



Vandy coach Mason will return in 2020

SPORTS, 1B



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“You’re seeing students who are engaged and you’re seeing teachers who want to be here.”

Leigh Vail
Teacher



Whitsitt Elementary second grader Keily Morales Reyes and classmates learn how to do yoga during the school’s enrichment period on Monday. PHOTOS BY SHELLEY MAYS/THE TENNESSEAN

School aims for ‘a sense of joy about learning’

Students – and teachers – given chance to thrive

Jason Gonzales
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

The grand sound of “Pomp and Circumstance” filled the music room at Whitsitt Elementary School as 16 students sat cross-legged and listened quietly.

The students barely moved as the string trio from the Nashville Symphony played the song.

“How does that make you feel?” said Emma Supica, a community volunteer, to the students just as the song concluded.

The group yells out: excited, surprised and proud.

The interaction on Monday is an every month occurrence during Whitsitt’s Power Monday events, which fill the school’s halls and rooms with community volunteers so teachers and staff can take part in professional development.

As educators learn, volunteers teach students through reading, yoga, puppet shows or Nashville Symphony performances. And it is an example of why the school is part of six schools the Nashville Public Education Foundation will showcase over the next year.



Rodrigo Suarez Marin pets Gregory, a Music City Pet Partners therapy dog.

What makes a school successful?

The new initiative, called Thriving Schools, hopes to reframe how the city thinks about what makes a school and its students successful. It also looks to bring awareness to the resources — whether through volunteer work or through having experienced teachers — a school needs.

In June, the foundation will also release a study on the state of every Metro Nashville Public School.

“Everyone thinks that academic achievement is critical, and we are no exception, but the way we talk about school success limits to those two areas,” said Katie Cour, the education

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State plan outlined for TANF surplus

DHS to spend down \$732 million in reserve

Natalie Allison Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Department of Human Services on Tuesday announced its plan to begin spending down hundreds of millions of unspent federal block grant funds for the working poor.

The department’s surplus of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds has grown to \$732 million in recent years, prompting scrutiny in recent weeks after the reserve was highlighted by the conservative Beacon Center of Tennessee and reporting by The Tennessean.

Moving forward, DHS announced, the department will retain a surplus of only three years’ worth of TANF expenses, or approximately \$342 million.

The state’s TANF reserve level is currently the highest in the nation.

In a statement, DHS spokesman Sky Arnold outlined the department’s plan to spend down some of the funds.

That plan includes reopening for applications the state’s Two Generation or “2Gen” grant program, which awards funding to nonprofits around the state through TANF dollars.

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More inside

Lawmakers criticize lack of notice. **9A**

Emails show ‘commitments’ for controversial \$4M grant fund

Joel Ebert Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Two commissioners in Gov. Bill Lee’s administration knew in July there were as many 60 commitments that would be funded by an economic development grant created by former House Speaker Glen Casada, according to emails obtained by The Tennessean through a public records request.

The commitments outlined in the emails were made long before the state put in place any formal process to distribute the grants. The \$4 million grant fund has faced scrutiny from Republican and Democratic lawmakers and spending from it is currently on hold after The Tennessean first reported its existence in early October.

Rep. Matthew Hill said a nonprofit

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USA TODAY

“Improper” request: Military veteran Vindman says of Trump-Zelensky call: “I knew I had to report this.” **16A**

Mitsubishi names Franklin site

Japanese automaker signs a long-term lease to house its new permanent North American headquarters. **11A**

Weather

High 59° ■ Low 41°
Partly sunny and nice.
Forecast, **10B**

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