

Tennessee Policy Report Card 2017



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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 school 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

An Introductory Letter from the CEO of 50CAN

2017 has been an exciting year for the 50CAN organization. We've seen our organization grow as we've added two new state chapters in Delaware and Hawaii. We also embarked on a new, 5-year strategic plan. Our work to improve education in America springs from our belief in the immense potential found within every child. Building upon the lessons learned from our work supporting a dozen state-level education advocacy campaigns, we will marshal our organizational resources around four big bets to help democratize education advocacy itself:

- More people: We will recruit the next generation of citizen advocates and support them in leading this nationwide effort to reimagine education.
- Greater opportunities: We will provide more opportunities for local advocates to create new campaigns of all shapes and sizes to ensure their enthusiasm translates into action.
- Smarter goals: We will create a community of learning to ensure these advocacy efforts work on behalf of transforming education into dynamic, vibrant systems focused on children's needs.
- Better tools: We will invest in a suite of advocacy tools to help these local leaders build, carry out and learn from their campaigns so that they secure the results our kids deserve.

The essence of our campaigns are that they are locally led and nationally supported, and the work of the Tennessee team is a great example of what type of change can be created when you have a diligent team placed in an area with a ready climate.

Our network was able to witness the positive efforts taking place in Tennessee firsthand, as we held our annual 50CAN Summit in Memphis this past fall. Our entire team came away inspired by the work of local advocates, educators, and parents—working in concert to ensure a better future for all Memphis and Tennessee children.

This report is a snapshot of the state policy levers that we can pull to cause change for thousands of students. Every year, this document is a guide for our Tennessee team's work in state level policy conversations and how those policy changes can impact local schools and districts. All of these policies lead toward our overall mission of ensuring that every Tennessee student has access to great teachers and great schools.

We hope you will take the time to read through this document and be a partner with us on how we can make some of these items realities for students and families across Tennessee in 2018 and beyond.



Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.
CEO and Founder of 50CAN

Executive Summary

In many ways, the 2017–18 school year will be a year of transition in Tennessee’s education landscape. First, passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has shifted education policy back to the states. This policy change afforded Tennessee an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to transparency, accountability, innovation and flexibility in order to continue improving academic outcomes for Tennessee students. Tennessee’s ESSA plan was submitted and approved earlier this year and received strong national acclaim for the plan’s innovation and commitment to clear and transparent educational goals, as well as our state’s commitment to equity in achieving educational excellence.

Second, 2017–18 will be the final school year in Governor Bill Haslam’s eight-year term. For the past 15 years, Tennesseans have been led by two Governors deeply committed to education reform and improving student achievement. Under their leadership, Tennessee has made extraordinary progress in the last decade. As evidenced by our state’s performance on the “Nation’s Report Card” (National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), Tennessee’s approach to educational transformation with state policy has translated to the strongest growth gains in the nation for nearly half a decade. In 2018, Tennesseans will elect a new governor, and it is crucial for our continued progress that he or she maintains a strong commitment to education reform as the key lever for our state’s future prosperity.

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 that 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. Going into an election year, it

is our hope that candidates, policymakers and educators 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 further in order to raise the bar for all Tennessee children.

As we have mentioned before, these policy recommendations serve as a guide to the model practices developed by state-based entities in conjunction with state and national research. However, it is crucial to once again note that policy is only as good as its implementation. Thus, with these policy frameworks in mind, our state must continue to implement the enacted 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 the 25 education policies we believe are the most critical levers for Tennessee to achieve strong educational progress and a high-quality educator pipeline. Pages 16–26 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 urgent nature of the work that still lies ahead, we also recognize that policymakers need to methodically formulate a sensible policy strategy for Tennessee’s students, educators and schools. We recognize that some policies should not be adopted until others are put in place.

This iteration of the policy report card includes a few policy rubric updates but does not contain any new policies compared to the 2016 version. The updates are necessary to ensure

