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TURNAROUND 2.0

McQueen outlines state intervention plans for 21 Memphis schools

BY LAURA FAITH KEBEDE - FEBRUARY 16, 2018

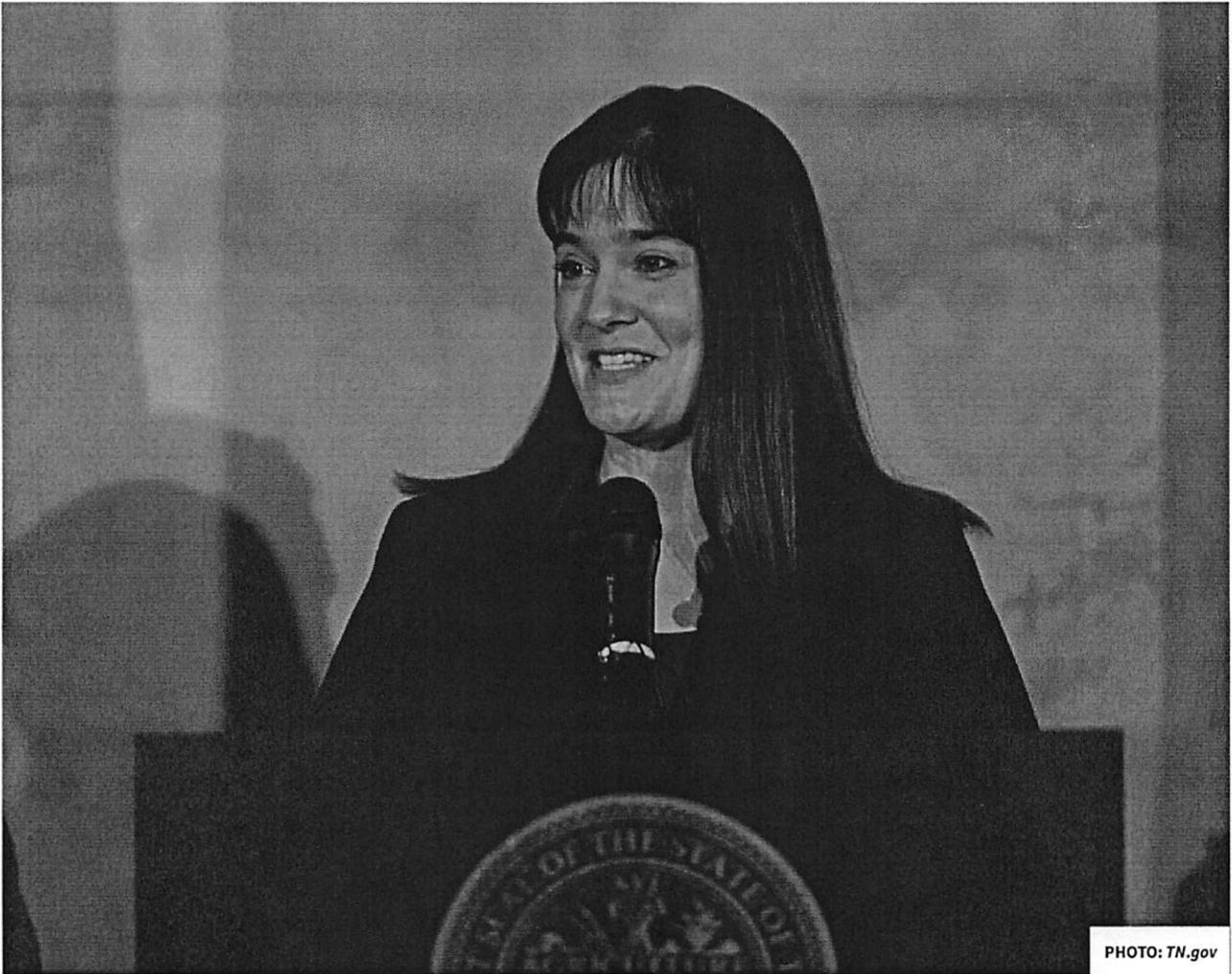


PHOTO: TN.gov

Candice McQueen has been Tennessee's education commissioner since 2015 and oversaw the restructure of its school improvement model in 2017.

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Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen has identified 21 Memphis schools in need of state intervention after months of school visits and talks with top leaders in Shelby County Schools.

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In its first intervention plan under the state's new school improvement model, the Department of Education has placed American Way Middle School on track either for state takeover by the Achievement School District or conversion to a charter school by Shelby County Schools.

The state also is recommending closure of Hawkins Mill Elementary School.

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And 19 other low-performing schools would stay under local control, with the state actively monitoring their progress or collaborating with the district to design improvement plans. Fourteen are already part of the Innovation Zone, the Memphis district's highly regarded turnaround program now in its sixth year.

McQueen outlined the "intervention tracks" for all 21 Memphis schools in a Feb. 5 letter to Superintendent Dorsey Hopson that was obtained by Chalkbeat.

Almost all of the schools are expected to make this fall's "priority list" of Tennessee's 5 percent of lowest-performing schools. McQueen said the intervention tracks will be reassessed at that time.

McQueen's letter offers the first look at how the state is pursuing turnaround plans under its new tiered model of school improvement, which is launching this year in response to a new federal education law.

The commissioner also sent letters outlining intervention tracks to superintendents in Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Jackson, all of which are home to priority

schools.

Under its new model, Tennessee is seeking to collaborate more with local districts to develop improvement plans, instead of just taking over struggling schools and assigning them to charter operators under the oversight of the state-run Achievement School District. However, the ASD, which now oversees 29 Memphis schools, remains an intervention of last resort.

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McQueen identified the following eight schools to undergo a “rigorous school improvement planning process,” in collaboration between the state and Shelby County Schools. Any resulting interventions will be led by the local district.

- A.B. Hill Elementary
- A. Maceo Walker Middle
- Douglass High
- Georgian Hills Middle
- Grandview Heights Middle
- Holmes Road Elementary
- LaRose Elementary
- Sheffield Elementary
- Wooddale High

These next six iZone schools must work with the state “to ensure that (their) plan for intervention is appropriate based on identified need and level of evidence.”

- Sheffield Elementary
- Raleigh-Egypt High
- Lucie E. Campbell Elementary
- Melrose High
- Sherwood Middle
- Westwood High

The five schools below will continue their current intervention plan within the iZone and must provide progress reports to the state:

- Hamilton High
- Riverview Middle
- Geeter Middle
- Magnolia Elementary
- Trezevant High

The school board is expected to discuss the state's plan during its work session next Tuesday. And if early reaction from board member Stephanie Love is any indication, the discussion will be robust.

"We have what it takes to improve our schools," Love told Chalkbeat on Friday. "I think what they need to do is let our educators do the work and not put them in the situation where they don't know what will happen from year to year."

Among questions expected to be raised is whether McQueen's recommendation to close Hawkins Mill can be carried out without school board approval, since her letter says that schools on the most rigorous intervention track "will implement a specific intervention as determined by the Commissioner."

Another question is why the state's plan includes three schools — Douglass High, Sherwood Middle, and Lucie E. Campbell Elementary — that improved enough last year to move off of the state's warning list of the 10 percent of lowest-performing schools.

You can read McQueen's letter to Hopson below: