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# STUDENT PLACEMENT

Ensuring All Students Have Equitable  
Access to Highly Effective Teachers

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Horace Mann, one of the architects of the American education system, aptly noted:

*“Education...beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men --the balance wheel of the social machinery.” (1848)*

Within that context, teachers are the most influential in-school factor in a student’s education.<sup>1</sup> This is why we must ensure that students are placed with effective teachers on a consistent basis.

### The Issue:

According to data<sup>2</sup> released in August 2016 by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), students scoring below basic in math in 2013 were more likely to score at a higher achievement level in 2015 if they had access to a highly effective (HE) teacher\* in both 2014 and 2015. For example, in 4-8 Math, only 5.2% of students without a highly effective teacher for two consecutive years were proficient or advance, compared to 12.7% for students with a highly effective teacher for two consecutive years. Further, in 4-8 ELA students scoring below basic composed 55.4% of the overall population of students without access to a highly effective teacher, compared to 38.7% for those with access for two consecutive years.

**Below basic students  
have less access to  
highly effective  
teachers than advanced  
students.**

In 4-8 ELA, advanced students had an average 4.4% greater chance<sup>^</sup> of being placed with a highly effective teacher than their below basic peers, with one district nearing a 40% greater chance of that inequity. (It should be noted that multiple districts actually had below basic students having a greater chance of being placed with a highly effective teacher than their advance peers). The same pattern exists at the high school level.

\*TDOE defines highly effective (HE) teachers as those who have individual growth TVAAS scores of level 4 or 5.

<sup>^</sup>Percentages are represented as an effective teaching gap, defined by TDOE as: % advanced students with an HE teacher minus the % of below basic students with an HE teacher.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Hanushek, J. Kain and S. Rivkin, "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement", National Bureau of Economic Research (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Please note that all data in this brief is from 2014-15 or earlier. 2015-16 data was not available at the time this brief was made public.

In 4-8 Math, the inequity between access to highly effective teachers for advanced and below basic students averaged 9.5% across the state, with one district having a greater than 50% gap. (Again, it should be noted that multiple districts had the reverse with below basic students having better access). Similar to ELA, the same pattern exists at the high school level, and in fact, is more exacerbated with a 10.1% state average gap.

In 2015 and 2016, StudentsFirst Tennessee conducted two statewide surveys asking school leaders about their current practices around student assignment. While year over

**Around 15% of school leaders do not consider student or teacher performance when assigning students to classrooms.**

year there are more principals that say they have the autonomy to make student assignment decisions, our results noted three striking findings. First, there are many school leaders that

do not feel empowered to make placement decisions for their students. Second, over 15% of principals do not take prior or current teacher or classroom performance into consideration. Third, nearly 15% of principals do not take student performance into consideration when placing students into specific classrooms. *Detailed results are available in Appendix A.*

Another issue is one major constraint we do not discuss at length in this brief because it goes beyond the ability to get access to more effective teachers. However, it is still worth mentioning. Many districts across the state are small and/or rural and only have one class per grade or subject area. Thus, there is no practicable options for school administrators to assign students to different classrooms. Without delving too far into this related but separate issue, the solution as it pertains to student placement rests with developing and training teachers within the existing system – something districts and the state are currently addressing through the TDOE strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*,<sup>3</sup> and other projects.

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<sup>3</sup> An online version of Tennessee Succeeds is available online at [https://tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/strategic\\_plan.pdf](https://tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/strategic_plan.pdf).

## Current Statutory Landscape:

Current law governing student assignment authorizes the local governing board of local education agencies (LEAs) to enroll and assign students to schools within the LEA. *T.C.A. § 49-6-3102(a)(1)* This authority to assign students may be delegated to other personnel