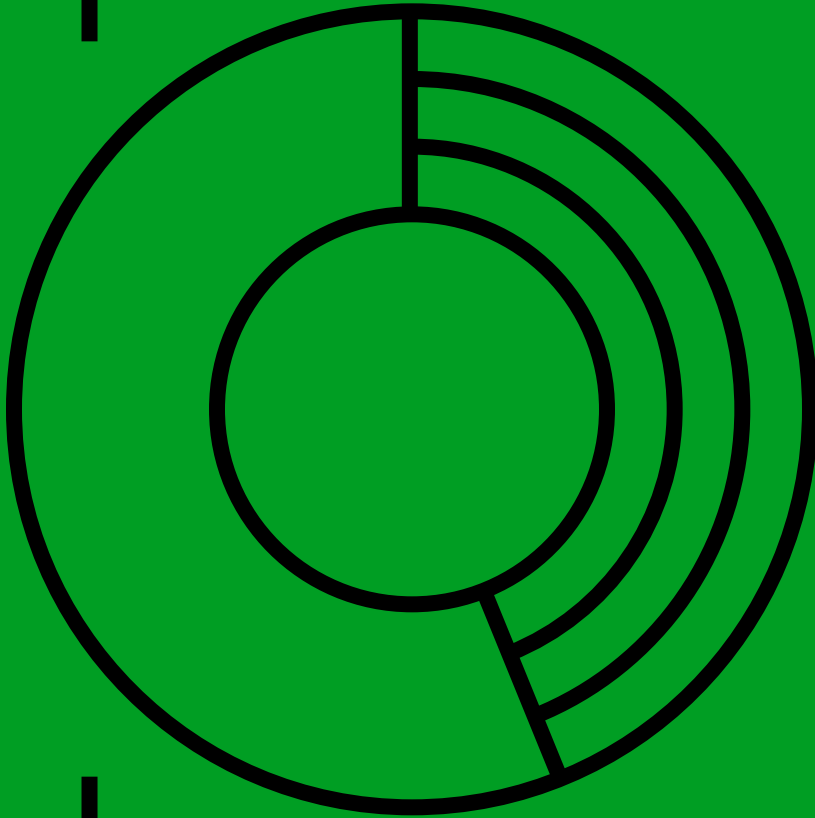
we are aligned with research-based best practices and the evolving needs of our school communities.

Select highlights from the 2017 Tennessee Policy Report Card:

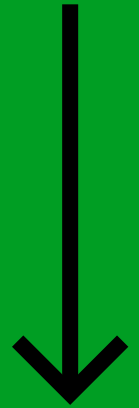
- During the 2017 legislative session, our state enacted Public Chapter 307, the High-Quality Charter Schools Act, which improved public charter school oversight and accountability, established an authorizer fee for districts overseeing public charter schools and created a charter school facilities fund.
- Improved scoring in *School Turnaround Strategies* as codified in Tennessee’s ESSA plan, which included specific timelines for district- and state-led turnaround strategies once a school lands on the priority list.
- In 2017, the legislature passed Public Chapter 305, which clarified enrollment eligibility in the Individualized Education Account program by adding two additional disability categories as eligible to enter the program.
- We made changes to some existing policy rubrics, including:
 - Adding a requirement for state policies intended to improve teacher diversity as part of *Teacher Preparation Programs Admissions*.
 - Adding the inclusion of a common enrollment system to the rubric for *Open Enrollment*.
 - Prioritizing the use of performance frameworks in *Public Charter School Authorizing Practices*.
 - Adding and prioritizing reporting of equitable access to highly effective educators to the rubric for *Student Placement/Classroom Assignment*.
- As with previous years, the state maintains its model standard with identifying quality instruction and practice with educators through robust evaluation rubrics and performance-based policies. Tennessee continues its commitment to providing students quality school options through expanded school choice programs.
- Tennessee continues to need improvement around student assignment practices. Current practice does not require any action from districts and schools toward addressing students who are placed in chronically underperforming classrooms.

Strong Policies for Tennessee

In 11 of the 25 policies included in this report, Tennessee is categorized as a “Three” or “Four,” indicating strong state policy.



11/25
Strong state
policies



Five policies are categorized as a “Three,” while six 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 Commissioner of Education
Dr. Candice McQueen

Tennessee State Board Members

Mr. B. Fielding Rolston (Chairman)	District 1
Mr. Mike Edwards	District 2
Ms. Allison Chancey	District 3
Mr. Gordon Ferguson	District 4
Ms. Elissa Kim	District 5
Ms. Lillian Hartgrove (Vice chair)	District 6
Ms. Wendy Tucker	District 7
Mr. Lang Wiseman	District 8
Mr. Darrell Cobbins	District 9

