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Walking the Walk: Local Leaders Join TCAP Simulation to Stand Behind Students

McMinnville, Tenn., April 22, 2025 — Warren County Schools welcomed local civic leaders and media representatives this morning for a unique opportunity to experience firsthand the academic demands placed on students during state testing. The district hosted its first-ever TCAP Simulation Event at the Warren County Schools central office, where participants sat for the English language arts (ELA) subtests of the third-grade TCAP assessment.

This initiative, spearheaded by Director of Schools Dr. Grant Swallows, was designed to give community stakeholders a clearer understanding of the rigor, structure, and expectations involved in standardized testing.

“We wanted our community leaders to truly feel what it’s like to be a student during TCAP,” said Dr. Swallows. “It’s not just about filling in bubbles; it’s about focus, stamina, and demonstrating a deep understanding of grade-level standards. This exercise helped shine a light on that.”

Participants were immersed in an authentic testing environment, complete with official **retired** TCAP testing booklets, scantron answer sheets, and number two pencils which are the same materials used by students. All personal electronic devices were collected at the start and monitored by staff throughout the session to follow actual school protocols.

Dr. Shea Panter, Director of Federal Programs, led the simulation by walking participants through testing instructions and timing, while Director of Continuous Improvement Kathy Bryant served as test proctor. Both ensured a testing experience that closely mirrored what third-grade students across Warren County face each spring.

“As a room full of county leaders, we all had the same takeaways that this was extremely more difficult than we thought. Even as an adult, there was some tension and anxiety in this test taking process. You don’t understand the pressures on our students until you sit down in that seat and take that test,” said Warren County Board of Education Chairman Chris Cope.

“I had a very hard time paying attention to the teacher when she was reading the passage, my mind kept wandering and I saw that other people were finished before me and it made me feel like I was behind,” explained Main Street Media Owner Chad Graves. “It was a much more difficult process than I had thought.”

Following the simulation, answer sheets were scored using the same process students experience.

Community participants included:

- Warren County Executive Terry Bell
- City of McMinnville Mayor Ryle Chastain
- Warren County Board of Education Chairman Chris Cope
- Warren County Board of Education Commissioner Tommy Culwell
- McMinnville-Warren County Chamber of Commerce President Melissa Mullins
- Main Street Media Owners Chad Graves and Scot MacDonald
- Warren First 931 Owner and Host Kelly Walker Slaughter
- WCPI Host and *Southern Standard* Contributor Bill Zechman
- Warren County Schools Director Dr. Grant Swallows

“We need to challenge our other lawmakers to come take this test and let them see how it affects them in the testing environment,” stated Warren County Executive Terry Bell.

Warren County Schools plans to make this simulation a regular spring event, expanding participation to include even more community members in future years.

“We are incredibly grateful for the support and engagement of our local leaders and media partners. Their willingness to participate shows a shared commitment to understanding and supporting the students of Warren County,” said Swallows.

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