital need of one of the school systems, it must automatically give money to the other system, even if the other system hasn't made a specific request or submitted a capital projects plan.

Many citizens have expressed concern about using a formula for capital funding. Some believe that this *automatic* capital funding gives school systems more money than they really need and therefore encourages waste and inefficiency. Others suggest that the automatic formula provides less funding than

school systems actually need for capital projects and, in fact, both school systems point out that their capital needs are consistently underfunded.

Where these different perspectives find agreement is in the idea that the current ADA mechanism does not, support the careful matching of capital funding to actual needs.

In the context of growing County debt and rising property taxes the community conversation has focused on how to achieve the greatest value from school capital investments.

In response to that conversation, the County Commission last year established a Needs Assessment Committee (NAC) to help the Commission evaluate the capital needs of both systems more thoroughly and ensure that funding better matches need.

While still new, the NAC is also identifying other ways to squeeze value out of school capital investment. Some strategies will address how to ensure maximum efficiency in school construction and renovation. Other strategies may consider how most efficiently to use schools that are under capacity.

Capital Funding

Matching Capital Funds to Capital Needs (*cont.*)

In addition the NAC and other community leaders will likely advance discussions by the County Commission about how best to pay for new schools that must be built to accommodate growth and migration in the County.

Presently, as discussed throughout this Guide, all County taxpayers (including City of Memphis residents) pay for the school construction in new County developments, except when a rural school bond is issued. Community conversations have begun to explore alternative sources of revenue that

shift responsibility for new construction costs to the population and developers who directly benefit from the new construction. Examples discussed in Shelby County include impact fees and adequate facilities taxes on new developments.

The issues and challenges of capital funding are complex, but community leaders continue to seek creative approaches that can ensure the greatest value to taxpayers while adequately supporting the facilities needs of our education systems.

Getting Involved

An engaged and informed citizenry is essential to governing our communities effectively and sustaining school improvement. After reading the Guide, please share your thoughts with us directly on education funding and governance issues, or write a letter to the newspaper.

Writing a Letter or Email

Writing to an elected official or newspaper is easier than it seems. The simpler and more direct your message is, the more effective your letter will be. Here are some tips:

- **Keep it brief.** Your letter should be one page long at most. Letters to editors at newspapers should be even shorter—about 250 words, or four short paragraphs.
- **Stay on track.** State who you are and why you're writing. Identify your issue and position clearly, and only write about one issue per letter.
- **Hit three big points.** Choose your three strongest, most important points to support your position and persuade readers and elected officials.
- **Make it personal.** Tell how the issue will directly impact your community. Use real-life stories.
- **Don't forget to sign.** Include your full name and address when writing to an elected official so they know you're a constituent. If you're mailing or faxing a letter to a newspaper editor, include a signature; many newspapers won't publish a letter without one. Also list a phone number in case the paper wants to contact you.

Sample Letter to an Elected Official

[Today's Date]

[Official's Name and Title]
[Official's Address]

Dear [Official];

My name is _____. I'm a resident and voter in [your city, county, and/or state]. I am writing to you about [the local, statewide, or national education issue that concerns you], an issue of vital importance to our community. [State your position here.]

[Reason # 1 for your position]
[Reason # 2 for your position]
[Reason # 3 for your position]

[If you have children in school, mention their age[s] and also where they go to school.] This issue affects our children directly. As a concerned citizen [and parent], I urge you to [the position you want the official to support or vote for].

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Address]
[Your Phone Number]

Getting Involved

Task Force Contact Information

Ron Belz

Belz Enterprises
100 Peabody Place, Suite 1400
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: rbelz@belz.com
Telephone: (901) 260-7268

Beth Dixon

Memphis Rotary Club
The Rise Foundation
22 North Front Street, Suite 690
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: beth@risememphis.org
Telephone: (901) 507-6641

Bobbi Gillis

Vice Chair Memphis Regional Chamber
567 Magnolia Mound Drive
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: bobbi@faxongillis.com
Telephone: (901) 759-7000

Mayor Sharon Goldsworthy

City of Germantown
1930 Germantown Road
Germantown, TN 38138
Email: mayor@ci.germantown.tn.us
Telephone: (901) 757-7201

Russell Gwatney

Gwatney Chevrolet
2000 Covington Pike
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: jrg@gwatney.com
Telephone: (901) 387-2000

Commissioner Wanda Halbert

Chair, Board of Commissioners
Memphis City Schools
2597 Avery Avenue, Room 218
Memphis, TN 38112
Email: halbertw@mcsk12.net

Mayor W. W. Herenton

City of Memphis
125 N. Main, Suite 700
Memphis, TN 38103
Telephone: (901) 576-6000

Lee Harris

Black Business Association
Enriching Future Minds
P.O. Box 752307
Memphis, TN 38175
Email: lharris860@hotmail.com
Telephone: (901) 757-9074

Dr. Carol Johnson

Superintendent, Memphis City Schools
2597 Avery, Room 214
Memphis, TN 38112
Email: superintendentmcs@mcsk12.net

Mayor Terry Jones

City of Millington
7930 Nelson Street
Millington, TN 38053
Email: mayorjones@cityofmillington.org
Telephone: (901) 872-6252

Mayor Linda Kerley

City of Collierville
500 Poplar View Parkway
Collierville, TN 38017
Email: kerley@ci.collierville.tn.us
Telephone: (901) 457-2201

Getting Involved

Task Force Contact Information (Cont.)

Robert Lipscomb

Executive Director
Memphis Housing Authority
700 Adams
Memphis, TN 38105
Email: robert.lipscomb@mhanewday.com
Telephone: (901) 544-1102

Commissioner Deidre Malone

Shelby County Board of Commissioners
160 N. Main, Suite 450
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: deidre.malone@shelbycountyttn.gov
Telephone: (901) 545-4301

Mayor Keith McDonald

City of Bartlett
6400 Stage Road
Bartlett, TN 38134
Email: kmcdonald@cityofbartlett.org
Telephone: (901) 385-6444

Councilwoman Tajuan Stout Mitchell

City of Memphis
125 North Main, Suite 514
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: m_tajuan@bellsouth.net
Telephone: (901) 576-6785

Commissioner Tom Moss

Shelby County Board of Commissioners
160 N. Main, Suite 450
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: tom.moss@shelbycountyttn.gov
Telephone: (901) 545-4301

David Pickler

Chair, Board of Education
Shelby County Schools
160 South Hollywood Street
Memphis, TN 38112

Blair Taylor

President
Memphis Tomorrow
22 North Front Street, Suite 670
Memphis, TN 38103
Email: btaylor@memphistomorrow.org
Telephone: (901) 322-8080

Dr. Bobby G. Webb

Superintendent, Shelby County Schools
160 South Hollywood Street
Memphis, TN 38112
Email: superintendent@mail.scs.k12.tn.us

Mayor A C Wharton

Shelby County Government
160 N. Main, Suite 800
Memphis, TN 38103
Telephone: (901) 545-4500

Commercial Appeal

www.commercialappeal.com
The Editor
The Commercial Appeal
Box 334
Memphis, TN 38101
Email: letters@commercialappeal.com

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