TennesseeCAN

TENNESSEE POLICY REPORT CARD 2018

Table of contents

Key

IHE	Institution of Higher Education
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ASD	Achievement School District
TDOE or Department	Tennessee Department of Education
SBE	Tennessee State Board of Education
TCAP	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program
LEA or District	Local Education Agency
BEP	Basic Education Program
TN	Tennessee
Commissioner	Commissioner of Education
State Legislature	Tennessee General Assembly
House	Tennessee House of Representatives
Senate	Tennessee Senate
Priority Schools List	Priority Schools are the lowest-performing five percent of schools in Tennessee in terms of academic achievement.[1]
Tennessee Succeeds	The TDOE Strategic Plan

A Letter to Governor-Elect Lee

Over the past decade, two governors from two different political parties have placed a top priority on improving education in Tennessee. As a result of this strong leadership and a shared, cohesive vision, we are doing more than ever to ensure every student in our state receives a high-quality education, and Tennessee has been recognized as one of the fastest-improving states in the country.

This work is critically important for our students and the future of our state, but it hasn't been easy. It has required buy-in at every level—from the Governor's office to the State Legislature, to district and school leaders, to individual classroom teachers.

While we have made gains, the work is far from done.

As Tennessee's 50th Governor, you have the opportunity to ensure we remain relentlessly focused on ensuring every student receives a high-quality education through access to great teachers and great schools.

TennesseeCAN's 2018 Tennessee Policy Report Card lays out the crucial policies our state must protect or enact to ensure we do better for our students. These policies are grouped into four main areas of focus: excellence, equity, choice, and transparency.

— Excellence: Guaranteeing excellence in Tennessee's schools requires setting rigorous academic standards and providing an annual aligned assessment—while rewarding our teachers and principals for their achievements and setting the bar high for the students in their schools.
— Equity: Tennessee's policies should provide a high-quality education to every student, regardless of their socioeconomic background, where they live, or any other life circumstance.
— Choice: Whether it's a traditional public school, a public charter school, a private school, or homeschooling, every Tennessee family should have the ability to choose the educational option that best meets their children's unique needs.
— Transparency: Tennessee must protect our accountability system and provide for greater transparency of information on student, teacher, school, and district performance, as well as taxpayer investments in public education.

This document will examine specific policies in each focus area, highlighting where Tennessee is doing well—along with the areas where we must continue to improve.

Our goal is to provide specific policy recommendations that will help tackle tough challenges as well as expand on what is working well.

We, along with many other partners, stand ready to support you as you lead our state toward continued progress in education.

The TennesseeCAN Team

Executive Summary

2019 will mark the first year in Governor Bill Lee's administration, and it is our hope and belief that the new administration will continue and build upon the state's decade-plus efforts to improve education in the Volunteer state. It is critical that our state retains its commitments to key education policies and reforms that have demonstrably improved outcomes for students in Tennessee and led the state to extraordinary progress in the last decade. Policymakers now have the opportunity to pursue innovative methods to further cement Tennessee's status as a national leader in education.

While this report is not an analysis of student or school performance, it is a barometer on the state policy efforts that have contributed to an environment of academic success. It is an outline and reflection on the work our legislators and state agencies have done to support the incredible instruction of our teachers and school leaders. It is our hope that the incoming administration and policymakers will use this report to double down on state policies that have led to impressive education gains, while examining areas in which the state can innovate to raise the bar for all children.

These policy recommendations serve as a guide to the model practices developed by state-based entities in conjunction with state and national research. However, policy is only as good as its implementation. Our state must continue to implement policies with fidelity to ensure our most vulnerable student populations are receiving the highest quality of education and afforded every opportunity to succeed.

Our report analyzes 25 education policies we believe are the most critical levers for Tennessee to achieve strong educational progress and a high-quality educator pipeline. Pages 15–22 provide an overview of all 25 policies, each of which are detailed in more depth later on in the report. Only a strong policy structure can give our families greater access to quality school options, help our leaders foster and develop strong teacher talent pipelines, and unburden our local systems to grant greater flexibility to educators. While we understand the urgency of the work that lies ahead, we also recognize that policymakers need to methodically formulate a sensible policy strategy for Tennessee's students, educators, and schools, and some policies should not be adopted until others are put in place.

This year's version of the policy report card has been reorganized to reflect TennesseeCAN's new policy "guiding stars" — Excellence, Equity, Choice, and Transparency.

Select highlights from the 2018 Tennessee Policy Report Card:

— This report includes two new introductory spotlights: the first on the importance of successful assessment implementation and the second on Career and Technical Education (CTE), which highlights some guiding principles to help Tennessee continue to improve its CTE programs statewide.
— Recent legislation improved public charter school access to equitable funding. During the 2018 legislative session, the state passed Public Chapter 767, allowing public charter schools equal access to the Special Education High-Cost Reimbursement fund, as well as Public Chapter 835, providing access to energy efficient facilities grants and loans.
— The state maintains its model standard of using robust evaluation rubrics and performance-based policies to measure our educators' quality of instruction.
— Tennessee should continue its commitment to providing students quality school options through expanded school choice programs.
— It is becoming more evident that Tennessee's school funding formula, the BEP, is not sufficiently providing adequate and equitable funding to the schools and students who need it most. Reform is needed to ensure that Tennessee has a fair funding formula.
— Tennessee continues to need improvement around student assignment policies. Current practice does not require districts and schools to address students who are placed in chronically underperforming classrooms.

Strong Policies for Tennessee

In 12 of the 25 policies included in this report, Tennessee is categorized as a “Three” or “Four,” indicating strong state policy.

12/25

Strong state policies

Five policies are categorized as a “Three,” while seven policies are categorized as a “Four.”

We will help every student realize his or her potential and provide them opportunities for success in life.

Tennessee Education at a Glance

Tennessee Commissioner of Education
Dr. Candice McQueen

Tennessee State Board Members

Mr. Nick Darnell	District 1
Mr. Mike Edwards	District 2
Mr. Bob Eby	District 3
Mr. Gordon Ferguson (Vice chair)	District 4
Ms. Elissa Kim	District 5
Mrs. Lillian Hartgrove (Chairman)	District 6
Mrs. Wendy Tucker	District 7
Vacant	District 8
Mr. Darrell Cobbins	District 9
Vacant	Student Representative

Tennessee State Legislature
The General Assembly has
33 Senators and 99 Representatives

School System

975,222
Students

62,132
Teachers

$9,958
Average Per-pupil Expenditure*

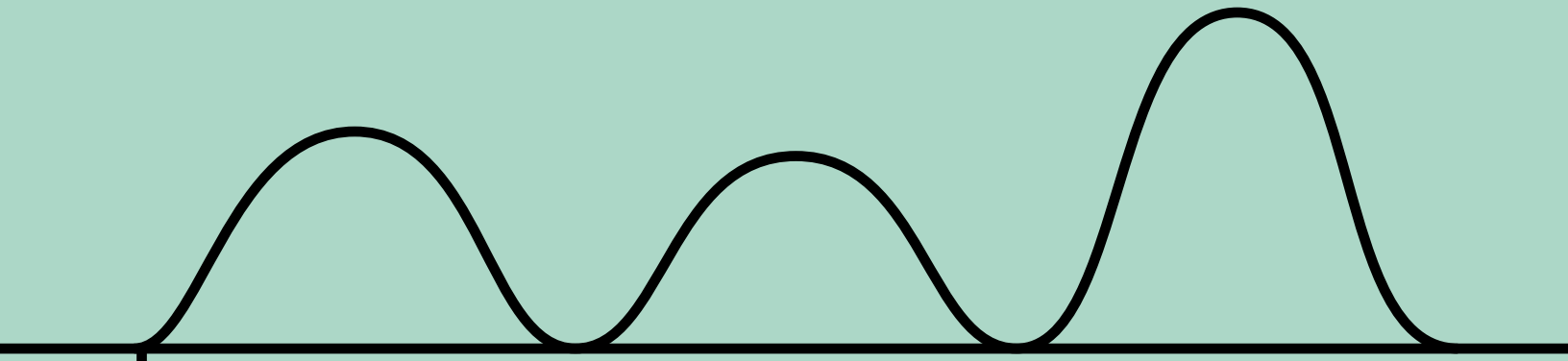
146
School Districts

1,749
Schools (All)

→113
Public Charter Schools

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program

Grade 3–8 TNReady Scores



37.3
Math

33.9
ELA

58.1**
Science

Percentage of students scoring on track or mastered.

Average
ACT Score

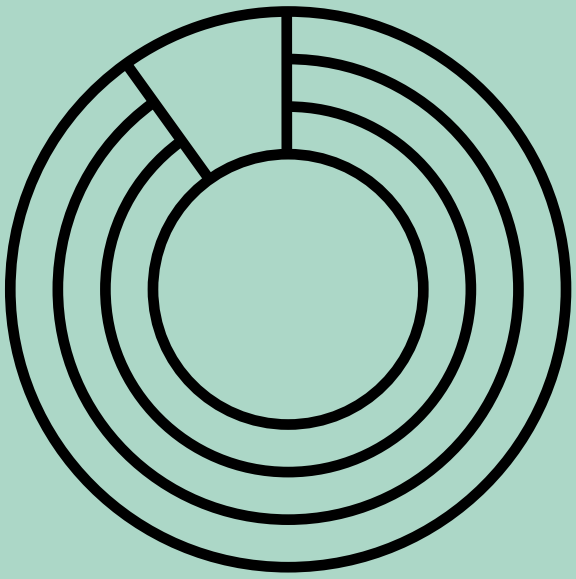
20.2

The benchmark for college and career ready, including eligibility for the HOPE scholarship, is 21

89.1

Average (%)

State
Graduation
Rate***

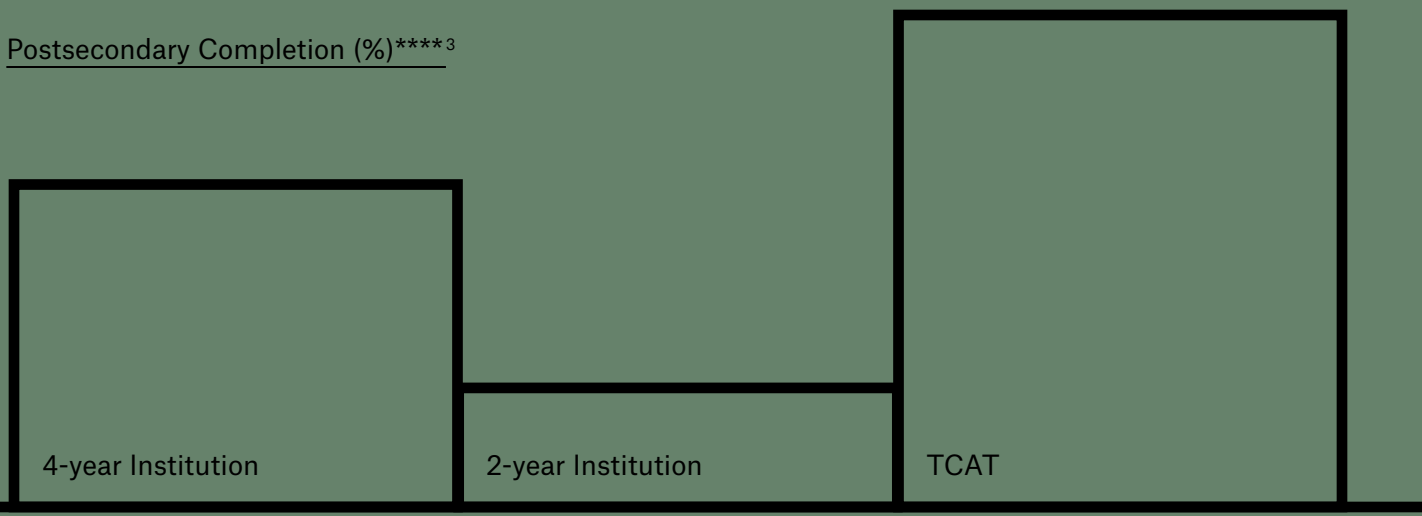


Postsecondary Enrollment (%)****[2]

63.0

Combined 2- and 4-year institutions rate

Postsecondary Completion (%)****[3]



53.9 27.7 81.7

Note: All data, unless otherwise noted, reflects information fromthe 2017–18 school year; available on the Tennessee State Report Card.

*This data is from 2016–17 as updated 2017–18 data was not yet available when this report was published.

**Student proficiency in science is higher compared to ELA and math. More rigorous science academic standards will be implemented in Tennessee schools in 2018-19.

