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PHIL BREDESEN
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Commission Members

FROM: Richard G. Rhoda 

DATE: September 7, 2006

SUBJECT: Release of *Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education*

This morning the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education held a press conference in Washington, DC, to announce the release of *Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education*. Patrick Callan, President of the National Center, was joined in the announcement by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Former Governor of North Carolina Jim Hunt.

The National Center began issuing these biennial report cards in 2000 to animate and inform a national conversation on the effectiveness and accessibility of American higher education. *Measuring Up* grades entire states, not students or individual institutions, in six performance categories: College Preparation, College Participation, College Affordability, College Completion, Higher Education Benefits to the State, and Learning.

In the email accompanying this memo, I am attaching three documents:

- A state-specific press release prepared by the National Center for Tennessee;
- Tennessee's *Measuring Up 2006* Report Card; and
- *Measuring Up 2006* grades for all 50 states.

The following table shows Tennessee's grades in each category since the report's inception. It is important to note that *Measuring Up* grades states "on the curve." That is, the average performance of the current top five states in each category sets the standard for an A grade. The lone exception to this practice is in the area of Affordability, where grades are based on the

performance of the top states from the early 1990s. Consequently, 43 states received an F in Affordability in 2006.

Tennessee *Measuring Up* Grades by Category, 2000 - 2006

Category	2000	2002	2004	2006
College Preparation	C-	D-	C-	C-
College Participation	D-	D+	C-	C-
College Affordability	C	D-	F	F
College Completion	C	C+	C+	B
Higher Education Benefits to the State	D+	D+	C	C+
Learning	I	I	I	I

A few brief reactions:

1. Change takes time. This longitudinal look at Tennessee’s *Measuring Up* grades reminds us of that. As with any investment, the results of Tennessee’s investment in its educational system are best viewed over the long term. The National Center’s grading categories represent difficult and complex issues requiring a long-term commitment in the same direction. While it is easy to look at this year’s scores and say “there’s nothing new here,” the report is a continual reminder, especially useful as new players enter positions of policy leadership, of the basic issues we should all be concerned about. In the final analysis, the very process of external review, though often controversial and sometimes painful, proves as informative as the grades themselves.
2. We *have* made progress, most discernibly in the categories of Completion and Benefits. Even in the Preparation category, where Tennessee’s grade has not changed, the state has made significant improvement on specific measures such as the percentage of 9th to 12th graders taking at least one upper-level math course; the percent of 8th graders scoring “proficient” or above on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and high ACT and Advanced Placement scores. Tennessee’s educational challenges, while significant, are solvable.
3. Other states (and nations, whose citizens compete increasingly with our graduates for jobs) are improving also, so it is possible for Tennessee to improve and not gain ground in terms of national averages or international comparisons.
4. Affordability is an important issue, and we should remain vigilant about tuition increases. However, Affordability as a construct does not lend itself easily to a single grade for an entire state. The usefulness of a grading scheme is limited when the highest grade for any state is a C- and 43 states receive an F. This is partly due to the fact that states have

only recently begun to recover from the 2001 recession in the national economy. In the public sector, tuition is tied closely to levels of state and local government support per student, which in 2005 were at an all-time low nationally. For its part, Tennessee's public institutions are priced below the national average at every level, and the state's rating by the National Center should only improve as the lottery scholarship program is fully phased in, increasing both total *and* need-based state student aid per student.

5. There is reason to be optimistic about the future. First, the Tennessee HOPE lottery scholarship should improve not only affordability, but just as importantly, preparation for and successful participation in postsecondary education. Second, through a federally funded GEAR UP grant, the Commission and its partners are reaching out to middle and high schools in nine Tennessee counties demonstrating greatest educational need, to design and deliver early interventions to students academically and economically at-risk. Finally, a statewide web portal currently under development, www.CollegeForTN.org, will provide students a virtual one-stop shop where they can apply for admission and financial aid and be advised on their choice of college, major, and career.

Although *Measuring Up* offers but one perspective on these issues, it is a very useful one because it reminds us that "we're all in this together." A reporter asked yesterday whether it is fair to grade higher education on things over which we have no control such as students' preparation in high school. My reaction is twofold. First, higher education *does* have an important role to play in setting and communicating standards for admission and placement and aligning secondary requirements in ways that afford students the best opportunity to succeed at the postsecondary level. And, of course, we prepare K-12 teachers. Second, whether they fully realize it or not, Tennessee's students are preparing to enter an economy, increasingly knowledge-based and global, where the bottom line is, "Can Tennessee's citizens compete?" We all share in responsibility for the answer to that question.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or David Wright on my staff.

Attachments: *Measuring Up 2006* Tennessee Press Release
 Measuring Up 2006 Tennessee Report Card
 Measuring Up 2006 State Grades

cc: Sen. Douglas Henry, Chair, Senate Finance, Ways and Means
 Committee
 Sen. Jamie Woodson, Chair, Senate Education Committee
 Rep. Craig Fitzhugh, Chair, House Finance, Ways and Means Committee
 Rep. Les Wunningham, Chair, House Education Committee
 Drew Kim, Policy Chief, Governor's Office
 Matt Kisber, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Economic &
 Community Development
 Charles Manning, Chancellor, Tennessee Board of Regents
 John Petersen, President, University of Tennessee
 Claude Pressnell, President, Tennessee Independent Colleges &
 Universities Association