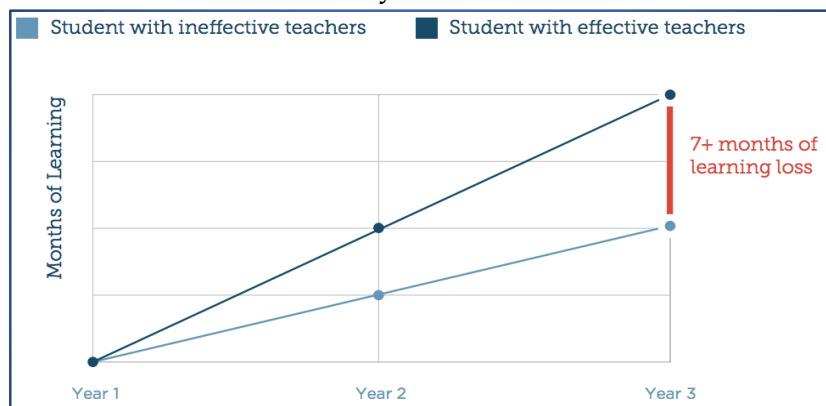
**State code outlines 22 factors local boards may consider in assigning students, yet none are related to teacher performance.**

within the district. *T.C.A. § 49-6-3102(e)(1)* While the authority may be delegated, the ultimate authority of the local school board may be a leading factor for why many school leaders do not feel empowered to make decisions related to student

assignment. State code outlines twenty-two (22) factors the local governing board may consider in the assignment of students to schools, none of which include considering the performance of the prior or current teacher of record. *T.C.A. § 49-6-3103* When assignment decisions are made, districts may notify parents on a student's report card or other "feasible means." *T.C.A. § 49-6-3107* However, that notification cannot include estimates of specific teacher effects on the educational progress of students, since those effects shall not be public record according to state law. *T.C.A. § 49-1-606*

## The Effect:

Placement in an ineffective classroom can have a detrimental impact on student learning. With every year in such a classroom, a student loses an average of 3.5 months of learning.<sup>4</sup> So when a student is placed in such a classroom for two years in a row, that student can lose up to seven or more months of learning during that time.<sup>5</sup> Studies further show that a student who is placed in three ineffective classrooms in a row is unlikely to recover from that learning loss, remaining far behind his or her peers.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>4</sup> The Education Trust-West, "Learning Denied: The Case for Equitable Access to Effective Teaching in California's Largest School District", (Oakland, CA: The Education Trust-West, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, "Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement", Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, November 1996.

## A Solution:

Great teachers can make up for learning loss. This is because students with high-quality

**Students with *high-quality teachers gain five to six more months of learning than students in classrooms with the lowest-performing teachers.***

teachers gain five to six more months of learning than students in classrooms with the lowest-performing teachers.<sup>7</sup> **Tennessee cultivates some of the best teachers and we need to figure out how to make sure ALL our students consistently have access to the best quality instruction.**

It is important to consider our solutions within the greater context of educator pipelines. Like all policymaking, a solution to the issue of equitable access to effective teachers requires understanding how the student assignment component fits into the overall teacher pipeline.

The issue is multifaceted and rests on three main areas:

- Supply of highly effective teachers and high quality applicants;
- Distribution of teachers both between and within schools; and
- Identifying, sharing, and reflecting on data around access to effective teachers.

As part of *Tennessee Succeeds*, the state, districts, and educator preparation programs are focusing on expanding the pipeline of qualified candidates. The recommendations set forth in this section focus on the latter two areas of equitable access for students: distribution of teachers and transparency of compliance data. *For model statutory language to incorporate into Tennessee statutory code (T.C.A.), please see Appendix B.*

**Recommendation 1. Ensure students have access to the best possible education by requiring consideration of student and teacher performance when assigning students each year.**

- Recommendation 1A. Enact a policy ensuring school administrators consider student and teacher performance to better safeguard against K-5 students having two ineffective primary classroom teachers for two consecutive years.

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<sup>7</sup> TNTP, *The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools* (New York: TNTP, 2012), 2, 42, [http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP\\_Irreplaceables\\_2012.pdf](http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf).

- Recommendation 1B. Enact a policy ensuring school administrators consider student and teacher performance to better safeguard against students in grades 6-12 students having two ineffective teachers of the same core academic subject (Math or ELA) for two consecutive years.

**Recommendation 2. Create compliance reports that are publicly accessible.** Require districts publish a compliance report on access to effective teachers outlining where students have been placed over consecutive years based on their performance and their teacher’s performance. The state should require the board of education of each local school system to compile information on its ability to comply with this section, including the aggregate<sup>8</sup> number of underperforming students that could not be assigned to highly effective teachers. This information should be shared publicly.

**Recommendation 3. Notify parents when a student is placed in an underperforming classroom for multiple consecutive years.**

- Recommendation 3A. If the school is not able to comply with Recommendation 1, the parents of each applicable student should be notified before the start of the second consecutive school year that the student will be placed in an underperforming classroom for a second consecutive year.
- Recommendation 3B. Tennessee prohibits information regarding a teacher’s impact on student educational progress from being released to parents. See T.C.A. § 49-1-606. The result is that parents are in the dark about when their child is placed in an

**Recommendation 1.**  
**Ensure students have access to the best possible education by requiring consideration of student and teacher performance when assigning students each year.**

**Recommendation 2.**  
**Create compliance reports that are publicly accessible.**

**Recommendation 3.**  
**Notify parents when a student is placed in an underperforming classroom for multiple consecutive years.**

**Recommendation 4:**  
**Emphasize consideration of teacher performance in student assignment practices.**

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<sup>8</sup> Reporting aggregate information will still maintain the privacy of teacher performance to the public, while allowing transparency around the issue of student assignment.

underperforming classroom. Thus, we recommend the state amend the provision under T.C.A. § 49-1-606 to allow notification to parents when students are placed in an underperforming classroom.

**Recommendation 4: Emphasize consideration of teacher performance in student assignment practices.** Add statutory language regarding teacher performance to the list of factors that districts may consider when assigning students pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-3103.



Currently, there are two<sup>9</sup> other states that have elements of model policy: Florida<sup>10</sup> and Indiana.<sup>11</sup> Both states enacted their laws to go into effect during the 2011-12 school year.



### Conclusion:

As each school year rings in, the impact on students as they arrive in their new classrooms goes beyond meeting new peers or choosing where they will sit. Teachers have the most substantial in-school impact on student achievement. When a student has a rock star teacher, they thrive. Conversely, when a student has a struggling teacher or is placed in an underperforming classroom, they can flounder. Not only will they fall behind for that year, but if a student is placed in consecutive underperforming classrooms, their chances of catching up to their peers is greatly diminished.

Tennessee is already addressing several of the issues around expanding the high quality teacher pipeline.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the work does not stop there. We need to ensure that those students, especially our lowest performing students, in classrooms today are able to have access to effective teachers. As a state, if we are committed to the value of “All Means All,” we cannot continue to have gaps in access to highly effective teachers for our most vulnerable students. Because as Horace Mann wisely opined...education is the great equalizer among us.

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<sup>9</sup> Rhode Island enacted regulations to implement a student assignment policy, however it is unclear whether the policy has been implemented or enforced. See Rhode Island’s Equity Plan on Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, available at [http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Equitable-Access/APPROVED\\_EQUITY\\_PLAN\\_RI\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Equitable-Access/APPROVED_EQUITY_PLAN_RI_2015.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Florida statute: F.S.A. 1012.2315(6) regarding assignment of teachers based upon performance evaluations

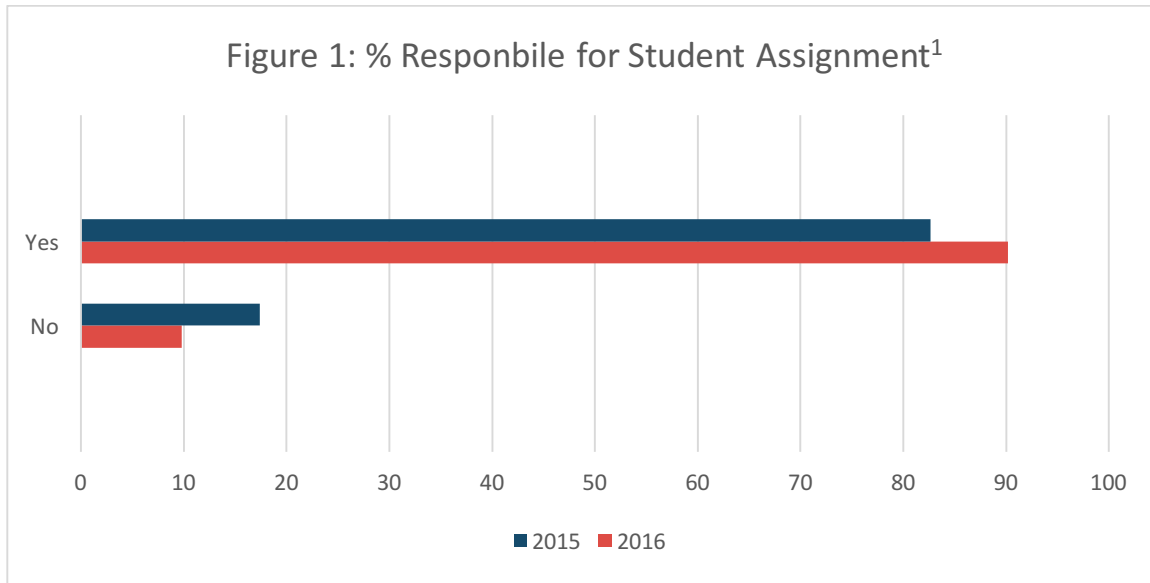
<sup>11</sup> Indiana statute: IC 20-28-11.5-7 regarding the consecutive instruction of students by teachers rated as ineffective

<sup>12</sup> See Tennessee Succeeds, TDOE’s strategic plan, accessible location noted above or the Tennessee Equity Plan (2015), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/equitable/tnequityplan9115.pdf>.

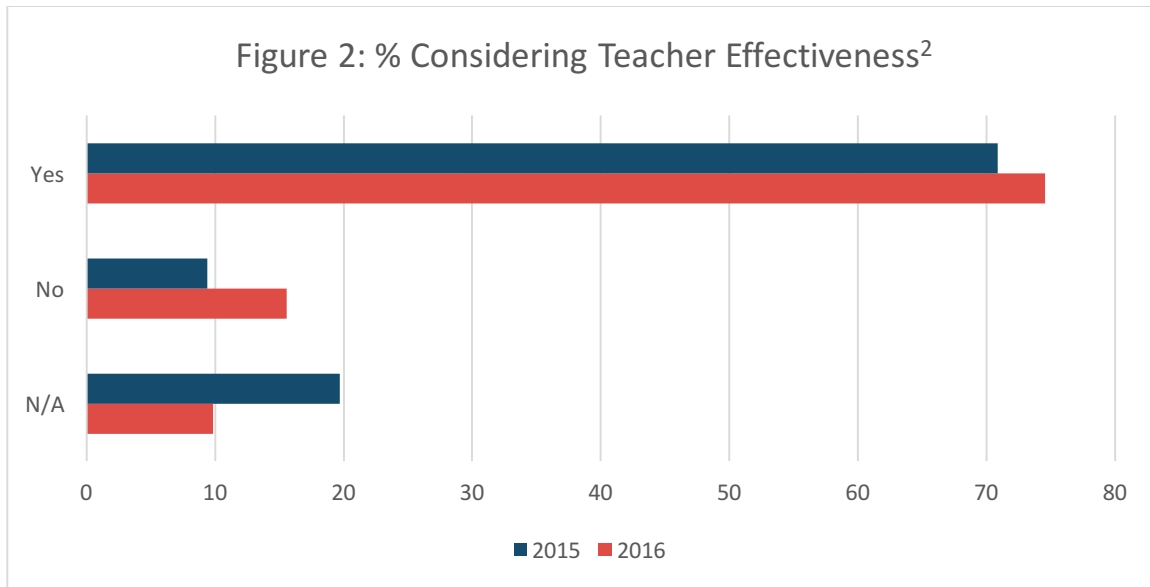
## Appendix A: Student Placement Survey Results

Total number of survey respondents:

- November 2015: n=213
- July 2016: n=344

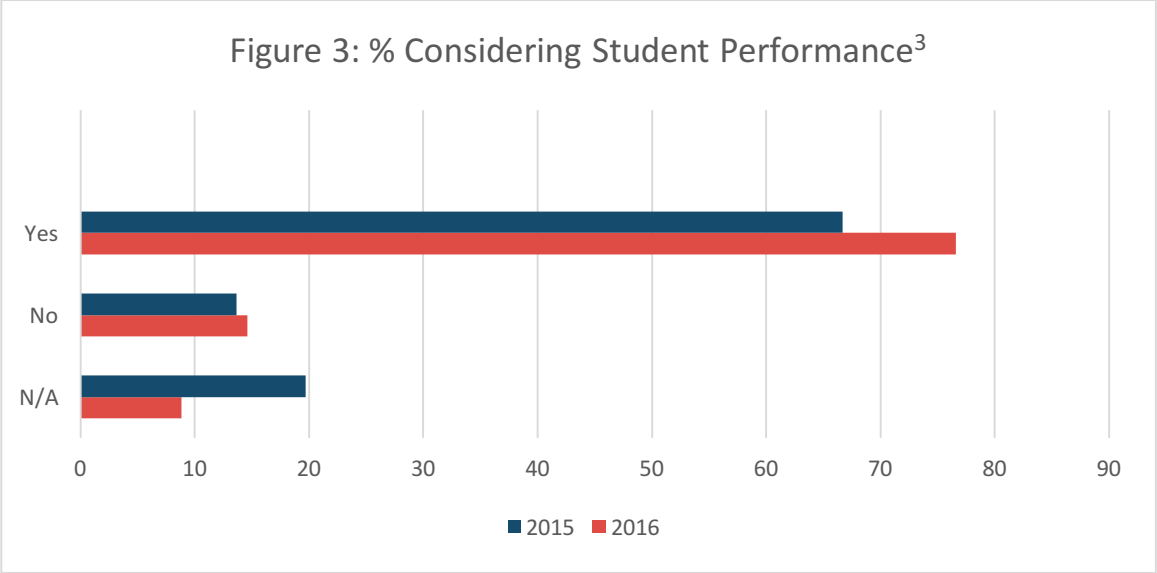


1 – The exact language of the question asked was: *At the beginning of each school year, are you responsible for placing students in the particular classroom they will be assigned to?*



2 - The exact language of the question asked was: *When placing students in individual classrooms at the beginning of the year, do you give consideration to the effectiveness of the teacher/classroom the student had the previous year relative to the effectiveness of the teacher/classroom you would place them in for the coming year?*





3 - The exact language of the question asked was: *Alternatively, when placing students in individual classrooms at the beginning of the year, do you give consideration to their individual achievement levels from the previous year relative to the teacher/classroom performance where they will be assigned?*

## **Appendix B: Model Statutory Language:**

Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-3103, is amended by adding the following as a new, appropriately designated subdivision:

The overall performance of the teacher where the pupil may be assigned, as determined by the teacher's evaluations conducted pursuant to § 49-1-302(d).

Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 31, is amended by adding the following language as a new, appropriately designated section:

(a) When assigning students under this Part, the board of education of each local school system shall consider whether the student will be instructed for two (2) consecutive years by two (2) consecutive teachers, each of whom was rated as “below expectations” or lower by their evaluation conducted pursuant to § 49-1-302(d) in the immediately preceding school year which the student is placed in the respective teacher's class. If a teacher did not instruct students in the immediately preceding school year in which students are placed in the teacher's class, the teacher's rating under § 49-1-302(d) for the most recent year in which the teacher instructed students shall be used.

(b) Subdivision (a) shall only apply to the instructional subjects of reading, language arts, and math.

(c) Prior to the beginning of each school year, the board of education of each local school system shall notify parents according to the acceptable means pursuant to *T.C.A. § 49-6-3107* of any student who is assigned to a classroom teacher for a second consecutive year who received a performance evaluation rating of “below expectations” or “significantly below expectations.”

(d) The board of education of each local school system shall compile information on its ability to comply with this section, including the total number of students that could not be assigned according to the provisions of subdivision (a). The information shall be reported annually to the Senate Education, House Education Administration & Planning, and House Education Instruction & Programs Committees of the Tennessee General Assembly.

Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-1-606, is amended by adding the following language after the first sentence of subdivision (b):

The estimates of specific teacher effects on the educational progress of students may be shared with parents in order to comply with Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 31 of this code so long as the specific overall evaluation scores derived pursuant to T. C. A. § 49-1-302(d) are not shared.

**About StudentsFirst Tennessee:**

We're a nonpartisan, nonprofit K-12 education group working to ensure that every child in Tennessee has great teachers and great schools. Established in Tennessee in 2011, our work is aimed at increasing the number of high-quality school choices that are available, empowering parents with accessible and transparent information, and ensuring every student has access to great teachers and great schools.

*More information is available at [studentsfirst.org/tennessee](http://studentsfirst.org/tennessee).*

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