

Tennessee Valley Fair organizers say they’ve been left out of planning for Chilhowee Park, the event’s home for 110 years



Fair’s share of the future

Devarrick Turner Knoxville News Sentinel | USA TODAY NETWORK – TENN.

Changes are coming to Chilhowee Park, and Tennessee Valley Fair organizers are trying to figure out how their event fits into the park’s new era after nearly 110 years.

Knoxville City Council members voted to allow The Muse children’s museum to take over the Jacob Building, a city-owned centerpiece of the park and the fair, with construction starting next year. And the city could sell nearly 13 acres of Chilhowee Park to Emerald Youth Foundation for a sports complex.

Tennessee Valley Fair organizers have known since 2019 that changes to the park were in the works, but they say they’ve had little to no discussion with city leaders.

This not only makes it difficult to develop a plan for the fair to evolve with the park but also unfairly pits the fair against other community groups with differing interests, including The Muse,

See FAIR, Page 5A

TOP: Between 100,000 and 250,000 people attend the Tennessee Valley Fair at Chilhowee Park each year. PHOTOS BY SAUL YOUNG/NEWS SENTINEL

This year’s Tennessee Valley Fair will be Sept. 5-14. The fair’s lease with the city runs through 2029 but only guarantees use of the park through fall 2026.



Cost of vouchers exceeds per-pupil spending

Program could cost TN \$1.1B in first five years

Rachel Wegner
For the Knoxville News Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Tennessee spends more on students who receive taxpayer-funded school vouchers to pay for private school than it does on the average public school student, new state data shows.

Data presented to the State Board of Education broke down per-pupil state spending for the 2025-26 school year based on the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement formula. The student-based formula took effect in 2023, marking the first revision in 30 years.

Tennessee’s controversial new school vouchers, known as Education Freedom Scholarships, worth \$7,295 were earmarked for 20,000 students statewide for this school year.

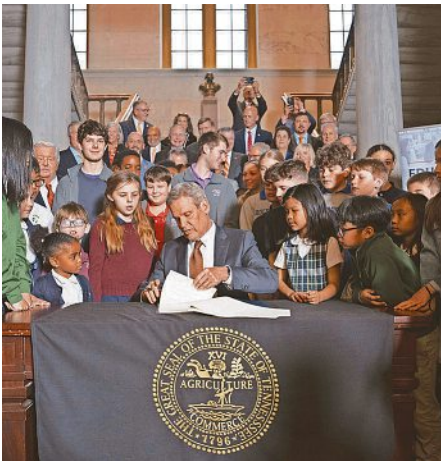
The data presented to the board showed state spending in public schools comes out to \$7,023 per student. That means the state is spending \$272 more on voucher recipients than the average public school student this year.

Gov. Bill Lee has championed the voucher expansion, saying it empowers more parents to access different education options for their children. The expansion was met with opposition and delays for years but passed earlier this year during a short special legislative session.

According to a state estimate released ahead of the session, the voucher program will cost at least \$1.1 billion in its first five years.

Along with state funding, Tennessee school districts also receive local and federal funding for students. Overall per-pupil spending varies

See VOUCHERS, Page 5A



Gov. Bill Lee signs the school voucher expansion bill at the Tennessee State Capitol on Feb. 12.
NICOLE HESTER/THE TENNESSEAN

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Allison Kiehl
Knoxville News Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

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See GOOGLE, Page 5A

