



Columnist: For Vols to kick this door down, they'll need bigger boots

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'Clarksville comes together' after tragedy



Kirkwood Elementary School students and faculty pray while wearing black and gold to honor Kenwood Middle School students during a Knights Black and Gold Day remembrance ceremony on March 30 in Clarksville. MARK ZALESKI/THE TENNESSEAN

Students, families unite in black and gold after bus crash

Kenya Anderson

Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle | USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

As Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools students returned to school on March 30, schools across the district held prayers, vigils and a moment of silence for the Kenwood Middle students involved in the fatal bus crash.

Before Kenwood High School opened its doors, over 100 students, teachers and community members wearing black and gold stood outside the doors as they prayed for the school just up the street.

In front of the crowd stood Kenwood senior Grant Johnson, who addressed those gathered by asking everyone to spend a few minutes talking to their neighbors to see if they were okay.

"Me standing up here speaking and an audience listening is great," Johnson said. "But sometimes we need community engagement, so let's just check in with each other."

For about five minutes, students, teachers and community members stood hugging each other, talking

See **VIGIL**, Page 2A



Kirkwood Elementary School Principal Frances Ann Camp speaks during a Knights Black and Gold Day remembrance ceremony on March 30 in Clarksville. The Clarksville middle school students were on a field trip to compete in a go-cart Grand Prix completion when the tragic crash happened near Jackson, killing two students and severely injuring several others. MARK ZALESKI/THE TENNESSEAN

School voucher applicants exceed state median income

Applicants average \$20K over

Vivian Jones

Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Families who applied to participate next school year in Tennessee's statewide taxpayer-funded private school voucher program make an average annual income of more than \$96,400, according to limited summary data obtained by The Tennessean through a public records request.

That's about \$20,000 above Tennessee's median family income, and nearly three times the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Adding 20,000 more slots to double his signature school choice program is a top priority for Gov. Bill Lee in his final year in office.

But expansion is facing some obstacles as a few Republican lawmakers who supported the program last year are seeking more data from the administration, and questioning whether the state has the money to sustain expansion.

Despite their calls, the Lee administration has declined to share anonymized income data — with anyone other than political allies.

The Tennessee Department of Education privately circulated summary statistics of the applicants' income data to members of Republican leadership weeks ago, according to TDOE Chief Counsel Christy Ballard. That data was made available to Republicans in the supermajority before the first votes on a 20,000-slot voucher expansion bill took place.

Democratic leadership was not provided with the information, according to spokespeople for the House and Senate Democratic caucuses.

"The Department shared the summary statistics with legislative leadership and members of the General Assembly weeks ago," Ballard told The Tennessean in an email.

See **VOUCHERS**, Page 2A

NTSB joins fatal school bus crash investigation

Kirsten Fiscus

Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

The National Transportation Safety Board is digging into what happened before a Clarksville-Montgomery County School bus crashed in Carroll County, killing two middle school students and injuring at least a half dozen.

Twenty five Kenwood Middle School students and five staff members were on their way to a student competition at the Toyota Hub City Grand Prix in Jackson March 27 when the wreck happened.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol said the bus crashed near Cedar Grove, about 20 minutes outside of Jackson, around noon. A Tennessee Department of Transportation dump truck and a Chevrolet Trailblazer were also involved.

Seven helicopters transported students to various hospitals in the region. Two students, who officials have not yet named, were pronounced dead at the scene.

The NTSB said in a statement that the investigation will look into the driver's performance, student passenger occupant protection and the oversight of school transportation operations.

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