



Education Consumers Foundation

## **Fifth Annual Value-Added Achievement Awards: What Tennessee Needs to Learn From the Winners**

State Capitol  
Nashville, Tennessee  
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Remarks of J. E. Stone, President  
Education Consumers Foundation

For the 5<sup>th</sup> year, the Education Consumers Foundation is celebrating the exemplary work of Tennessee's top principals. These are the folks who are already bringing about the achievement gains sought by Tennessee's winning Race to the Top plan.

Clearly, they are ahead of their time in many respects.

It isn't an exaggeration to say that the educators we honor today are the people on whom Tennessee's educational future depends.

America's future depends on them too. Our international competitors believe that we are on a long slide into the dustbin of history, and they see our school and college dropouts as leading indicators.

Countering that trend, the principals you see here today and the schools they lead are showing that American students can work hard and make the academic gains necessary to become college and career ready.

These principals and their schools are living proof that America is capable of seizing the moment, addressing its problems, and moving ahead.

### **About the Education Consumers Foundation's mission**

Before I say more about the vital role of our honorees, let me say a word about our Foundation's perspective on their accomplishment.

ECF is a consumer organization—like the people who publish Consumer Reports, but focused exclusively on education. Our headquarters is in Arlington, VA.

We have spent the last 5 years, however, focused on Tennessee because Tennessee is the one state in which it is possible the average person to see which schools do the most to help students learn.

It is that fact that made Tennessee the best choice for our effort to bring consumers more fully into the conversation about school quality.

We believe that local schools are not likely to improve (or remain improved) unless local parents and voters appreciate the quality of educational service that is being provided.

Better schooling is not sought by consumers if they believe that most schools provide about the same service. Instead of looking for effective schools, consumers pay attention to superficial characteristics such as which are the newest, the friendliest, or the most convenient.

Of course, when superficialities are front and center, a school may be doing a great job of getting students to learn, but receiving very little credit for its efforts.

So ECF's mission has been to make each school's learning gains visible and understandable to local parents, taxpayers, and their elected representatives.

We want Tennessee to be the first state in which consumers can see for themselves which schools are doing a superior job. With a critical mass of informed consumers, local school boards and local leaders can find the support they need to act in behalf of better schooling.

### **What Tennessee needs to learn from these winners**

So this brings me back to the school leaders that we honor here today. These folks did not reach their current performance levels by accident. They worked hard at implementing carefully chosen policies and practices, and we need to learn from them.

If Tennessee's educational ranking is going to move up, (which I confident that it will), everyone—especially other educators—will need to know more about how these schools went about their business and what tools they used.

We at ECF have been working to become a convenient and understandable source for that information.

Every year we ask the winners of our Value Added Achievement Award to provide us with Recipes for Success. These are posted on our website and they reveal many interesting commonalities.

A few years ago, we interviewed six of our multi-year winners and found a surprising degree of agreement in their approaches to schooling. That report - *Effective Schools, Common Practices*<sup>1</sup> - is up on our website. It lists a dozen practices that they found useful.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.education-consumers.org/tnproject/EffectiveSchools\\_CommonPractices\\_ECF.pdf](http://www.education-consumers.org/tnproject/EffectiveSchools_CommonPractices_ECF.pdf)

In the coming weeks and months, ECF will be extending that effort by adding a “Proven Practices” section to our website. It will include findings drawn from Tennessee’s successful schools and reports of research-based practices drawn from sources such as the US Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse.

We will be especially interested in hearing from the winners of today’s awards and from other schools about the programs and practices that they have found to be effective or ineffective. We are particularly interested in reports grounded in TVAAS data.

As an independent, non-profit consumer organization, we are comfortable with reporting about both the effective and ineffective. We know that schools have often been victimized by fads that turn out to be a waste of time—or worse.

Just call us if you need a second opinion. We can always tell you if the supporting research is credible and often point to previous versions of the same practice that were known by another name.

In closing, let me mention two promising tools that we are currently tracking.

First, teachers throughout Tennessee are challenged by substantial numbers of poor readers. Putnam County is trying to nip the problem at the K-3 level by using Direct Instruction<sup>2</sup>. Their goal is to have virtually all students up to speed by grade 3. So far, the results are remarkable. We believe that success in closing these initial gaps could have a profound effect on the learning gaps that confound all subsequent schooling.

A second promising tool is the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence<sup>3</sup> which is now approved under Tennessee’s new transitional teacher licensure program. The ABCTE program could be a godsend to districts that lack qualified science and math teachers. ABCTE permits engineers, scientists, and other academically qualified professionals to begin teaching in a matter of months, not years, through completion of a self-paced online training program.

We will soon be posting updates on both of these items.

Again, I want to thank everyone who is attending today, especially our honorees and distinguished guests.

Now, please join me congratulating our award-winning principals.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.education-consumers.org/DIvideos.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abcte.org/>