***The Graduation Rate measures the percentage of students who graduate from high school within four years and a summer out of those students that entered the ninth grade four years earlier.

****This data is from 2016–17 as updated 2017–18 data was not yet available when this report was published. Completion is represented by the six-year graduation rate. Therefore, this 16-17 data represents the six-year completion rates for the cohort who entered college in 2011.

The Importance of Assessment Implementation

The 2018 spring administration of Tennessee's statewide assessment, TNReady, presented many challenges for Tennessee students and educators. Simply put, we fell short of providing a seamless online testing experience for our students and educators.

Despite the challenges experienced in spring 2018, it is important to reaffirm the role of a statewide standards-aligned assessment and its value in improving student outcomes.

Ultimately, the TNReady assessment is a crucial lever in improving academic outcomes. The education gains that Tennessee has achieved in the past decade were possible because an annual statewide assessment produced data that created urgency around continuous improvement.

Importantly, TNReady was specifically designed to align with high-quality, state-based academic standards. Prior to 2010, Tennessee did not have high-quality rigorous standards and our statewide assessment did not give us an accurate picture of students' preparedness for college and career. An aligned statewide assessment tells teachers and parents whether a student is meeting expectations and gaining the skills demanded for college and career.

Moreover, annual assessment data helps educators improve their practice while allowing policymakers and stakeholders to hold school systems accountable for results—including identifying and expanding what is working well, and making data-based decisions to tackle tough challenges, like closing achievement gaps for historically underserved student subgroups.

The public understands the value of a high-quality standards-aligned assessment, as well. A September 2018 poll by the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) showed that 88 percent of voters surveyed agreed that testing is an important way to measure education effectiveness, with over half calling it very important. On TNReady specifically, only 27 percent dubbed it "a failure," while 61 percent said the test "should be fixed so that we have a good measure of student progress."[4]

The annual statewide assessment will continue to play a crucial role in achieving further improvements, and effective administration of TNReady is of paramount importance. Governor Bill Haslam and other state leaders have led the charge to seek feedback on how we can do better, and are working to ensure a successful administration of the assessment for the 2018-2019 school year.

Tennessee Department of Education Commissioner Candice McQueen released a plan to take immediate actions to improve administration in 2018–19. Initiatives include:

- Releasing a new Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify the assessment vendor(s) that can successfully administer the state test in 2019-20 and beyond.
- Amending the state's current contract and relationship with the test administration company to improve the assessment experience in 2018-19.
- Adjusting the pace of the state's transition to online testing, and which grade-levels will take the assessment online versus on paper.

Further, Governor Haslam and Commissioner McQueen hosted a statewide listening tour, convening six roundtables with educators across the state to discuss ways to work towards a smoother testing administration going forward. These conversations revealed four distinct areas of needed focus: restoring the credibility of TNReady, creating greater student accessibility to technology, receiving results from the assessment in a timely manner, and aligning instructional resources to the assessments.

Moving forward, all policymakers and stakeholders can and should work toward improving the implementation and administration of TNReady, but must do so in a way that preserves the core elements of a rigorous, standards-aligned annual assessment.

Policymakers should also resist political pressure to overhaul the assessment and accountability structure, which could jeopardize a decade's worth of academic improvement and imperil the state's status as one of the country's fastest-improving states in education.

Innovation Spotlight: Career and Technical Education

Tennessee stands out for its progress in education growth, and in 2018 the state hit its highest high school graduation rate for the second year in a row.[5] Despite this progress, more than one in three Tennessee high school graduates do not enroll in any postsecondary institution.[6]

Yet by 2025, more than half of the jobs in Tennessee will require some sort of postsecondary credential, and a high school diploma, which in Tennessee only nets an average annual salary of $10,880 immediately after high school, no longer guarantees career success or even access to the middle class.[7] Of the 47 million jobs created in the U.S. in the past 10 years, two-thirds require a postsecondary credential. Of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential, 30 percent require a bachelor's degree, and another 30 percent require an associate's degree.[8]

The statewide Drive to 55 initiative and programs like Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect are helping more and more Tennesseans achieve a postsecondary credential, but businesses continue to face shortages of skilled laborers. To meet workforce demands, state leaders must build K–12 and post-secondary education systems that align with employer needs and seamlessly transition students from learning to work.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is a critical link that helps ensure opportunities for all students to access high-quality education, training, and career options after high school. Tennessee has made progress toward aligning its CTE offerings with the needs of industry— helping create opportunities for students to learn the skills required to access high wage, high demand careers.

However, ensuring high-quality CTE programs is a challenge many states face, and Tennessee can do more to build more high-quality CTE programs and ensure relevance, rigor, quality, and equitable access for all students. To help develop high-quality, workforce-aligned CTE programs, policymakers should focus on five guiding principles.

Vertical Alignment Across Systems

A key attribute of any high-quality state CTE policy is strong vertical links between secondary and postsecondary credentials. Students in Tennessee will benefit from the opportunity to earn stackable and transferable credentials as they progress along their chosen pathway. Stackable credentials allow students to earn meaningful credentials that have value in the workforce early, often while still in high school, but that also transfer and combine with additional credentials that students can elect to earn through postsecondary training to build their career paths, create opportunities for field advancement or increased compensation, and access degree programs. Vertical alignment gives students a) meaningful credentials that have value in a globally competitive workforce and b) a clear on and off ramp to the state's education system as their interests, skills, and jobs change over time. To date, nineteen other states have established stackable credential policies.

Integrated Data Systems

The smart use of data is critical for states as they work to develop programs that reflect a purposeful sequence of courses that have direct alignment to industry and to postsecondary programs. The ability to analyze program offerings and outcomes alongside information about labor market demand and requirements and postsecondary opportunities allows states to measure program alignment, identify gaps in alignment or opportunity, and retool or phase out programs that no longer have relevance to the labor market.

Commitment to Quality

In order to retain relevance and to ensure that students gain the skills and knowledge they need to be ready for a range of postsecondary options, states must ensure that CTE course content is rigorous and that educators receive ongoing, progressive training and professional development so that instruction reflects course standards and current industry work environments. The state should serve as a resource for local districts to maintain a consistent level of high-quality across geographic and socioeconomic boundaries.

Commitment to Equity

States must craft CTE policies that make high-quality CTE opportunities available to all students. Today, many learners still lack access to high-quality CTE opportunities and the pattern of tracking low-income students into low-quality courses continues. As Tennessee continues to revise and improve CTE offerings, it is imperative that the state collect data on who in the state is taking and completing CTE courses linked to high wage, high demand careers. This data should be disaggregated by subgroups, publicly reported, and used by the state and districts to design programs that ensure equitable access. Further, the state should explore ways to target additional funding for at-risk student subgroups participating in CTE courses.

Robust Public-Private Partnerships

States need strong buy-in from industry and business leaders to build high-quality state CTE policies and programs. Developing cross-sector partnerships among K–12 education, business and industry organizations, and postsecondary institutions can pose a real challenge to strengthening career pathways for students, but these partnerships are vital to ensuring that secondary CTE pathways are closely aligned to labor market demand, feature meaningful experiential learning opportunities such as work study and internships, and provide stackable, transferable credentials across all sectors.

Engaging industry leaders in designing the program curriculum, providing certifications, and providing training and professional development to secondary educators are key steps states can take on the front end of the process to lay a strong foundation for continued partnership.

How Does Tennessee Stack Up?

The evolution of CTE is underway across the nation, and Tennessee has been singled out for the bold steps taken to bring its course offerings in alignment with industry demands. Likewise, Tennessee is recognized for:

— An annual program of study justifications used to phase out irrelevant courses and introduce new courses based on industry demands
— Seeking feedback from industry and postsecondary institutions on courses to ensure alignment and rigor
— Collecting data on who is enrolled in and completing high-quality career pathways
— Extensive professional development for teachers to master new course standards

As Tennessee's leaders consider how to build on the strong foundations already in place around CTE, they should focus on building the data infrastructure and data-driven decision making practices that will ensure our state's programs remain relevant and aligned with the needs of students and employers so all students in the state can access pathways to high wage, high demand careers. More specifically, state leaders should focus their efforts on addressing the following gaps:

— Collaborate with districts, industry leaders, and postsecondary institutions to craft a stackable credential policy for students
— Disaggregate and publicly report data on student level enrollment and outcomes to support improved equity
— Design additional methods (including various financial incentives) to support struggling districts to ensure that all districts are offering courses best aligned to their regions
— Collect more data on the quality of work-based learning and use this data to guide reforms to work-based learning including incentives for employers to participate in work-based learning

Ensuring multiple high-quality pathways to college and career readiness will yield benefits for our students and our communities by promoting sustainable economic well-being for Tennesseans and for our state.

STATE POLICIES OVERVIEW

How to read the policy rubrics and state analysis

Each policy is broken down into five tiers, similar to our categorization of educator performance in Tennessee through our teacher evaluation system.

Categorization ranges from 0 to 4, with 0 indicating insufficient or no progress toward model standards, and 4 indicating state-enacted law that encompasses research-based national best practices.

In order to attain a higher category, such as moving from a 1 to a 2, the state must codify in law or regulation all elements of the higher category. Thus, if the state enacts partial elements of a higher category, it would still be rated in the lower category.

State Policy Categories

Excellence Policies

Guaranteeing excellence in Tennessee's schools requires setting high standards for students, educators, and schools and having robust accountability to ensure excellent results. To reach this destination, we will continue to support reforms and reinforce existing policies to provide every student with access to a high-quality education. We must also build upon the significant reforms in our current education system—maintaining our national recognition as one of the fastest-improving states in the nation for education.

Excellence also means we reward highly-effective teachers and principals. Tennessee stands out as a national leader in its teacher and principal evaluation practices and our state uses a robust evaluation framework to reward educators based on performance, while simultaneously holding persistently underperforming educators accountable. *See pages 23–45*.

Equity Policies

Not all students enter school on equal footing. Strong education policies must help students and teachers overcome opportunity gaps and ensure that every school has the resources it needs to empower all of its students. Our policies must provide a high-quality education to every student, regardless of their socio-economic background, where they live, or any other life circumstance.

To reach this destination, we must ensure that all students—including students of color, low-income students, English learners, special needs students, and students in rural, as well as urban districts—are not left behind. We will pursue equitable access to high-quality schools and educators, sufficient and equitable funding and school resources, highly-effective classrooms, and safe and secure school learning environments for all of Tennessee's students. *See pages 46–56.*

Choice Policies

Ensuring every Tennessee student has access to a high-quality education is our top priority—and that requires providing students and their families with equitable access to a diverse range of educational options. Whether it's a traditional public school, a public charter school, or a private school, every Tennessee family should have the ability to choose the educational option that best meets their children's unique needs.

To reach this destination, we will continue to call for policies that provide true choice and access for all students and families—especially those who need them most. We will ensure there are effective, fair enrollment systems and safeguards in place so families can make the best choices for their children. We will make sure that all of Tennessee's families are able to navigate the choice system. *See pages 57–67*.

Transparency Policies

Elected officials, superintendents, school leaders, and families need to be able to evaluate how well resources are being used to create high-quality educational experiences for every child. Accountability to ensure excellence begins with transparently reporting academic and financial data on student, educator, school, and district performance. Moreover, performance data helps ensure that our improvements to education policy are making real progress towards our goals on student outcomes.

To reach this destination, we must protect the accountability system and provide for greater transparency of information on student, teacher, school, and district performance, as well as taxpayer investments in public education. Academic and financial transparency ensures only the strongest education policies are created and maintained. We must also ensure that any information available is presented in an easy-to-understand way. *See pages 68–76*.

Excellence Policies: Current Scores and Overview

4 Teacher Evaluations

Our state requires annual comprehensive teacher evaluations that utilize a five-tiered rating system based on classroom evaluations, personal conferences, and 50 percent based on student performance. Tennessee could further strengthen its evaluation framework by requiring that all districts incorporate student surveys as an additional measure. *No score change from prior year. See pages 24–25.*

4 Principal Evaluations

Tennessee principals are evaluated annually based on achievement data and a five-tier rating of effectiveness. Fifty percent of the evaluations are based on school-level value-added growth. Performance is measured around four areas, including instructional leadership for continuous improvement, culture for teaching and learning, professional learning and growth, and resource management. *No score change from prior year. See pages 26–27.*

2 Differentiated Pay

State law requires that evaluations play a role in employment decisions, including compensation. Tennessee should ensure that effective teachers are compensated for the positive impact they have on student learning and that districts and schools have the flexibility to create competitive compensation systems reflective of their needs. *No score change from prior year. See pages 28–29.*

3 Tenure

Our state requires teachers to undergo a probationary period of five years and at least two prior years of above-expectations performance before obtaining tenure. Tenure is revocable if a teacher is rated in the lowest two tiers of performance for two years in a row. Tennessee should require at least three prior years, instead of two, of strong performance before making a tenure determination. *No score change from prior year. See pages 30–31.*

3 Last In First Out ("LIFO")

Our state requires that districts consider teacher performance when determining layoffs during a reduction in force. However, seniority is not prohibited from being the primary factor. Tennessee should require that performance serve as the primary basis for dismissal decisions during a reduction in force and explicitly prohibit districts from using seniority as a factor except in case of a tiebreaker. *No score change from prior year. See pages 32–33.*

4 Mutual Consent/ Forced Placement

Our state has eliminated forced placement policies and requires excessed teachers and principals to mutually agree on school placement. Tennessee must continue to ensure that schools have the authority to build and maintain an effective instructional team without forced placement. *No score change from prior year. See pages 34–35.*

2 Teacher Dismissals

State law requires evaluations be a factor used when dismissing ineffective teachers. However, Tennessee policy does not establish a frequency threshold for when ineffectiveness leads to dismissal. Tennessee should ensure that districts and school leaders have the authority to build and maintain an effective instructional team by removing persistently ineffective teachers from the classroom. *No score change from prior year. See pages 36–37.*

2 Principal Dismissals

Tennessee should ensure that district leaders have the authority to build and maintain an effective leadership team by removing underperforming principals from schools. Principals with multiple consecutive years of ratings below expectations should be dismissed from their leadership placement. However, state law does not specify a frequency threshold for when ineffectiveness leads to dismissal for principals. *No score change from prior year. See pages 38–39.*

1 Teacher Preparation Program Admissions

Tennessee requires preparation programs to have an admission standard of a 2.75 average GPA or higher. Our state should increase the standard for entry to ensure preparation programs are drawing from the top half of the postsecondary student population, and incentivize entry by diverse candidates from historically underserved backgrounds. *No score change from prior year. See pages 40–41.*

4 Teacher Preparation Program Accountability

Tennessee provides robust data about the performance of teacher preparation programs, including graduate placement and performance outcomes. The state is also phasing-in requirements that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices around student teaching and mentorship. *No score change from prior year. See pages 42–43.*

4 Principal Preparation Program Accountability

State policy requires programs have selective admissions criteria and provide for accrediting and approval of alternative institutions. Importantly, our state requires a clinical component. The state also now collects and reports meaningful data on program graduate placement and outcomes. *Score raised to a 4 due to new program reporting requirements. See pages 44–45.*

Equity Policies: Current Scores and Overview

4 School Improvement Strategies

State turnaround efforts, such as the ASD, assume governance over some of the lowest-performing schools in the state. The ASD also has access to the district owned facilities of the schools placed in the ASD. Innovation Zones (i-Zones) are also set up to address the lowest-performing schools through district-led interventions with greater flexibility around staffing and extended learning time. The state should continue to support new and innovative turnaround strategies in addition to the ASD and iZones. *No score change from prior year. See pages 47–48.*

2 Fair Funding Formula

Tennessee should more efficiently fund students, using existing resources to ensure that targeted funding reaches the students it is intended to serve based on need. The current formula is resource-based, rather than student-based, and is limited in its ability to target funding to individual student or school need. *No score change from prior year. See pages 49–50.*

0 Student Placement/ Classroom Assignment

Tennessee prohibits information regarding a teacher's impact on student educational progress from being released to the public. Because of this provision, parents have no knowledge when their child is placed in an underperforming classroom. Tennessee must strive to provide every student with access to an effective teacher and leader, and should ensure that no student is assigned to underperforming classrooms for multiple consecutive years. *No score change from prior year. See pages 51–52.*

3 Equitable Public Charter School Funding

Tennessee's funding formula provides equal per-pupil funding for district and public charter school students. In the future, Tennessee must continue to protect equal per-pupil allocation by ensuring that public charter schools are fully funded for the students they serve, including operational and capital outlay costs. *No score change from prior year. See pages 53–54.*

2 Public Charter School Facilities Access and Funding

Currently, LEAs must make underutilized and vacant properties available to public charter schools and the state has established a charter school facilities grant program. Public charter schools in Tennessee also have access to tax-exempt financing, including Qualified Zone Academy Bonds. Moving forward, Tennessee should grant public charter schools access to available non-LEA public buildings and provide multiple sources of funding and financing for facilities. *No score change from prior year. See pages 55–56.*

Choice Policies: Current Scores and Overview

2 Open Enrollment

Tennessee has a mandatory intradistrict transfer policy for students attending low-performing schools, as well as a voluntary intradistrict and interdistrict transfer policy. However, transportation is not provided under either enrollment policy. Tennessee should strengthen its open enrollment policies by expanding its mandatory intradistrict transfer program to all students while providing transportation for these programs, and include unified enrollment systems for large urban districts. *No score change from prior year. See pages 58–59.*

3 Public Charter School Authorizing Practices

Our state has 10-year charter terms, multiple authorizers, and does not have charter authorization caps. Tennessee should establish a non-district statewide authorizer that all charter applicants can apply to directly. *No score change from prior year. See pages 60–61.*

2 Public Charter School Accountability

Tennessee public charter schools performing in the bottom five percent of all schools across the state must be closed immediately following the end of the school year. Charter schools are required to submit an annual report to the authorizer and Commissioner, and authorizers are required to adopt a performance framework. Additionally, Tennessee should create an oversight body that reviews the performance of individual authorizers. *No score change from prior year. See pages 62–63.*

1 Private School Choice Accessibility

Private school choice initiatives can supplement existing school systems where immediate access to quality alternative school options is needed. Programs such as education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarships, and opportunity scholarships (or vouchers) can prioritize access for at-risk student populations. Our state should extend additional educational options by creating a broad private school choice program that prioritizes access for our most vulnerable student populations. *No score change from prior year. See pages 64–65.*

1 Private School Choice Accountability

Ensuring strong accountability in private school choice programs gives confidence to the public that taxpayer money is being well spent. It also holds providers responsible for producing academic gains with students. *No score change from prior year. See pages 66–67.*

Transparency Policies: Current Scores and Overview

4 Assessments & Standards

Tennessee has instituted a formal in-state review process to ensure academic needs are met in the adoption of rigorous standards. The state requires annual administration of assessments that are reported publicly and aligned with college and career-ready standards. *No score change from prior year. See pages 69–70.*

3 School Accountability Frameworks

TDOE issues school- and district-level report cards with information on student performance in multiple areas. Beginning in 2019, state law will require that all schools earn a single summative rating based on school performance. Tennessee should ensure that the newly enacted A–F summative rating system is implemented and remains fully aligned with the school accountability framework required under ESSA. *No score change from prior year. See pages 71–72.*

1 Fiscal Transparency

Every LEA is required to submit a certified copy of its budget, prior year expenditures, and a financial audit to the Commissioner of Education. The Commissioner of Education is authorized to develop a fiscal transparency model that reports school-level per-pupil funding. Tennessee is currently conducting a pilot of the fiscal transparency model. The state should promote greater fiscal transparency by analyzing how well school districts use their resources to improve student achievement and develop a standard rating system to measure fiscal responsibility and performance among peers. *No score change from prior year. See pages 73–74.*

0 Class Size/ Local Flexibility

Tennessee state law arbitrarily restricts individual class size totals and school averages. Our state should eliminate class size restrictions above the 3rd grade and permit local districts to determine class size guidance. Eliminating statewide class size mandates empowers local school leaders to determine class size and grants them greater flexibility to staff their schools according to student need. *No score change from prior year. See pages 75–76.*

EXCELLENCE POLICIES

Teacher Evaluations

Current Score — 4

Teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement.[9] On average, students with the highest-performing teachers gain five to six more months of learning than students in classrooms with the lowest-performing teachers.[10] To understand the performance of our educators and develop their skills, we need to ensure our means of evaluating their work is accurate and objective. Robust teacher evaluations occur annually, differentiate teacher quality in a meaningful way, rely on multiple measures (including teacher contribution to growth in student achievement), and provide opportunities for feedback linked to professional development.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not require comprehensive teacher evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including student growth based on objective measures of student achievement, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a teacher's summative evaluation rating.

1 — The state requires comprehensive teacher evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including classroom observations and student growth based on objective measures of student achievement, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a teacher's summative evaluation rating.

2 — The state requires comprehensive teacher evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including classroom observations and significant* student growth based on objective measures of student achievement, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a teacher's summative evaluation rating.

3 — The state requires comprehensive teacher evaluations that: (1) occur annually, (2) are based on multiple measures, including classroom observations and significant student growth based on objective measures of student achievement, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a teacher's summative evaluation rating.

(4) The state requires comprehensive teacher evaluations that: (1) occur annually, (2) are based on multiple measures, including classroom observations and student growth worth between 33–50 percent of the overall evaluation based on objective measures of student achievement, and (3) include at least a four-tiered rating of effectiveness for a teacher's summative evaluation rating with opportunities for feedback.

Where We Are

The Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010 established annual teacher evaluations that include a five-tiered rating of effectiveness, classroom observations and personal conferences, and a 50-percent student achievement component (of which 35 percent is based on a student growth estimate and 15 percent is based on teacher selected achievement measures). Evaluations must be used as a tool to provide feedback for teachers and improve instruction. Additionally, the ASD and several other districts are implementing student surveys as a component to assess teacher effectiveness within the overall evaluation.

T. C. A. § 49-1-302(d); Public Chapter 552; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-01; Teacher and Principal Evaluation 5.201

Legislative Highlight

In 2018, the legislature passed Public Chapter 552, which requires school districts to use at least one alternative growth model for the evaluation of teachers in untested grades and subjects. The law also requires TDOE to develop additional alternative growth models for subjects and grade levels that do not currently have growth models. This is an improvement to teacher evaluation policy in that currently teachers of untested grades and subjects receive the school-wide average for the growth portion of their evaluation. The new law will allow these teachers to receive an individual growth score based on their impact in the classroom.

Policy in Action

TDOE's efforts to use evaluations as a meaningful measure of teacher effectiveness are evidenced by a 2018 educator survey noting that nearly three-quarters of teachers (72 percent) believed the evaluation process has improved their teaching (a figure that has doubled since 2012). Moreover, 69 percent of teachers believed that the evaluation process led to improvements in student learning.[11]

* Significant is not specifically defined within federal guidelines, and in fact is no longer a federal requirement under ESSA. Research has identified basing 33-50 percent of a teacher's evaluation on student growth maximizes correlation with state test gains, correlation with higher-order tests, and the reliability of the overall evaluation system.[12] However, any individual component in isolation will not ensure a robust evaluation framework. Instead, a comprehensive framework will include multiple measures and effective implementation.

Principal Evaluations

Current Score — 4

While teachers have the strongest impact on student achievement within the classroom, principals serve as the instructional leaders for those teachers within the school. In fact, principals have the second highest in-school impact on student achievement after teachers.[13] Principals are responsible for ensuring that the teachers they place in classrooms are highly-effective and are given meaningful opportunities for development. The efficacy of principals empowers teachers and is also tied to increased retention of highly-effective teachers.[14] Robust principal evaluations meaningfully differentiate principal quality, are based on multiple measures including school-wide student growth and effective management of teachers, and provide opportunities for feedback linked to professional development.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not require comprehensive principal evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including student growth based on objective measures of student achievement and effective management of teachers, or (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a principal's summative evaluation rating.

1 — The state requires comprehensive principal evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including student growth based on objective measures of student achievement and effective management of teachers, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a principal's summative evaluation rating.

2 — The state requires comprehensive principal evaluations that: (1) occur at least once every three years, (2) are based on multiple measures, including student growth based on objective measures of student achievement and effective management of teachers, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a principal's summative evaluation rating.

3 — The state requires comprehensive principal evaluations that: (1) occur annually, (2) are based on multiple measures, including significant* student growth based on objective measures of student achievement and effective management of teachers, and (3) include at least a three-tiered rating of effectiveness for a principal's summative evaluation rating.

(4) The state requires comprehensive principal evaluations that: (1) occur annually, (2) are based on multiple measures, including student growth worth between 33–50 percent of the overall evaluation based on objective measures of student achievement, and effective management of teachers, and (3) includes at least a four-tiered rating of effectiveness for a principal's summative evaluation rating with opportunities for feedback.

Where We Are

In Tennessee, principals are evaluated annually. The evaluation is based on achievement data and criteria developed by the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee using a five-tier rating of effectiveness. Fifty percent of a principal's evaluation is based on school-level value-added growth and the other half includes measures related to effective management of teachers (including the administrator's implementation of the teacher evaluation process at 15 percent), the education program offered to students, and the overall school facility. Specifically, performance is measured around four areas: instructional leadership for continuous improvement, culture for teaching and learning, professional learning, and growth and resource management.

T. C. A. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(A); § 49-2-303; Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policy 5.201; Tennessee Department of Education, TEAM Administrator Evaluation Rubric (2017–18).[15]

* Significant is not specifically defined within federal guidelines, and in fact is no longer a federal requirement under ESSA. Research has identified 50 percent as the ideal weight for the student outcomes component of the overall principal evaluation score.[16] However, any individual component in isolation will not ensure a robust evaluation framework. Instead, a comprehensive framework will include multiple measures and effective implementation.

Differentiated Pay

Current Score—2

Across the country, principals are facing significant shortages of quality teacher candidates.[17] States should empower school leaders with resources to attract and retain the right teachers. Tennessee should ensure that effective teachers are compensated for the positive impact they have on student learning. Tennessee should maintain district and school flexibility to create competitive compensation systems reflective of their needs.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state requires traditional school districts to implement a teacher compensation system based only on years of service, credentials, credits, or advanced degrees. The state restricts districts' ability to include measures of effectiveness when determining teacher compensation.

1 — The state requires traditional school districts to implement a teacher compensation system based primarily on years of service, credentials, credits, or advanced degrees. However, the state does not prohibit the use of measures of effectiveness when determining teacher compensation.

(2) The state requires traditional school districts to implement a teacher compensation system based primarily on years of service, credentials, credits, or advanced degrees. The state requires the use of measures of effectiveness when determining teacher compensation.

3 — The state requires that only effective or highly-effective teachers may receive base salary increases OR the state requires that compensation systems include incentives and pay increases for other factors of differentiated compensation.*

4 — The state requires that only effective or highly-effective teachers may receive base salary increases and that compensation systems must include incentives and pay increases for other factors of differentiated compensation.

Where We Are

State law requires evaluations be a factor in employment decisions, including compensation. In 2013, the SBE required all school districts to adopt and implement a differentiated pay plan. The purpose of the policy is to aid the staffing of hard-to-staff subject areas and schools and to assist in the hiring and retention of highly qualified teachers. The TDOE has developed exemplary differentiated pay models that districts can choose to adopt. Although salary schedules contain increases for advanced degrees, school districts may submit to the Commissioner and the SBE their own proposed alternative salary schedules for review and approval.

While our state has taken an important step towards flexibility, Tennessee should prioritize effective teaching by requiring districts to develop or adopt compensation systems that make measures of effectiveness the primary criteria used to determine all pay increases.

T. C. A. § 49-1-302(a)(18); § 49-1-302(d)(2)(A); § 49-3-306(a)(1); § 49-3-306(h); Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-02-.02; Strategic Compensation Policy 5.600

Policy in Action

For the 2017–18 school year, 52 out of 146 districts in Tennessee tie teacher pay to their performance.[18]

* Other factors of differentiated compensation, beyond teacher performance, include incentives and pay increases for teaching in high-need schools, hard-to-staff geographic areas, and hard-to-staff subjects.

Tenure

Current Score—3

Education policy often requires balancing the professional interests of adult employees with the educational needs and rights of students.[19] Tenure can provide a greater sense of stability for educators looking to make teaching a profession. After obtaining tenure, teachers are provided stronger due process in instances of misconduct or poor performance, and objectivity in times of layoff. However, in exchange for additional protections, like increased job stability, teachers must demonstrate strong and consistent performance.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state allows tenure to be attained in less than three years and attainment is not based on teacher performance as determined by evaluations.

1 — The state requires tenure to be attained after three or more years of service, but does not require attainment to be based on teacher performance as determined by evaluations.

2 — The state requires tenure status to be attained after three or more years of service and requires attainment to be based in part on teacher performance as determined by evaluations.

(3) The state requires tenure to be attained after three or more years of service and requires attainment be earned only if a teacher is rated in the two highest tiers of performance, consecutively, for the two most recent years. Tenure is revocable if a teacher is rated in the lowest two tiers of performance for two consecutive years.

4 — The state requires tenure to be attained after five or more years of service and requires attainment be earned only if a teacher is rated in the two highest tiers of performance, consecutively, for the three most recent years. Tenure is revocable if a teacher is rated in the lowest two tiers of performance for two consecutive years.

Where We Are

In order to receive tenure status, Tennessee requires a probationary period of five years in which the teacher must achieve an overall level of effectiveness of "above expectations" or "significantly above expectations" in the last two years of the probationary period. In Tennessee, tenure is revocable if a teacher is rated in the lowest two tiers of performance for two consecutive years.

Tennessee should require at least three prior years of strong performance, instead of two, before making a tenure determination.

T. C. A. § 49-5-503; § 49-5-504(e); § 49-5-511(a)(2); Tennessee Department of Education, New Tenure Law FAQ (2014)[20]

Last In First Out ("LIFO")

Current Score — 3

Sometimes enrollment changes and decreases in funding require districts to reconsider staffing needs. Research indicates that when districts conduct seniority-based layoffs, they end up firing some of their most effective educators.[21] When districts must have a reduction-in-force (RIF), layoffs should be based on teacher performance and prohibit seniority or permanent status from driving personnel decisions. Following these structures ensures that higher performing teachers are not exited from the system before lower performing teachers, thereby ensuring students have access to the greatest amount of high-performing teachers available.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state requires seniority or tenure status to be the key driver of layoffs during a reduction-in-force.

1 — State law is silent on the role of seniority or tenure status in determining layoffs during a reduction-in-force.

2 — The state allows districts to consider performance when making layoffs during a reduction-in-force, but does not prohibit seniority or tenure status from being considered in determining layoffs or prohibits seniority or permanent status from being considered in determining layoffs for new hires and non-permanent teachers only or only in specified districts.

(3) The state requires districts to consider performance when making layoffs during a reduction-in-force, or seniority or tenure status is prevented from being the key driver of layoffs.

4 — The state requires districts to make performance the primary factor when making layoffs during a reduction-in-force.

Where We Are

Tennessee requires that districts consider performance as a factor when determining layoffs during an RIF. Seniority is not required as a criterion for these decisions, but it is not prohibited from being the primary factor either.

To ensure effective teachers are retained, Tennessee should require that performance be the primary basis for dismissal decisions during an RIF and explicitly prohibit districts from using seniority as a factor except in the case of a tiebreaker for similarly rated teachers.

T. C. A. § 49-5-511(b); § 49-1-302(d)(2)(A)

Mutual Consent/Forced Placement

Current Score—4

Teachers should be given placements based on school fit and merit, not seniority or other arbitrary factors. Forced placement requires principals to hire certain teachers assigned by the district to a school without regard for principal or teacher input. When teachers are required to teach at a school for which they are not suitably fit, there is a negative impact on school culture.[22] In Shelby County Schools, mutual consent hires were more likely to rank in the highest teacher effectiveness category and less likely to rank in the lowest category.[23] Principals need to feel empowered to hire staff based on merit and fit. Similarly, teachers should also have a say in their place of employment. Tennessee must continue to ensure that schools have the authority to build and maintain effective instructional teams without forced placement of teachers.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state requires forced placement of teachers to school sites based on seniority or permanent status.

1 — State law is silent on forced placement of teachers to school sites based on seniority or permanent status.

2 — The state explicitly allows districts to establish mutual consent hiring, but forced placement based on seniority or permanent status is not prohibited.

3 — The state prohibits forced placement of teachers based on seniority or permanent status OR requires mutual consent hiring, but teachers with seniority OR permanent status have hiring priority over those who do not.

(4) The state prohibits forced placement of teachers based on seniority or permanent status OR requires mutual consent hiring.

Where We Are

In 2013, Tennessee eliminated forced placement and now requires teachers and principals to mutually agree on an excessed teacher's school placement. Tennessee requires consideration of teachers on a reemployment list based on effectiveness for rehiring. Only teachers with the top three performance evaluation ratings are placed on the preferred reemployment list. Teachers remain on an excessed list until they have rejected four offers for employment.

T. C. A. § 49-5-511(b)

Teacher Dismissals

Current Score—2

A teacher's role is to focus on student learning and classroom culture. National research has shown that 81 percent of administrators and 57 percent of teachers say there is a tenured teacher in their school who is performing poorly, and 43 percent of teachers say there is a tenured teacher who should be dismissed for poor performance.[24] In Tennessee after the 2010-11 school year, prior to tenure reform, only 0.2 percent of tenured teachers were dismissed or did not have their contracts renewed due to poor performance.[25] Sometimes, persistently underperforming teachers need to be dismissed based on performance. Tennessee should ensure that district and school leaders have the authority to ensure an effective instructional team by removing persistently ineffective teachers from the classroom.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not ensure that ineffective performance is grounds for dismissal. State law is silent on whether ineffective performance can be considered or state law prohibits ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal.

1 — The state explicitly allows ineffective performance* to be grounds for dismissal, but does not outline a clear, streamlined process for these dismissals or speak to frequency.

(2) The state explicitly allows ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals, but does not speak to frequency.

3 — The state requires ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal and ineffective teachers are exited from the system after no more than three years of being rated ineffective. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals.

4 — The state requires ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal and ineffective teachers are exited from the system after no more than two years of being rated ineffective. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals.

Where We Are

State law requires evaluations to be a factor when making determinations for dismissing ineffective teachers. State law also empowers district leaders to dismiss inefficient teachers. The dismissals process is specifically outlined in state law, including timelines and procedures. However, Tennessee policy does not establish a frequency threshold for when ineffectiveness leads to dismissal.

To strengthen its focus on retaining effective teachers, our state should ensure that teachers with multiple consecutive years of ratings below expectations are dismissed from their teaching placement.

T. C. A. § 49-5-511; § 49-5-512; § 49-5-513; § 49-1-302; § 49-2-203(a)(6); § 49-2-301(b)(1)(EE); § 49-2-301(b)(1)(GG); Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-02-03-.09

* Ineffective means those teachers that perform in the lowest tier of performance, or teachers who perform in the two lowest tiers (for states with five rating categories, such as Tennessee) of performance but demonstrates no measurable growth. Automatic exit from the system after no more than three years emphasizes the importance of maintaining a high-performing workforce. When district and school leaders genuinely work with educators to improve their practice, but performance does not improve over a period of time, leaders should exit ineffective educators from schools. This policy component should not be pursued until a state has put robust evaluation and professional development structures in place. For model components on teacher evaluations see the "Teacher Evaluations" section on page 24.

Principal Dismissals

Current Score—2

The role of school leaders is to focus on instructional leadership and development. Principals play multidimensional roles in keeping schools operational and safe, and in fostering productive work cultures where teachers and staff can serve students as they pursue their academic goals.[26] Sometimes, persistently underperforming principals need to be dismissed from a school based on performance in order to ensure a productive school culture and successful operations. Tennessee should ensure that district leaders have the authority to build and maintain an effective leadership team by removing underperforming principals from schools.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not ensure that ineffective performance is grounds for dismissal. State law is silent on whether ineffective performance can be considered or state law prohibits ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal.

1 — The state explicitly allows ineffective performance* to be grounds for dismissal, but does not outline a clear, streamlined process for these dismissals or speak to frequency.

(2) The state explicitly allows ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals, but does not speak to frequency.

3 — The state requires ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal and ineffective principals are exited from the system after no more than 3 years of being rated ineffective. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals.

4 — The state requires ineffective performance to be grounds for dismissal and ineffective principals are exited from the system after no more than two years of being rated ineffective. The state outlines a clear, streamlined process for dismissals.

Where We Are

Dismissals of principals are treated in the same manner as dismissals of teachers. State law requires evaluations to be a factor when making determinations for dismissing ineffective principals. State law also empowers district leaders to dismiss inefficient principals. However, Tennessee policy does not establish a frequency threshold for when ineffectiveness leads to dismissal.

To strengthen its focus on retaining effective school leaders, our state should ensure that principals with multiple consecutive years of ratings below expectations are dismissed from their leadership placement.

T. C. A. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(A); § 49-2-203(a)(6); § 49-2-301(b)(1)(EE); Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-02-03-.09; White v. Banks, 614 S.W.2d 331, 334 (Tenn. 1981)

* Ineffective means those principals that perform in the lowest tier of performance, or principals who perform in the two lowest tiers (for states with five rating categories, such as Tennessee) of performance but demonstrates no measurable growth. Automatic exit from the system after no more than three years emphasizes the importance of maintaining a high performing workforce. When district leaders genuinely work with school leaders to improve their practice, but performance does not improve over a period of time, leaders should exit ineffective principals from schools. This policy component should not be pursued until a state has put robust evaluation and professional development structures in place. For model components on principal evaluations, including links to professional development opportunities, see the "Principal Evaluations" section on page 26.

Teacher Preparation Program Admissions

Current Score — 1

As the gateway to the teaching profession, teacher preparation programs control the admissions and selection criteria that will dictate the teacher candidate pool. Strong admissions criteria help ensure that programs are drawing from the top half of the college-going population.[27] While reviewing teacher preparation program accountability, attention must be paid to the standards for candidate entry as well as the diversity of the teacher pipeline.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not require any preparation programs to have an admission standard of an average 2.5 GPA or higher and a 50th percentile score on a skills exam.

(1) The state requires preparation programs to have an admission standard of an average* 2.5 GPA or higher and a 50th percentile score on a skills exam.**

2 — The state requires preparation programs to have an admission standard of an average 3.0 GPA or higher and 50th percentile score on a skills exam. The state also requires demonstration of subject-matter/content knowledge in the area(s) taught through a content exam without requiring a graduate or undergraduate degree as demonstration of content knowledge.

3 — The state requires preparation programs to have an admission standard of an average 3.0 GPA or higher and 50th percentile score on a skills exam. The state also requires a 50th percentile score or higher on a content area exam without requiring a graduate or undergraduate degree as demonstration of content knowledge, AND the state also incentivizes entry into the teaching profession of teachers from historically underserved backgrounds and/or entry into hard-to-staff subjects.***

4 — The state requires preparation programs to have an admission standard of an average 3.0 GPA or higher and 50th percentile score on a skills exam. The state also requires a 50th percentile score or higher on a content area exam without requiring a graduate or undergraduate degree as demonstration of content knowledge. This content exam must be taken prior to program entry AND the state also incentivizes entry into the teaching profession of teachers from historically underserved backgrounds and entry into hard-to-staff subjects.***

* The selective admissions average is based on the cohort average, allowing variation among individual applications. This permits schools to incorporate additional factors for admissions.
** A skills exam should be nationally norm-referenced, and could include the SAT, ACT, or GRE.
*** The state of Tennessee defines historically underserved subgroups to include: economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, special education students and Black, Hispanic, and Native American students.

Where We Are

In 2014, the SBE revised its policy governing approval for teacher preparation programs. Under those revisions, our state now requires that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices of high quality teacher preparation program requirements, including selective admissions criteria.

Our state should increase the standard for entry to ensure preparation programs are drawing from the top half of the postsecondary student population. Tennessee should require preparation programs have an admission standard of an average 3.0 GPA (instead of 2.75) or higher, and 50th percentile on both skills and content area exams.

In addition to strengthening standards for entry, the state must support increasing diversity in the teaching workforce. Research shows that exposure to same-race teachers positively benefits student achievement and can reduce suspension and expulsion rates.[28] Currently, the state provides some incentives for preparation programs to recruit a diverse teaching force, including the Tennessee Innovation in Preparation Grants, the Tennessee Minority in Teaching Fellowships, and allocation of federal Title II, part A monies for improving workforce diversity.[29]

While the state requires educator preparation programs to set goals to increase the diversity of their candidates, the state should further assist educator preparation programs in attracting high-quality applicants from historically underserved backgrounds, particularly through programs and funding streams codified in state law.

T. C. A. 49-5-5601; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-02-04-.08; Tennessee State Board of Education; Tennessee Professional Assessments Policy 5.105; Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy 5.504

Policy in Action

Beginning January 1, 2019, initial license applicants are required to submit qualifying scores on the appropriate edTPA performance-based, subject-specific assessment.

For more information on the Tennessee teacher preparation program landscape and other recommendations, please see the Tennessee Teacher Preparation Report Card 2016 State Profile[30] and Prepared for Day One, a TN SCORE report on teacher preparation.[31]

Note: Tennessee permits programs to be accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in addition to the state-managed review process. CAEP requires a 3.0 GPA and group average assessment performance above the 50th percentile for admission.[32]

Teacher Preparation Program Accountability

Current Score—4

State governments have the strongest impact on the work of America's more than 3.5 million public school teachers.[33] This includes state oversight of teacher preparation programs. While individual programs do a lot to improve the preparation they provide, states must also ensure adequate teacher preparation right from the start.[34] While creating standards for teacher preparation programs, attention must be paid to the quality of program elements (including opportunities for student teaching/clinical practice) and the performance outcomes of graduates that enter the teaching profession. Including a clinical practice component, as well as supporting district and teacher preparation program collaborations, allows teacher candidates to gain valuable and quality mentorship and supervision.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state's policy does not provide for meaningful program elements or accountability for the performance outcomes of graduates.

1 — The state's policy provides for an immersive student teaching experience. The state does not collect meaningful data or pair effective mentors with teacher candidates. The state does not allow non-IHE programs for certification.

2 — The state's policy provides for an immersive student teaching experience that includes a mentorship component.* The state also collects meaningful objective data on the performance of program graduates.** The state allows alternative pathways for certification.*** The state does not formally review programs at least every seven years.

3 — The state's policy provides for an immersive student teaching experience that includes a mentorship component. The state collects meaningful objective data on the performance of program graduates. The state formally reviews programs at least every seven years with annual reviews for underperforming programs.

(4) The state's policy provides for an immersive student teaching experience that includes a mentorship component. The state collects meaningful objective data on the performance of program graduates. The state formally reviews programs at least every five to seven years with annual reviews for underperforming programs. The state provides annual public reports on existing programs, and institutes sanctions for underperforming programs.****

* Mentors should be volunteers who have been evaluated and rated in the two highest tiers of performance. States should consider incentivizing participation to ensure there are enough quality mentors for the number of teacher candidates.
** States should collect data related to the performance of program graduates, including satisfaction surveys. In order to attain a "three" or "four," states must facilitate data sharing between programs and state agencies. Meaningful data is necessary for accurate assessment of program performance so states may sanction programs when data sharing exists, but programs are still not getting better.
*** Alternative pathways to certification allow non-traditional candidates (such as those transferring mid-career) to enter the teaching profession. Alternative certification programs should still be held to the same high standards for accreditation and renewal.
**** Sanctions for underperforming programs should specifically target the deficiency of an individual program and can include enrollment quotas or decommissioning programs.
† Notably, the SBE already annually evaluates performance of programs focused on placement and retention rates, entrance examinations, and other teacher effectiveness data. Importantly, state law empowers the SBE to request data to conduct the evaluation. T. C. A. § 49-5-108

Where We Are

In 2014, the SBE revised its policy governing teacher preparation program approval for teacher preparation programs. Under those revisions, our state has gradually phased in requirements that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices around student teaching and mentorship and, importantly, collect and report on data related to program performance based on graduate outcomes.†

Additionally, in 2016, the SBE released a newly designed Teacher Preparation Report Card. The new report card is a more user-friendly report that allows users to easily view data about preparation programs performance and graduates' effectiveness in the classroom.[35]

Our state permits alternative certification pathways, including programs not affiliated with an IHE, for teacher candidates.

T. C. A. § 49-5-5601; § 49-5-5631; § 49-5-108; Public Chapter 573; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-02-04; Tennessee State Board of Education, Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy 5.504

Policy in Action

In a comprehensive 2018 review of the nation's teaching programs, the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) ranked seven Tennessee teacher preparation programs in the top tenth percentile of programs nationally across several different categories of educator preparation programs. Lipscomb University was rated as the number one preparation program in the country in the secondary education category.[36]

Legislative Highlights

A new law passed in 2018, Public Chapter 573, will help streamline licensure certification for proven educators from out-of-state. The law allows teachers to be exempted from taking the content assessment to gain a full professional license if the educator: possessed an active professional license from a state that had a reciprocal agreement with TN SBE; is employed to serve or teach in Tennessee in courses for which they are properly endorsed; and received an overall evaluation of a 4 or a 5 in each of the immediate preceding two years.

Principal Preparation Program Accountability

Current Score—4

Accountability for principal preparation programs should include similar elements to accountability for teacher preparation programs. Yet, states can ensure schools have principals who advance teaching and learning by setting principal standards and overseeing principal preparation.[37] Thus, attention must still be given to the types of programs available, the review and oversight of programs by the state, and the data states have available to better understand program performance.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not allow non-IHE programs to be approved. The state's policy also does not provide for high admissions standards for program entry, meaningful program elements, or accountability for the performance outcomes of graduates.

1 — The state does not allow non-IHE programs to be approved, although it does provide for selective admissions criteria for entry and a clinical component for programs. The state does not collect meaningful data* on graduates.

2 — The state's policy provides for approving alternative institutions, including non-profit organizations and school systems, in addition to selective admissions criteria and a clinical component. The state does not collect meaningful data on graduates.

3 — The state's policy provides for approving alternative institutions, selective admissions, and a clinical component. The state's policy also provides for meaningful data collection on placement and performance of graduates, and public reporting on program outcomes.

(4) The state's policy provides for approving alternative institutions, selective admissions, and a clinical component. The policy also provides for meaningful data collection and public reporting on program outcomes. The state institutes sanctions for underperforming programs and creates a separate renewal process focused on measuring outcomes of graduates.

Where We Are

Tennessee policy requires programs have selective admissions criteria, including a minimum of three years of successful K–12 education working experience. All programs must align to the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards, which include best practices for instructional leadership. Programs must also provide a clinical component that includes mentorship and performance evaluations. State policy allows providers beyond IHEs to become accredited and approved. State review of programs includes initial approval with a full approval review that must occur within five years of receiving initial approval.

Recent changes to state rule have further improved principal preparation program accountability, bringing it on par with the state's teacher preparation program accountability policies. Most notably, the state now requires meaningful data collection and reporting on variety of program graduate placement and performance metrics. Additionally, improvements to the state's review and approval process now require demonstrable program performance based on graduate outcomes and allows the state to sanction underperforming program providers.

Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-02-04; Tennessee State Board of Education; Learning Centered Leadership Policy 5.101

Policy in Action

In 2018, the Haslam administration announced an initiative to improve preparation, retention, and development of school principals. The initiative is in its early stages, but included $3.5 million for FY2018–19 to support: ensuring that current principal preparation programs are held accountable for the performance of their graduates; incentivizing top principal talent to lead the state's chronically underperforming schools; and developing opportunities and networks for rural principals.[38]

* Meaningful data collection should be similar to what we expect from teacher preparation programs. States need to ensure principal preparation programs are transparent and share data with other programs. Data sharing will better facilitate identifying best practices such as the ideal length of the clinical component or threshold for selective admissions criteria or program sanctions.

EQUITY POLICIES

School Improvement Strategies

Current Score — 4

In 2010, Tennessee established the ASD, a state-managed turnaround model, designed to govern the state's lowest-performing schools, or those ranking in the bottom five percent, based on student achievement. In 2012, Shelby County Schools and other LEAs initiated Innovation Zones (or i-Zones) to complement the work of state turnaround interventions. These mechanisms permit the state and districts to promptly intervene in chronically underperforming schools across our state. In concert with other choice options, these systems work together to serve as important turnaround efforts.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not allow for state governance of underperforming schools or require districts to have clear intervention strategies (e.g. i-Zone) to address underperforming schools.

1 — The state requires state governance or district intervention of chronically underperforming schools, those in the bottom five percent of schools statewide based on multiple years of student performance.

2 — The state requires state or district intervention after no more than four years of chronic student underperformance using both growth and achievement.

3 — The state governance mechanism (e.g. ASD) has final authority over school intervention where district intervention does not result in increased student performance after more than seven years.

(4) Requirements of "Three" and the state has created an autonomous state-run achievement school district to govern the state's lowest-performing schools. The Commissioner of Education appoints the head of the state governance mechanism who has authority to determine which low-performing schools to include under state governance.

Where We Are

Tennessee's school improvement strategies are detailed extensively in the state's ESSA plan. Schools that perform in the lowest five percent of schools statewide are subject to district- or state-level intervention.

The most rigorous state intervention is the ASD, an organizational unit of the TDOE, assuming governance over the lowest-performing schools whose district has been unsuccessful in turning around its schools. The Commissioner appoints the superintendent of the ASD. The ASD is funded through the BEP and has access to the district owned facilities of converted schools. Through the state's ESSA plan, the ASD is designated as the state's "most rigorous" turnaround intervention for chronically underperforming schools. The plan also details a clear process and timeline for schools to enter and exit state turnaround.

An LEA i-Zone is a district-level turnaround model approved by the Commissioner focused on the lowest performing schools with financial, programmatic, and staffing flexibility.

T.C.A. § 49-1-602; § 49-1-613; § 49-1-614

Policy in Action

In addition to the ASD and i-Zone school turnaround efforts, the state has implemented a "Partnership Network" as a school-turnaround strategy for a cluster of five priority schools in Hamilton County. This partnership network represents a shared governance model, executed through a memorandum of understanding with the state and the school district in which an advisory board was established for the partnership network with both state and local representation. This model allows for school-based autonomy in state turnaround efforts through a more collaborative approach driven by both the state and the local district.[39]

Fair Funding Formula

Current Score—2

The way we fund K–12 education needs to focus on equity—how we specifically account for individual student needs—and adequacy—how much funding we are providing for education. Property tax revenue disparities remain the dominant contributor to variations in local revenue in states with the largest total funding disparities.[40] In Tennessee, the BEP, the current funding formula for education in our state, focuses almost entirely on rigid inputs rather than student need and student outcomes. Tennessee should focus on funding students and schools based on educational need regardless of the town they live in or the type of public school they attend.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state's funding formula is focused on system needs rather than student needs. It contains elements that fail to correct for inequitable local tax bases at the district level and does not attempt to fund student needs, except through separate categorical funding.

1 — The state's funding formula attempts to correct for inequitable local tax bases at the district level or for disparities in funding across school choice options, however, the funding formula does not sufficiently address the varying needs of students.

(2) The state's funding formula attempts to correct for inequitable local tax bases at the district level or for disparities in funding across school choice options by providing funding that is somewhat responsive to varying student needs; significant discrepancies between districts or school choice options remain.

3 — The state's funding formula attempts to correct for inequitable local tax bases at the district level and for disparities in funding across school choice options by providing funding that is mostly responsive to varying student needs; significant discrepancies between districts or school choice options are eliminated.

4 — The state's funding formula ensures that every student receives equitable funding responsive to need, provided regardless of the school district or school choice option enrolled; valid and reliable information about student characteristics are used to consider student needs and all funding allocations.

Where We Are

Tennessee's funding formula, the BEP, bases funding decisions on the state's assuption of how schools should be staffed rather than the individual needs of students. The formula calculates funding allocations for districts based on 47 components. The formula does not fully or sufficiently target funding to take into account individual student or school need.

Tennessee should change its education funding formula to focus on individual student needs and ensure that targeted funding reaches the students it is intended to serve through a weighted funding model. The formula should also guarantee that per-pupil funding follows students to whatever school they attend, and provides spending flexibility to school leaders who are best positioned to understand the unique needs of their school and community.

T. C. A. § 49-3-307; § 49-3-351; § 49-3-356

Policy in Action

In the fall of 2018, a TennesseeCAN statewide survey of school and district leaders showed broad support for reforming Tennessee's current funding formula, the BEP. A combined 71% of district and school leaders want to see some sort of change to the BEP funding formula. Further, a combined 41% of district and school leaders would support weighting funding based on student needs.

District Example

After a three-year phase in period, Metro Nashville Public Schools shifted its budgeting practice to a student-based budgeting model, creating targeted, weighted funding for various at-risk student subgroups and granting greater autonomy to principals in determining how best to spend money on their students.[41] Additionally, Shelby County Schools also began piloting student-based budgeting beginning in the 2017–18 school year.[42] It is important to note that, despite the promise shown by these locally based student-based budgeting models, they are limited in their overall efficacy by the state funding formula. Reforming the BEP will allow for even more local autonomy when it comes to effectively funding students and schools.

Student Placement/Classroom Assignment

Current Score—0

With an ineffective teacher, a student loses an average of 3.5 months of learning per year.[43] When a student has two consecutive years in classrooms with ineffective teachers, that student can lose seven or more months of learning during that time. A student who has three ineffective teachers in a row is unlikely to recover from that learning loss, remaining far behind his or her peers.[44] Student placement policies can ensure students are placed with effective teachers.

Policy Rubric

(0) The state has no policy regarding the placement of students with ineffective teachers for consecutive years and does not report data on the distribution of effective teachers and the number students placed with ineffective teachers for consecutive years.

1 — The state has no policy regarding the placement of students with ineffective teachers for consecutive years but does report data on the distribution of effective teachers and the number of students placed with ineffective teachers for consecutive years to school districts and educator preparation programs.

2 — The state has no policy regarding the placement of students with ineffective teachers for consecutive years but does publicly report data on the distribution of effective teachers and the number of students placed with ineffective teachers for consecutive years.

3 — State policy requires school districts to limit the placement of students with ineffective teachers for consecutive years, publicly report data on the distribution of effective teachers and the number of students placed with ineffective teachers for consecutive years, AND this data is included as part of the school and district accountability frameworks.*

4 — The requirements of "Three" AND the state requires parental notification when a student must be placed with an ineffective teacher due to staffing constraints.

Where We Are

In Tennessee, individual teacher effectiveness data is not public record and cannot be included on students' educational progress reports. Because of this provision, parents cannot be notified when a student has been placed in an underperforming classroom.

The state permits but does not require notice to parents of student assignment decisions. The state outlines a clear process for challenging the assignment and requesting a school transfer, subject to decision by the local board and judicial review.

Equitable access to highly-effective teachers should be publicly reported* at the district and school level and disaggregated by student subgroups. The state should use these metrics as part of the school and district accountability framework to ensure Tennessee's commitment to educational equity.

Tennessee must also guarantee that no student is assigned to underperforming teachers for two consecutive years. However, where placement is necessary because of staffing constraints, our state should require parental notification when a student is placed with an ineffective teacher after the teacher has been rated "below expectations" or "significantly below expectations" for two or more consecutive years.†

T. C. A. § 49-1-606; §49-6-3107; §49-6-3201-3206

* Parental access to teacher effectiveness information upon request is not required for a state to reach a "three" or higher, where a state provides for parental notification or prohibits students from being placed with an ineffective teacher for multiple consecutive years.
† At the behest of the Tennessee senate education committee, the Office of Research and Education Accountability is currently conducting a study on student placement and the number and distribution of students being educated in ineffective classrooms for multiple years. At the time of this publication, that report has not yet been published.

Equitable Public Charter School Funding

Current Score—3

Charter schools are public schools educating Tennessee students just like other district-run schools. As such, they should be funded at the same level as other public schools in the district. However, due to the state education funding mechanism and outside revenue sources, including local funding raised through property taxes, funding disparities exist between charter schools and district-run schools.[45] Tennessee is one of a few states that ensure an equal pass-through of state and local funds to charter schools through its funding formula (as compared to district-run schools). Tennessee must continue to fund authorizers to perform oversight duties, while ensuring charter schools receive full operational funding, including all categorical funding, for their students.

Policy Rubric

0 — Public charter schools are funded separately from the state's main school funding formula, resulting in a significant disparity in student funding.

1 — Although public charter schools are funded separately from the state's main school funding formula, there is some attempt to provide equitable funding.

2 — The state's policy ensures that all public charter schools receive operating funding via the main school funding formula.

(3) The state's policy ensures that all public charter schools receive operating funding via the main school funding formula and the state provides a funding mechanism for all authorizers to perform authorizing functions.

4 — The state's policy ensures that all public charter schools receive fully equitable operating funding via the main school funding formula* and the state provides a funding mechanism for all authorizers to perform authorizing functions.

Where We Are

Tennessee's funding formula, the Basic Education Program (BEP), provides equal per-pupil funding for all students enrolled in traditional district-run or public charter schools.

Public charter schools are required to pay an annual authorizer fee to their authorizing LEA in order to cover the costs of oversight duties and ensuring school quality. Both ASD and SBE authorized public charter schools are also required to pay an annual authorizer fee. Tennessee could further improve equitable charter funding by ensuring that charter schools receive additional targeted funding for at-risk populations they are serving, and requiring all state and local revenue calculations to include any additional income that is generated for student services and per-pupil allocation, including facilities payments.

TCA § 49-13-112; § 49-13-106(a)(2)(B); Public Chapter 767; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-14-01-.03

Legislative Highlight

In 2018, the state legislature passed Public Chapter 767, which allowed public charter schools equal access to the Special Education High-Cost Reimbursement fund. This fund contains federal dollars earmarked for special education students with the highest needs. Public charter schools serving eligible students can now receive these funds from their LEA, which is required to include eligible students attending charter schools when applying for these high-cost reimbursement funds. The bill also allows public charter schools and school districts to form special education services associations in order to collaborate and share resources to better serve students with special needs.

Policy in Action

While there is state-level policy ensuring an equal calculation of state-allocated funds to charter schools, local district accounting practices make it difficult to determine whether the pass-through to charter schools is equitable to other district-run schools. Further, charter schools in the ASD that serve a higher percentage of students with greater need are disproportionately affected on funding calculations that are determined based on their neighboring district rather than the student population of the ASD or public charter school itself.

*Fully equitable funding requires all state and local revenue calculations to include any additional income that is generated for student services and per-pupil allocations, including facilities payments.

Public Charter School Facilities Access and Funding

Current Score—2

Due to unfavorable lending terms and a lack of dedicated space, public charter schools are often forced to settle for less-than-ideal classroom spaces for their students, such as former retail stores or office buildings.[46] Unlike district-run schools, public charter schools are often responsible for securing their own facilities. This can put a strain on their operational budgets, as state funding does not provide adequate resources for facilities allowances. While public charter schools are eligible for capital outlay allocations, in practice they do not receive any revenue generated through local district bonds. In order to ensure all students have access to appropriate facilities, states should grant public charter schools access to available non-LEA public buildings and provide multiple sources of facilities funding and financing.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state's policy provides charter schools with only limited access to buildings and no support for facilities financing.

1 — The state's policy provides for only one of the following four items: access to unused buildings, dedicated funding for facilities, assistance with borrowing, or access to tax-exempt bonds.

(2) The state's policy provides for two or three of the following four items: access to unused buildings, dedicated funding for facilities, assistance with borrowing, or access to tax-exempt bonds.

3 — The state's policy provides charters a right of first refusal to unused buildings. In addition, it provides for two of the following three items: dedicated funding for facilities, assistance with borrowing, or access to tax-exempt bonds.

4 — The state's policy provides charters a right of first refusal to unused buildings, dedicated funding for facilities, assistance with borrowing, and access to tax-exempt bonds.

Where We Are

In Tennessee, LEAs must make underutilized† and vacant properties available for use by public charter schools. Additionally, portions of underutilized properties must also be made available, allowing for co-location of charter and traditional district schools within district-owned facilities. In Tennessee, public charter schools authorized by the ASD have the right to use all facilities and property that are part of the intervened school, free of charge.

Tennessee provides some funding for charter school facilities through a per-pupil facilities allowance calculated in the BEP– our state's funding formula for schools. Public charter schools may also obtain financing through federal tax-credit bond programs. Public charter schools that have the support of their local taxing authority can access tax-exempt financing through the Tennessee Local Development Authority (TLDA). Public charter schools also have access to Tennessee Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB) with support from their LEA. The state has established a program where public charter schools can apply for facilities-related grant funding.

The law should be strengthened to permit co-location in a variety of public spaces, providing greater options for school choice. The state should provide public charter schools access to rent-free facilities, leases of underutilized or vacant district property, and right of first refusal to rent or purchase underutilized or vacant district property at or below market value.

T. C. A. § 49-1-614(f); § 49-3-1210; § 49-13-124; § 49-13-135; § 49-13-136; Public Chapter 835; Public Chapter 307 (2017).

Legislative Highlights

Passage of Public Chapter 307 in 2017 created the state's first-ever Charter School Facilities Grant Program. The law authorized the Commissioner to establish a facilities grant program that public charter schools can apply to in order to receive funding for facilities-related needs. The program was funded at six million dollars for both 2017–18 and 2018–19 with the Governor's office pledging an additional $6 million to be distributed in 2019–20. Additionally, in 2018 the legislature passed Public Chapter 835, allowing public charter schools to apply for energy efficient facilities grants and loans.

† State-level guidance defines "Underutilized or vacant property" as: entire property or portion thereof, with or without improvements, which is not used or is used irregularly or intermittently by the LEA for instructional or program purposes."[47]

CHOICE POLICIES

Open Enrollment

Current Score—2

While public charter schools and scholarship programs give options to families seeking an alternative to their zoned district-run school, many families want to keep their child within the district but at a different school. Others wish to send their child to a traditional public school in a neighboring district. Some families can navigate burdensome processes, giving them more education options because they have the means to purchase homes in neighborhoods with good schools or enroll in a private school, or they possess the social capital to navigate the various options offered.[48] Part of providing a suitable learning environment means that states have policies designed to increase all students' access to high-quality schools, including other district options.

Policy Rubric

0 — State law does not create open enrollment of any kind or the only type of open enrollment is voluntary intradistrict open enrollment.

1 — State law creates a mandatory intradistrict open enrollment program or state law creates a voluntary or mandatory interdistrict open enrollment program.

(2) State law creates a mandatory intradistrict open enrollment program or state law creates voluntary or mandatory interdistrict open enrollment, there is a system for providing high-quality information to parents about their open enrollment options,* and there are school placement preferences for low-income students and/or students in low-performing schools participating in the open enrollment program.

3 — State law creates a mandatory intradistrict open enrollment program and a voluntary or mandatory interdistrict open enrollment program, there is a system for providing high-quality information to parents about their open enrollment options, school placement preferences for low-income students and/or students in low-performing schools, and there is a unified enrollment system in large urban districts.

4 — All the requirements of "Three" and transportation is provided for participating students.

Where We Are

Tennessee has enacted two open enrollment policies. The first one is a mandatory intradistrict (transfers within district boundaries) policy. This statute allows students attending low-performing schools, as determined by the Priority Schools List, to attend a different school within their school district. The second one is a voluntary intradistrict and interdistrict (transfers across district boundaries) policy, which subjects student transfers to approval by local school boards. The intradistrict policy requires LEAs to provide annual open enrollment periods for transfer requests. Under both enrollment policies, transportation is not provided.

Tennessee should strengthen its open enrollment policies by expanding its mandatory intradistrict transfer program to all students within the district, while still assigning priority to students from low-income households or in low-performing schools. Our state should also provide transportation for these programs to facilitate greater access for open enrollment programs—particularly in large urban districts with multiple public school options within the district. Finally, large urban districts should establish unified enrollment policies allowing families to select the public school of their choice through a unified enrollment and application system.†

T. C. A. § 49-1-602; §49-2-128; § 49-6-3104; § 49-6-3105

Note: The Tennessee School Boards Association model policy outlines a process to require approval of requests during an annual open enrollment period.

* The inclusion of an A–F school grading framework satisfies this requirement. Please see "School Accountability Frameworks" section on page 71.

† It is worth noting that a group of parents and advocates are currently engaging Shelby County Schools to explore the feasibility of pursuing a unified enrollment system that would include all public school options (including public charter schools) for all Shelby County students and families.

Public Charter School Authorizing Practices

Current Score—3

Public charter schools provide an alternative education setting for Tennessee students zoned to a school that does not meet their needs. Charter authorizers serve as gateways, filtering through charter applications for quality and rigor before approving them. Authorizers that implement strong screening practices are more likely to approve schools with a greater chance of success, preserve school autonomy, and close schools that simply do not perform well.[49] Even after approving a charter, a quality authorizer will develop a performance framework and continuously monitor schools in its portfolio to ensure accountability and autonomy for its schools.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state has arbitrary barriers to public charter school authorization.

1 — The state sets a de facto cap on public charter school authorization.

2 — The state has no cap or sets a smart cap* on public charter school authorization or the authorization cap allows for significant future growth. The state establishes non-district charter school authorizers. Charter school replication requires demonstration of success.

(3) The state has no cap or sets a smart cap on public charter school authorization or the authorization cap allows for significant future growth. The state requires a performance-based authorization contract with initial five-year term lengths** and requires a performance-based framework.

4 — There is no cap or the state sets a smart cap on public charter school authorization or the authorization cap allows for significant future growth. The state requires a performance-based contract with initial five-year term lengths, requires authorizers to develop a performance framework, and sets a high threshold and expedited application track for renewal, replication, and expansion*** and the state establishes an independent statewide public charter school authorizer.

Where We Are

Tennessee does not cap the number of public charter schools that can be authorized. Our state allows for three types of authorizers. In addition to LEAs, the SBE can serve as an authorizer for applications denied by LEAs with at least one school on the Priority Schools List. The ASD also can authorize charter schools to operate priority schools. Upon approval, charters are granted a 10-year term length and subject to interim reviews every five years.

The state also allows all authorizers to collect an authorizer fee,† allowing the authorizer to receive a small portion of funds for charter oversight responsibilities. Authorizers are required to specify how the authorizer fee was spent on charter oversight activities. Finally, charter law requires districts to adopt a performance framework for all charter and district schools it oversees. TDOE has created a model performance framework that LEAs will be required to adopt if they do not already have a performance framework in place.[50]

Our state should permit charter applicants (other than LEA-sponsored applications) to apply directly to a non-district authorizer (currently, applicants must first go through their local governing body before appealing to the SBE).

T. C. A. § 49–13–104; § 49-13-108; § 49-13-120; § 49-13-141; Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 6.111, Quality Charter Authorizing Standards; Charter Interim Review Guidelines; Tennessee Model Charter School Performance Framework.

* The definition of "smart cap" is that if a state caps the number of public charter schools that can operate in the state, high-performing charter schools from in- and out-of-state do not count against the total number of public charter schools against the cap.
** A state may have either five-year term lengths or longer term lengths in conjunction with a meaningful interim review that is equivalent to a renewal application review. Longer charter terms provide benefits for securing facilities and financing opportunities, but authorizers should conduct a high-stakes review at least every five years.
*** An expedited application process should outline the necessary thresholds an existing charter operator must meet before approval. This policy should not be pursued until a state has put strong charter accountability in place. For model components on charter accountability, see the "Public Charter School Accountability" section on page 63.
† For LEA authorizers, up to three percent of a charter school's operating budget or $35,000—whichever amount is less. The SBOE and ASD may collect up to four percent.

Public Charter School Accountability

Current Score—2

In exchange for providing greater flexibility around governance and operations, public charter schools must be held accountable for their performance. Clear, objective, and rigorous standards for revocation, combined with a transparent public process, help parents and community leaders see evidence of a school's extreme underperformance or wrongdoing, and highlight the necessity for urgent action to protect students.[51] Establishing clear, strong mechanisms for closing low-performing schools and making authorizers answerable for their schools' performance can strengthen accountability for public charter schools.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not outline clear accountability measures for evaluating and closing low-performing charter schools or holding authorizers accountable.

1 — The state requires charter authorizers to regularly monitor school performance and collect annual school reports for each school they oversee.

(2) The state requires charter authorizers to regularly monitor school performance and collect annual school reports for each school they oversee. Authorizers have clear authority to close low-performing schools following renewal or high stakes reviews or authorizers have the ability to revoke a charter at any time for poor performance or failure to meet the objectives of the performance contract.

3 — The state requires charter authorizers to regularly monitor school performance and conduct annual school reviews for each school they oversee. Authorizers have clear authority to close low-performing schools following renewal or high stakes reviews or the state has a clear mandatory closure trigger for low-performing charter schools. The authorizer must submit annual performance reviews to an oversight body and annually review the performance of each authorizer and set clear sanctions* for authorizers due to poor performance.

4 — The state requires charter authorizers to regularly monitor school performance and conduct annual school reviews for each school they oversee. Authorizers have clear authority to revoke a charter at any time for poor performance or failure to meet the objectives of the performance contract and the state has a clear mandatory closure trigger for low-performing charter schools. An oversight body annually reviews the performance of each authorizer and there are clear sanctions in place for authorizers due to poor performance.

Where We Are

Tennessee requires public charter schools included in the bottom five percent of all schools in our state (according to the Priority Schools List) be closed immediately following the end of the school year in which the school was identified on the Priority Schools List. Schools overseen by the ASD are closed if they fall on two consecutive Priority Schools Lists.

Public charter schools may also be closed at the end of any year for poor academic, organizational, or fiscal performance. Public charter schools are required to submit an annual report to their authorizer and the Commissioner, and authorizers are required to submit annual reports to the Department of Education that include individual charter school performance. Recent updates to state law have established clear criteria for non-renewal or revocation and outlined a closure process. Authorizers are also now required to submit a more detailed annual report on all public charter schools overseen that includes individual school performance, according to the LEA's performance framework.

Tennessee could still do more to improve public charter school accountability, particularly in ensuring authorizer accountability by creating an oversight body that reviews the performance of individual authorizers. Additionally, the default charter school law should be amended to ensure that public charter schools have a full three years of operational and achievement data before facing automatic closure by being placed on the Priority List.**

T. C. A. § 49-13-120; § 49-13-121; § 49-13-122; Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 6.111, Quality Charter Authorizing Standards

* Sanctions should relate to the specific privileges or functions of authorizers and only be instituted after there are multiple authorizers operating within a state. As one example, if the authorizer fee was made contingent on authorizers following state law and establishing high-quality authorizing and oversight standards, that could raise the state's rubric score. Tennessee's authorizing structure requires all applicants to apply to the local governing body as a first step, making sanctions for individual LEAs effectively restrict access to authorizing for applicants.
** Because of recent difficulties in the TNReady assessment administration, several of the public charter schools placed on the 2018 Priority Schools had less than three years of operational and achievement. Please see the "Assessments and Standards" section above on page 69-70 for more information on TNReady administration.

Private School Choice Accessibility

Current Score — 1

Private school choice, like education savings accounts (ESAs) or opportunity scholarships, can complement public school choice options and provide a lifeline, allowing eligible students immediate access to high-quality private schools. For example, scholarship programs have already shown positive effects on student outcomes without inflicting negative fiscal impacts on the existing district.[52] Tennessee should institute a new ESA program that allows for broad eligibility and participation, but also ensures that students from at-risk student subgroups or enrolled in low-performing public schools or districts have priority access to particpate in the program.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not provide for any private school choice alternative for students.

(1) The state has a private school choice program, but there is limited funding available for the program, an undefined program enrollment cap, or the program is limited to a small population of students. Also, the state does not make an effort to ensure the program serves at-risk student subgroups or students in low-performing public schools or districts.

2 — The state has a private school choice program, but limited efforts exist to ensure the program(s) serve at-risk student subgroups or students in low-performing public schools or districts.

3 — The state has a private school choice program that prioritizes at-risk student subgroups or students in low-performing public schools or districts. There is an undefined program enrollment cap or the program may require significant financial contribution from participants.

4 — The state has a broad private school choice program. There is no program enrollment cap or, if one exists, the program prioritizes students who are both from at-risk student subgroups and attending low-performing public schools or districts. The program amount can be used for tuition and other educational expenses or used as tuition-in-full to attend a private school for qualifying at-risk students, and a clear and meaningful parent portal exists to provide families information and the ability to enroll in the program.

Where We Are

Despite legislative efforts to establish a publicly-funded scholarship program over the last several years, Tennessee has been unsuccessful in passing opportunity scholarship legislation. Since January 2017, the state has had an operating private school choice program for students with special needs called the Individualized Education Account Program (IEA).

To increase the availability of quality school choices, our state should establish an education savings account program (ESA) that is broad but also ensures access to at-risk student subgroups in low-performing schools or districts. In this model, parents would be able to use the per-pupil funding for a variety of educational uses, including enrollment in a private school. In order to ensure low-income families full access to a variety of school choice options, the full ESA scholarship amount should be required to be accepted as payment-in-full at participating schools for qualifying at-risk student who choose to use the full ESA scholarship amount to pay for private school tuition.

Similar to accountability for students enrolled in traditional district schools, an ESA program should: require participating ESA students to take some version of state-approved assessments, publicly report on aggregate student performance to determine program success, and hold participating schools accountable by hinging continued involvement on demonstrated student growth. A final component of an accessible private school choice program is the creation of a well-designed, user-friendly parent portal where families could find information on the ESA program, lists of participating schools, and instructions for how to enroll. The state should provide dedicated funding to ensure that a high-quality portal is developed and maintained. (See Private School Choice Accountability below on page 66).

T.C.A. § 49-10-1402; § 49-10-1405; Public Chapter 305 (2017)

Private School Choice Accountability

Current Score—1

When a state enacts a private school choice program, it is asking the public for a high level of trust in using public funds. To ensure fidelity of use for taxpayer money, it is critical to require high accountability for providers and the state that operates that public-private partnership. As with all other policy areas, accountability should be pursued in concert with efforts to create or expand existing private school choice programs.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not have an accountability framework for any of its private school choice programs.

(1) The state's policy provides for only one of the following four items: state authority to conduct random financial audits of providers, state authority to sanction underperforming providers, annual performance assessments of participating students, and feedback surveys on providers.

2 — The state's policy provides for only two of the following four items: state authority to conduct random financial audits of providers, state authority to sanction underperforming providers, annual performance assessments of participating students, and feedback surveys on providers.

3 — The state's policy provides for only three of the following four items: state authority to conduct random financial audits of providers, state authority to sanction underperforming providers, annual performance assessments of participating students, and feedback surveys on providers.

4 — The state's policy provides for the following four items: state authority to conduct random financial audits of providers, state authority to sanction underperforming providers, annual performance assessments of participating students, and feedback surveys on providers.

Where We Are

Tennessee permits the state to suspend or terminate a provider for non-compliance with state law, but does not authorize oversight on performance. Annual performance assessments are only required of students in grades 3–8. There are no provisions for financial audits or feedback surveys on providers in state law.

While pursuing a broader private school choice program, Tennessee should authorize state entities to hold providers accountable for performance. In addition to requiring private school programs to administer some version of state-approved assessments to participating ESA students, the state should also collect feedback surveys from participating students and parents on providers, as well as publish aggregate data on participating student growth and performance. (See Private School Choice Accessibility above on page 64).

T.C.A. § 49-10-1404

TRANSPARENCY POLICIES

Assessments & Standards

Current Score — 4

State education standards provide a roadmap for where our students should be at certain milestones in their K–12 education. The state regularly reviews these standards to ensure they are adequately preparing students for college and future careers. Statewide assessments provide insight into the status of a student's movement along that roadmap, telling families and educators where they are progressing.[53] For grades where standardized assessments are age- and grade-appropriate, assessments are a valuable tool for educators to tailor instruction to individual student needs. Assessing all students in our state also provides the public with a gauge of how entire grades and our state as a whole are growing toward content mastery.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state's policy does not provide for any of the following items: universal administration,* annual administration of the statewide assessment,** alignment with college- and career-ready standards, or public reporting of annual assessment data.*** The state prohibits standardized testing in certain grades.

1 — The state's policy provides for an assessment aligned with college- and career-ready standards. The state does not require universal administration, annual administration of the statewide assessment, or public reporting of annual assessment data.

2 — The state's policy provides for an assessment aligned with college- and career-ready standards. The state requires universal administration OR annual administration. The state does not require public reporting of annual assessment data.

3 — The state's policy provides for an assessment aligned with college- and career-ready standards. The state requires universal administration AND annual administration. The state does not require public reporting of annual assessment data.

(4) The state's policy provides for universal administration, annual administration of the statewide assessment, alignment with college- and career-ready standards, and public reporting of annual assessment data.

* Federal guidelines permit up to one-percent student exemption from the statewide-administered test. This exemption is reserved for those students who participate in alternative means of assessment, including portfolios. State policy may be silent on the matter or explicitly require all students in the state be assessed.
** Assessments should be annually administered across multiple grades. At minimum, states should be assessing students in grades three, eight, and 10. The minimum required for attaining a "two" is administration in grades three through eight, and administration in grades three through 11 to attain a "three" or "four."
*** The public reporting requirement must include reports to be disaggregated by demographic subgroup, and by school and district level, in addition to overall state scores.
† Due to issues with online administration of TNReady in 2018, the legislature enacted Public Chapters 881 and 1026. These chapters temporarily hold harmless students, educators, and schools from any negative accountability or adverse action based on the 2017–18 TNReady results. Due to the temporary nature of these provisions, it does not affect the rubric score for this policy. Please see the section "The Importance of Assessment Implementation" above on page 12 for additional details.

Where We Are

In 2010, Tennessee updated its existing education standards to address changing postsecondary and workplace expectations and to prepare students for college and career settings. In 2015, the Legislature codified a formal state review process to ensure Tennessee's academic needs are specifically met in the adoption of quality, rigorous standards by the SBE.

In Tennessee, student Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) scores in grades 3–11 comprise a percentage of the student's final grade (left to local board discretion). Our state requires annual administration of assessments with the TNReady Assessment for grades 3–8 and End-of-Course Assessments for grades 9–11. The 2016–17 school year marked the first full year of TNReady's administration. All students are required to participate in the ACT or SAT in order to graduate high school.[54] †

T. C. A. § 49-1-309; § 49-1-617; § 49-1-226; § 49-1-608; § 49-6-6001(b); § 49-6-6002; Public Chapter 817

Policy in Action

High academic standards and an aligned, rigorous statewide assessment enjoy strong public support in Tennessee. Since 2012, The Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) has conducted polling consistently finding strong support for an annual assessment to measure whether students are reaching their learning goals. Despite testing implementation issues in the spring of 2018, 88 percent of voters surveyed agreed that testing is an important way to measure education effectiveness, with over half calling it very important. On TNReady specifically, only 27 percent dubbed it "a failure," while 61 percent said the test "should be fixed so that we have a good measure of student progress."[55]

For additional information, see the TN SCORE report on assessments highlighting teacher, principal and district leaders' perspectives.[56]

School Accountability Frameworks

Current Score—3

Data on school performance is most powerful when it provides the public, especially families, with accessible information. School accountability frameworks not only serve as a baseline for determining school performance and targeting resources and interventions, but they can also give valuable insight for families making decisions about where to send their child to school or what questions they should be asking school leaders. When creating reporting systems around school performance, state leaders should consider whether public reports are providing increased transparency and serving the needs of parents and communities.[57] Also, frameworks and reports that are useful and accessible should include a single summative rating based on student outcomes.

Policy Rubric*

0 — The state does not align school accountability frameworks with school improvement strategies.

1 — The state aligns school accountability frameworks with school improvement strategies, but does not align A–F school report cards with the overall system.

2 — The state aligns accountability frameworks with improvement strategies, including A–F school report cards, but does not weight growth significantly.**

(3) Requirements of "Two" and a rating system based in part on achievement gap closure.***

4 — Requirements of "Three" and a rating system based in part on access to highly-effective educators.**** School accountability frameworks also report on school culture.

Where We Are

The TDOE publicly issues school and district level report cards with information on student performance in individual subject areas, such as reading, writing, social studies, and science across various student demographic populations.[58] The report cards also provide graduation data for high schools, identify growth trends in subject performance, and include student subgroup data.

In 2016, the Legislature enacted a law requiring the state to implement an A–F rating system for all schools beginning with the 2017–18 school year and each year thereafter. The grading system analyzes six sub-indicators: student growth, achievement, English language proficiency, and two non-academic indicators (chronic absenteeism and access to early postsecondary opportunities), which are graded individually and then taken together to produce a single A–F letter grade for each school. The system also requires the performance of student subgroups be taken into account when determining school performance and letter grades. This letter grading system will satisfy the ESSA requirement for having an identification system of school performance, and the framework is detailed extensively in Tennessee's ESSA plan.†

T. C. A. § 49-1-211; § 49-1-228.

* The policy rubric score remains a 3, despite the delay of releasing summative A–F letter grades due to the temporary nature of the 1-year delay. However, if the A–F school letter grade system is not implemented for the 2018–19 school year, the rubric score will be lowered.
** Significantly weighting growth means equal to or nearly equal to the weight for achievement.
*** The rubric score reflects the school accountability framework plan as outlined in Tennessee's ESSA plan.
****Effective teaching is defined as educators receiving an overall evaluation score of "at expectations" or higher.
† Due to issues with online administration of TNReady in 2018 (see "Assessments & Standards" section above on pages 69–70) the full implementation of the A–F letter grading system will be delayed. For 2017–18, TDOE will release numerical scores for each of the sub-indicators, but will not issue an overall letter grade. Full letter grades will be released for the 2018–19 school year in Fall of 2019.

Fiscal Transparency

Current Score — 1

Tennessee is one of a handful of states that increased education funding throughout past economic downturns and continues to increase spending each year.[59] However, there is little information publicly available to determine which schools are spending money in a way that maximizes student outcomes. This is particularly important if the state shifts toward a student-weighted funding model. Tennessee should promote greater fiscal transparency by analyzing how well school districts use their resources to improve student achievement, and provide transparent data about school-level expenditures and per-pupil spending at the individual school level.

Policy Rubric

0 — The state does not collect or report expenditure data that would be of sufficient detail to examine whether school districts are using their resources wisely to improve student achievement.

(1) The state collects and reports detailed expenditure data at the school district level. However, the state does not analyze how well school districts use resources to improve student achievement.*

2 — The state collects and reports detailed expenditure data at both the school building and school district level. However, the state does not analyze how well school districts use resources to improve student achievement.

3 — The state collects and reports detailed expenditure data at both the school building and school district level. The state analyzes how well school districts use resources to improve student achievement. Information is reported through a standard rating system.**

4 — The state collects and reports detailed expenditure data at both the school-building and school-district level. The state analyzes how well school districts use resources to benefit students and improve student achievement in the context of multiple measures of student outcomes. Information is reported through a standard rating system.

Where We Are

Tennessee law empowers the Commissioner and the Comptroller of the Treasury to develop and revise as necessary a standardized system of financial accounting and reporting for all LEAs. Each year, every LEA is required to submit a certified copy of its budget, prior year expenditures, and a financial audit to the Commissioner.

A state law passed in 2016, as well as the federal ESSA directives, requires Tennessee to develop a fiscal transparency model in order to report per-pupil spending at the school-level beginning in the 2018–19 school year. During the 2017–18 school year, TDOE conducted a fiscal transparency pilot in order to develop a system of reporting fiscal transparency statewide beginning after the 2018–19 school year. At the time of this publication, the results of that pilot were not publicly available.

Our state should also require TDOE to link expenditure and student achievement data in a way that allows policymakers and the public to identify and share best practices to maximize student achievement, while spending taxpayer funds efficiently and effectively. Additionally, Tennessee should develop a standard rating system to measure fiscal responsibility and performance among peers.

T. C. A. § 49-3-316; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-02-.13

* Information is collected and reported publicly in order to hold schools and districts accountable for spending taxpayer money efficiently and to identify best practices across our state.
** Because the results of the state's fiscal transparency pilot have not yet been unveiled, the rubric score remains the same as in previous years.

Class Size Mandates/ Local Flexibility

Current Score—0

When considering policies that influence student outcomes, we must determine more than just the presence or absence of any measurable positive effect. When considering policies that influence student outcomes, we must also consider whether these policies can deliver the most impactful use of education dollars for their associated costs. Class-size mandates restrict the way schools spend scarce funds. Notwithstanding the demonstrated benefits of smaller classes for certain grade levels, class-size mandates must still be considered in the context of alternative uses of education tax dollars.[60] Effective teachers could be granted opportunities to teach additional students to free up needed resources for other staffing and services. Local school leaders should have flexibility to staff their schools according to student needs.

Policy Rubric

(0) The state requires school districts to limit class sizes in grades K–12 based on class size maximums. A significant portion of state funding is arbitrarily restricted or earmarked for specific activities.

1 — The state only requires school districts to limit class sizes in grades 4–12 based on class size averages. A significant portion of state funding is arbitrarily restricted or earmarked for specific activities.

2 — The state does not restrict class size in grades 4–12 OR schools have some limited spending flexibility.

3 — The state does not restrict class size in grades 4–12 and schools have some limited spending flexibility.

4 — The state does not restrict class size in grades K–12 and school districts have flexibility to use state dollars, free of arbitrary restrictions or earmarks for specific activities.

Where We Are

Tennessee restricts individual class size totals and school averages for grades K–12. Tennessee's funding formula, the BEP, does not prescribe specific levels of expenditures for individual components. However, funds generated through the BEP by the instructional components must be spent on instruction, and funds generated by the classroom components must be spent on either instruction or other classroom areas.

Our state should eliminate class size restrictions above the third grade and permit local districts to determine class size guidance to allow greater flexibility in academic programming and resource allocation.

T. C. A. § 49-1-104; § 49-3-351(c); § 49-3-354(b); Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-03-.03

A Note on Class Size Mandates

We fully recognize there are benefits to smaller class sizes in certain classrooms and grade-levels with highly-effective teachers.[61] Nonetheless, our focus for this policy recommendation highlights the need to permit local districts and schools the ability to determine their staffing needs in individual classrooms and schools. Having state mandates on class sizes can have extremely burdensome budgetary effects on individual schools and districts. For example, in financially strained rural districts and schools with only one class per grade, one additional student could require a district to hire an additional employee to meet the class size restriction. The goal in lifting class size mandates is to provide flexibility so schools can be more nimble and innovative in their educational practices.

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TennesseeCAN: The Tennessee Campaign for Achievement Now has been active in Tennessee since 2011. We are a nonprofit education organization that advocates to ensure every Tennessee student has access to a high-quality education through great teachers and great schools. We work to advance policies and programs that prioritize positive impacts for students statewide—especially those with the greatest needs.

More information is available at www.tn-can.org

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Author: Charlie Bufalino, Director of Policy & Strategy, TennesseeCAN

This report and other resources are available for download at www.tn-can.org

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For inquiries, please contact Chelsea Crawford at ccrawford@crispcomm.com

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