Tennessee State Legislature

The General Assembly has
33 Senators and 99 Representatives

School system

999,701

Students

\$9,958

Average Per-pupil
Expenditure

64,928

Teachers

146

School Districts

1,819

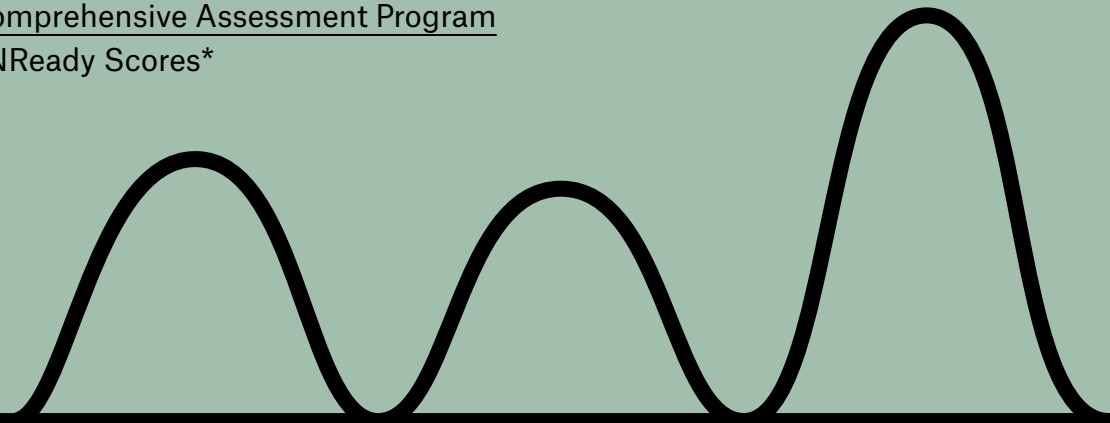
Schools (All)



111

Public Charter
Schools

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program
Grade 3-8 TNReady Scores*



Percentage of students scoring on track or mastered.

38.0

Math

33.8

ELA

58.5**

Science

Average
ACT Score

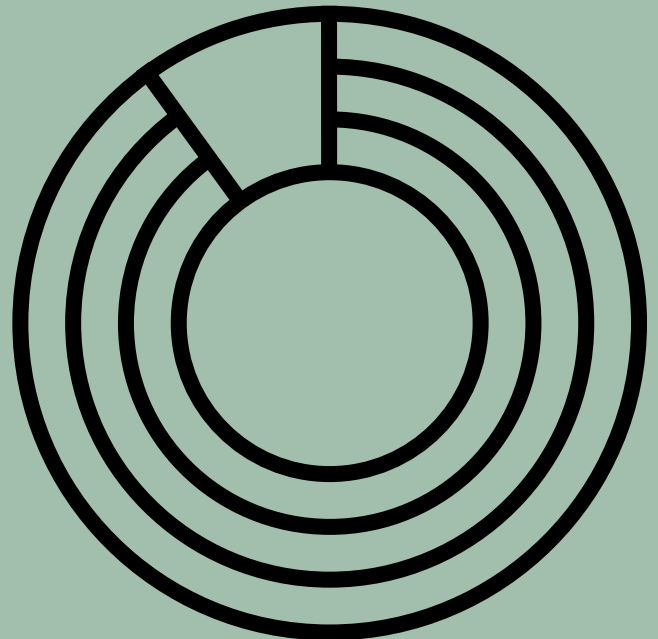
20.1

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



51 20 75

Note (pages 7-11): All data reflects information from the 2016-17 school year (unless otherwise noted) available on the Tennessee State Report Card.

* Tennessee reset K-12 academic expectations with the more rigorous TNReady assessment in grades 3-8 in 2016-17. As a result, student proficiency levels changed markedly from the 2014-15 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) implementation.

** 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 2015-16 as updated 2016-17 data was not yet available when this report was published.

Tennessee's ESSA Plan: Roadmap for Education Policy

In August of 2017, the U.S. Department of Education formally approved Tennessee's ESSA plan—the culmination of an 18-month process that included deep stakeholder engagement and feedback from Tennesseans across the state. Tennessee's plan received national acclaim as one of the top ESSA plans submitted in the first submission round (plans submitted in Spring 2017).⁴

Building off of Tennessee Succeeds, the state's strategic education plan, the ESSA plan serves as a roadmap of the top education priorities that will ensure Tennessee remains the fastest improving state in education. Below, we provide a summary of some of our ESSA plan's key highlights. For each ESSA subsection summarized below, we also identify any corresponding policies found in this report card. This summary is not comprehensive and we encourage readers to review the ESSA plan in its entirety.*⁵

*The Tennessee ESSA Plan can be found on the TDOE website at https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/TN_ESSA_State_Plan_Approved.pdf.

Goals

A) Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on NAEP by 2019.

B) Seventy-five percent of Tennessee third graders will be proficient in reading by 2025.

C) The average ACT composite score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.

D) The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree.

Standards and Assessment

- Tennessee transitioned to new, more rigorous standards for math and ELA in 2015–16, and will transition to more rigorous standards for science in 2018–19 and 2019–20 for social studies.
- Beginning in the 2015–16 school year, Tennessee transitioned to a more rigorous assessment, TNReady, for testing in grades 3–11. The test is fully aligned to Tennessee’s college- and career-ready academic standards.
- Tennessee will require a 95-percent participation rate for all students and for each subgroup of students in accordance with ESSA.

Please see *Assessments and Standards* section below on page 73.

Accountability

- Tennessee will implement a new school accountability framework in 2017–18 which will issue each school a summative A–F letter grade. The summative grade will comprise four main sub-indicators: (1) student achievement; (2) student growth; (3) English language proficiency and (4) chronically out of school. High school includes two additional sub-indicators of graduation rate and postsecondary readiness. Subgroup performance is weighted at 40% for each sub-indicator.
- The ESSA plan also clarifies school turnaround strategies and timelines in which the bottom five percent of schools must be put on a state turnaround plan.

Please see *School Accountability Frameworks* and *School Improvement Strategies* sections on pages 76 and 65.

Historically underserved subgroups:

All means all

- The state will hold districts and schools accountable for equity in serving four pri-

mary subgroups of students: (1) economically disadvantaged; (2) students with disabilities; (3) English learners; and (4) Black, Hispanic, and Native American students.

- The ESSA plan commits Tennessee to ensuring equitable access to highly effective teachers.
- The state will establish a “School Health Index” and implement a “Schools Climate” survey to ensure all students are being educated in a healthy, supportive learning environment.

Please see *School Accountability Frameworks and Student Placement/Classroom Assignment* sections on pages 76 and 81.

District Empowerment

- Tennessee will encourage district innovation through targeted grantmaking and a centralized repository for district strategy documents.
- The state will enter into a partnership with Vanderbilt University to form the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA). TERA’s research agenda will be based directly on state strategic priorities, allowing best-in-class research to influence rapid iteration and improvement for our top education initiatives.
- Tennessee will also establish a Personalized Learning Task Force focused on blended learning, predictive analytics, micro-credentialing and competency-based education.

Educator Support

- Tennessee will support educators through five key strategies: educator preparation, educator evaluation, professional learning, differentiation and an educator pipeline.
- The state will increase the supply of effective teachers for TN schools by raising admission standards, requiring rigorous coursework, requiring high-quality clinical

experiences and well developed candidate assessments.

- In 2016 the state released a redesigned Teacher Preparation Report Card that includes four domains: candidate profile, employment, satisfaction and program impact on student outcomes.

Please see *Teacher Evaluations, Principal Evaluations, Teacher Preparation Program Admissions, and Teacher Preparation Program Accountability* sections on pages 28, 31, 43, and 46

Early Foundations and Literacy

- The state will support deeper literacy instruction in preparation programs and licensure standards.
- Tennessee will establish improved early grade assessments including a Kindergarten Early Inventory and an optional Second Grade assessment aligned to the TNReady assessment administered in grades 3–11.
- The state will also invest in a major early literacy initiative, Read to be Ready, which will provide a network of district and regional coaches to support literacy initiatives statewide.

Bridge to Postsecondary

- The state aims to improve ACT scores by offering seniors a free retake of the test and the creation of a free ACT prep course.
- Tennessee remains committed to increasing college attendance through the Drive to 55 and the Tennessee Promise, which provides scholarship dollars for eligible students to attend community college tuition-free.
- The ESSA plan calls for districts to provide multiple early postsecondary options for students that include: advanced placement, international baccalaureate, dual credit and industry certification.

State Policies Overview

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), a state must codify in law or regulation all elements of the higher category. Thus, if a state enacts partial elements of a higher category, it would still be rated in the lower category.

Educator Quality Policies

Tennessee stands out as a national leader in its teacher and principal evaluation practices. Importantly, our state uses a robust evaluation framework to reward educators based on performance while simultaneously holding persistently underperforming teachers accountable. Great teachers and principals make great schools; thus, our state's policies must incentivize and reward exceptional educators. *See pages 19–21.*

School Choice Policies

Tennessee parents and families deserve the right to access an education setting that best fits their child's needs. School choice policies provide an avenue for families seeking an alternative school environment from their zoned school. Public options, including open enrollment initiatives, public charter schools, state turnaround efforts, as well as private school choice, offer important educational choices for students with the highest need. When families are empowered with a meaningful choice in their child's education, communities become more invested in their students' educational outcomes. *See pages 22–24.*

Data & Transparency Policies

Information empowers students, families and educators alike. As a public service, transparency around the academic and financial performance of schools and districts helps ensure we are maximizing expenditures of taxpayer money. Moreover, performance data helps ensure that our improvements to education policy are making real progress towards our goals on student outcomes. With further transparency and an increased focus on data-driven policies, we can monitor student and school progress and provide better information to the public about the performance of our institutions. *See page 25.*

School Systems Policies

Tennessee state policies must work to empower school and system leaders to determine the staffing needs of their schools. Our state should also endeavor to ensure that all students, regardless of need, are afforded the opportunity to reach their highest potential. With targeted funding, spending flexibility for schools, and staffing flexibility, Tennessee can ensure that educators have the tools to give every student the best education possible. *See page 26.*

4

Teacher Evaluations

Our state requires annual comprehensive teacher evaluations that utilize a five-tiered rating system based on classroom evaluations, personal conferences and a 50 percent assessment-driven student growth and achievement component. Tennessee could further strengthen its evaluation framework by requiring that all districts incorporate student surveys as an additional measure. *No change from prior year. See pages 28–30.*

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 change from prior year. See pages 31–32.*

2

Differentiated Pay

State law requires that evaluations play a role in compensation decisions. 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 change from prior year. See pages 33–34.*

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 change from prior year. See pages 35–36.*

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 tie-breaker. *No change from prior year. See pages 37-38.*

2

Teacher Dismissals

State law requires evaluations be used for 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 change from prior year. See pages 39-40.*

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 change from prior year. See pages 41-42.*

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. *Updated rubric from prior year to include diversity component. No score change from prior year. See pages 43-45.*

4

Teacher Preparation Program Accountability

Tennessee is phasing-in requirements that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices around student teaching and mentorship. State policy provides for meaningful data collection and relevant program elements, including a student teaching and mentoring component. *No change from prior year. See pages 46–48.*

2

Principal Preparation Program Accountability

State policy requires programs have selective admissions criteria and provide for accrediting alternative institutions. Importantly, our state requires a clinical component. Tennessee can strengthen its principal preparation policy by requiring programs to report candidate graduation data and by facilitating information sharing among programs. *No change from prior year. See pages 49–50.*

2

Open Enrollment

Tennessee has an intradistrict mandatory transfer policy for students attending low-performing schools and also 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 common enrollment systems for large urban districts. *Updated rubric to include common enrollment systems. No score change from prior year. See pages 52–53.*

3

Public Charter School Authorizing Practices

Our state has 10-year charter terms, multiple authorizers, and does not have charter authorization caps. The state also allows for multiple types of authorizers. Tennessee should permit all charter applicants to apply directly to a non-district authorizer. *Updated rubric to prioritize inclusion of performance frameworks. Score raised to a 3 due to requirement for charter performance frameworks. See pages 54–56.*

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 change from prior year. See pages 57–59.*

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. *Score raised to a 3 due to the fact that all authorizers can now receive an authorizer fee. See pages 60–61.*

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 change from prior year. See pages 62–64.*

4

School Improvement Strategies

State turnaround efforts such as the ASD assume governance over some of the lowest performing schools in the state and is funded through the BEP. The ASD also has access to the facilities of converted local district-run schools. 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. *Score raised to a 4 due to adoption of state ESSA plan’s school improvement provisions and specific timelines for intervention. See pages 65–67.*

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 be targeted to at-risk student populations. Our state should extend additional educational options for our most vulnerable student populations by expanding private school choice options. *No change from prior year. See pages 68–69.*

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 getting academic gains with students. *No change from prior year. See pages 70–71.*

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 recorded publicly and aligned with college and career-ready standards. *No change from prior year. See pages 73–75.*

③ School Accountability Frameworks

TDOE issues school- and district-level report cards with information on student performance in many subject areas. State law requires 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. *Score raised to a 3 reflecting the accountability framework as laid out in the state’s ESSA plan. See pages 76–77.*

① Fiscal Transparency

Every LEA is required to submit a certified copy of its budget, prior year expenditures and 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 change from prior year. See pages 78–79.*

0

Student Placement/ Classroom Assignment

Tennessee prohibits information regarding a teacher's impact on student educational progress from being released to parents. Because of this provision, parents have no knowledge when their child is placed in an underperforming classroom. To ensure students have access to the best possible education, Tennessee should guarantee that no student is assigned to underperforming teachers for multiple consecutive years. *Rubric updated to prioritize transparent reporting and consecutive years of placement in underperforming classroom above parental notification. No score change from prior year. See pages 81–82.*

4

Mutual Consent/Forced Placement

Our state has eliminated forced placement policies and requires teachers and principals to mutually agree on an excessed teacher's school placement. Tennessee must continue to ensure that schools have the authority to build and maintain an effective instructional team without forced placement. *No change from prior year. See pages 83–84.*

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 does not adequately include targeted funding that takes into account individual student or school need, but is instead heavily influenced by the local district's ability to contribute. *No change from prior year. See pages 85–87.*

0

Class Size/Spending Flexibility

Tennessee 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 change from prior year. See pages 88–90.*

Educator Quality Policies

4

Teacher Evaluations

Teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement.⁶ 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.⁷ 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 locally selected achievement measures). Evaluations must be used as a tool to provide feedback and professional development for teachers. 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 192; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-01; Teacher and Principal Evaluation 5.201

Legislative Highlight

As part of the transition to the new statewide assessment, TNReady, the legislature passed Public Chapter 192 to temporarily reduce the impact of student growth on a teacher's overall evaluation score. Further, the law permanently establishes that teachers will receive either the composite three-year growth score, or the most recent year's growth score—whichever is higher—when calculating the growth score for their overall evaluation. Given the temporary nature of the reduction in student growth for the overall evaluation, the rubric score remains unchanged.

* 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.⁸ However, any individual component in isolation will not ensure a robust evaluation framework. Instead, a comprehensive framework will include multiple measures and effective implementation.

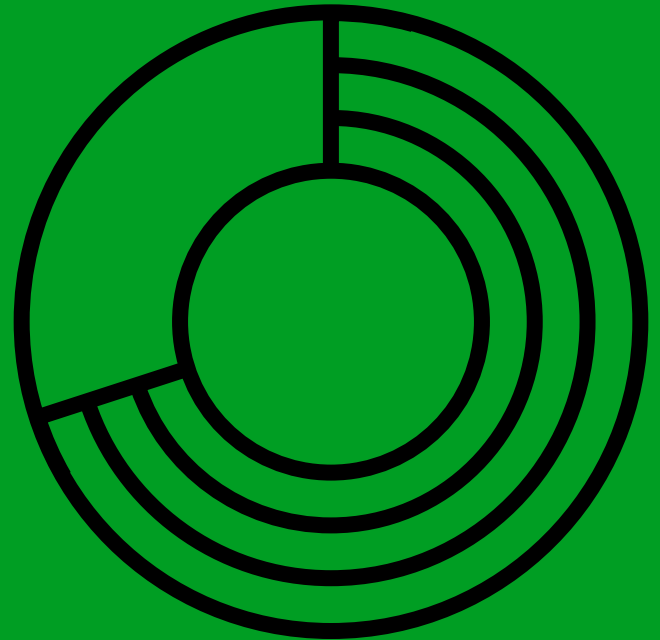
Policy in Action

TDOE's efforts to use evaluations as a meaningful measure of teacher effectiveness are evidenced by a 2017 educator survey noting that three-quarters of teachers believed the evaluation process has improved their teaching (a figure that has doubled since 2012). Moreover, almost 90 percent of these

teachers reported that they received detailed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses through the evaluation process. Finally, 70 percent (up from 66 percent in 2016) of teachers believed that the evaluation process led to improvements in student learning.⁹

70%

of all teachers believe the evaluation process led to improvements in student learning



4

Principal Evaluations

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.¹⁰ Principals are responsible for ensuring that the teachers they place in classrooms are high-quality and are given meaningful opportunities for development. The efficacy of principals empowers teachers and is also tied to increased retention of high-quality teachers.¹¹ 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 (3) include at least a three-tiered effectiveness rating for the 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 effectiveness rating for the 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 effectiveness rating for the 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) include at least a four-tiered effectiveness rating for the 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)¹²

* 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.¹³ However, any individual component in isolation will not ensure a robust evaluation framework. Instead, a comprehensive framework will include multiple measures and effective implementation.

②

Differentiated Pay

Today, across the country, principals are facing significant shortages of quality teacher candidates.¹⁴ 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 compensation decisions. 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 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 most heavily weighted criteria used to determine all pay increases.

Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-01-02-.02; T. C. A. § 49-1-302(a)(18); § 49-1-302(d)(2)(A); § 49-3-306(a)(1); § 49-3-306(h); 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.¹⁵

* 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.

3

Tenure

Education policy often requires balancing the professional interests of adult employees with the educational needs and rights of students.¹⁶ Tenure can provide a greater sense of stability for educators looking to make teaching a profession. After attaining 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

Tennessee requires a probationary period of five years and at least two prior years of performance where the teacher has been rated above expectations. 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)¹⁷

3

Last In First Out (“LIFO”)

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.¹⁸ 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 when determining layoffs during a 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 a 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)

2

Teacher Dismissals

The role of teachers is to focus on student learning and classroom culture. Notably, 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Sometimes, persistently underperforming teachers need to be dismissed from a school based on performance. Tennessee should ensure that district and school leaders have the authority to build and maintain 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 used 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

Litigation Update

In 2014, the Memphis teachers' union filed a lawsuit, *Kelley v. Shelby County Board of Education*, against the school district implicating our state's mutual consent laws. In August 2016, a court ruling found tenured teachers cannot be dismissed (including during a reduction-in-force) by the superintendent or district administrators, but rather must be dismissed by the local governing board (i.e. the school board).

* 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 29.

②

Principal Dismissals

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.²¹ 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 used 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 31.

① Teacher Preparation Program Admissions

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.²² 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.***

Where We Are

In 2014, the SBE revised its policy governing accreditation for teacher preparation programs. Under those revisions, our state will phase in requirements that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices, including selective admissions criteria. The new requirements will be fully implemented in 2018. Beginning in 2019, the state requires demonstration of subject matter knowledge through the edTPA.†

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 the current 2.75) or higher and 50th percentile on both a skills exam and content area exam.

In addition to strengthening standards for entry, the state must support increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce. Research shows that exposure to same-race teachers positively benefits student achievement and can reduce suspension and expulsion rates.²³ Currently, the state does provide some material 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.²⁴

* 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 learners, special education students and black, Hispanic and Native American students.

† edTPA is a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system used by teacher preparation programs throughout the United States to emphasize, measure and support the skills and knowledge that all teachers need from Day 1 in the classroom. For more information please visit www.edtpa.org

While the state requires educator preparation programs to set goals to increase the diversity of their candidates, the state should take further steps to 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; 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, per revised SBE policy.

For more information on the Tennessee teacher preparation program landscape and other recommendations, please see the Tennessee Teacher Preparation Report Card 2016 State Profile²⁵ and Prepared for Day One, a TN SCORE report on teacher preparation.²⁶

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 for programs.²⁷

④ Teacher Preparation Program Accountability

State governments have the strongest impact on the work of America's more than 3.5 million public school teachers.²⁸ This includes state oversight of teacher preparation programs. While individual programs can do a lot to improve the preparation they provide, states also must be responsible for ensuring adequate teacher preparation right from the start.²⁸ While creating state 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 go into 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.†

Where We Are

In 2014, the SBE revised its policy governing accreditation for teacher preparation programs. Under those revisions, our state will phase in requirements that all existing and new programs adhere to national best practices around student teaching and mentorship, and importantly, will collect and report on data related to program performance based on graduate outcomes.‡ The new requirements will be fully implemented in 2018.

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 Tennessee State Board of Education; Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy 5.504

Legislative Highlights

A new law passed in 2017, Public Chapter 402, requiring all teacher preparation program faculty to annually visit and collaborate with a local school or district. This policy will strengthen partnerships between local districts and teacher preparation programs and improve the student teaching experience.

* 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

Policy in Action

In a comprehensive 2017 review of the nation's teaching programs, the National Council for Teacher Quality ("NCTQ") ranked three Tennessee teacher preparation programs in the top tenth percentile of programs nationally. Lipscomb University was rated as the number one preparation program in the country in the secondary education category.³⁰

In December of 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.³¹

② Principal Preparation Program Accountability

While we know that accountability for principal preparation programs should include similar elements to teacher programs, we do not yet have the same wealth of data to make many projections on national best practices. Yet, states can ensure schools have principals who advance teaching and learning by setting principal standards and overseeing principal preparation.³² 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 accredited. 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 accredited, 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 accrediting 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 – State policy provides for 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 – State policy provides for 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. Programs must provide a clinical component that includes mentorship and performance evaluations. State policy allows providers beyond IHEs to become accredited. State review of programs includes conditional approval with an interim review within 18 months before full approval. While the state may approve a program with stipulations, there are no mechanisms for sanctions for underperforming providers.

Tennessee can strengthen its principal preparation policy by requiring programs to report candidate and graduate data, and by facilitating sharing between programs to identify best practices. The state should also encourage programs to support clinical instructional leadership programs, as well as provide training and support for school finance and budgeting.

Tennessee State Board of Education; Learning Centered Leadership Policy 5.101

* 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.

School Choice Policies

② Open Enrollment

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. 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.³³ 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 intra-district open enrollment.

1 – State law creates a mandatory intra-district open enrollment program OR state law creates a voluntary or mandatory inter-district open enrollment program.

② State law creates a mandatory intra-district open enrollment program OR state law creates voluntary or mandatory inter-district 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 intra-district open enrollment program and a voluntary or mandatory inter-district open enrollment program, there is a system for providing high-quality information to parents about their open enrollment options, are school placement preferences for low-income students and/or students in low-performing schools, AND there is a unified common 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 intra-district (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 intra-district and inter-district (transfers across district boundaries) policy, which subjects student transfers to approval by local school boards. The intra-district 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 intra-district 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 for transportation with 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 common enrollment policies allowing families to select the public school of their choice through a unified, common enrollment and application system.

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

Note: The TSBA 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 76.

③ Public Charter School Authorizing Practices

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.³⁴ 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.

* 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 57.

† Up to three percent of a charter school’s operating budget or \$35,000—whichever amount is less.

Where We Are

Tennessee does not have charter authorization caps. 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.

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; Public Chapter 307, Tennessee Charter Interim Review Guidelines (June 2013)

Legislative Highlights

In 2017, the legislature passed the High-Quality Charter Schools Act, Public Chapter 307, an omnibus bill that strengthened charter authorizing practices. The legislation establishes an authorizer fee† allowing the authorizer to receive a small portion of funds for charter oversight responsibilities and also requires authorizers to take into account an operator’s past performance. Authorizers are required to specify how the authorizer fee was spent on charter oversight activities. Finally, the law requires districts to adopt a performance framework for all charter and district schools it oversees. TDOE shall create a model performance framework that LEAs will be required to adopt if they do not already have a performance framework in place.

Policy in Action

As of 2017, three charter authorizers (there are six active authorizers in the state during the 2016–17 school year) use performance frameworks.³⁵ One authorizer, Shelby County Schools, is currently working on a performance framework as part of its Charter Compact.³⁶ All authorizers will be required to develop a performance framework or adopt the state’s model performance framework in order to comply with Public Chapter 307. The SBE will implement a comprehensive performance-accountability and compliance-monitoring system to evaluate each authorized charter school's academic, financial and organizational performance.

② Public Charter School Accountability

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.³⁷ 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 a 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. An oversight body annually reviews the performance of each authorizer and there are clear sanctions* in place 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 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. 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.

Tennessee could do more to strengthen public charter school accountability, including requiring annual reviews of school performance and creating an oversight body that reviews the performance of individual authorizers.

T. C. A. § 49-13-120; § 49-13-121; § 49-13-122; Public Chapter 307

Legislative Highlights

Passage of Public Chapter 307 establishes clear criteria for non-renewal or revocation and outlined a closure process. It also requires authorizers 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.

* 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.

Policy in Action

In 2016, Shelby County Schools shut down four public charter schools for low performance, a decision that was upheld by the SBE. Due to complications with the state test, there was a one-year delay in issuing an updated Priority Schools List; therefore, no public charter schools will be automatically closed until the 2018–19 school year. Districts could still pursue revocation for public charter schools not meeting the provisions of their charter agreement, but to date, no public charter schools have been closed during 2017.³⁸

3

Equitable Public Charter School Funding

Charter schools are public schools educating Tennessee students just like any other district-run school. As such, charter schools 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, disparities in funding exist between charter schools and district-run schools.³⁹ 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 for the students they serve.

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 equitable operating funding via the main school funding formula* and the state provides a funding mechanism for all authorizers to perform authorizing functions.

* 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.

** Up to three percent of a charter school’s operating budget or \$35,000—whichever amount is less.

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 charter schools.

LEAs that have authorized charter schools are permitted to receive an authorizer fee in order to conduct charter oversight duties and ensure school quality. Both the ASD and SBE are also authorized to receive an authorizer fee for any charter school that they oversee. Tennessee could further improve equitable charter funding by requiring all state and local revenue calculations to include any additional income that is generated for student services and per-pupil allocations, including facilities payments.

TCA § 49-13-112; § 49-13-106(a)(2)(B); Public Chapter 307; Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 0520-14-01-.03

Legislative Highlights

Passage of Public Chapter 307 now allows LEA authorizers to collect an authorizer fee** from charter schools it oversees, beginning in the 2018–19 school year. The legislation also clarifies that charter schools shall receive state and local funding payments based on that year’s actual enrollment numbers, rather than estimates based on previous years’ enrollment data.

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 itself.

2

Public Charter School Facilities Access and Funding

Due to unfavorable lending terms and a lack of dedicated school 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.⁴⁰ Unlike district-run schools, public charter schools are responsible for securing their own facilities. This can put a significant strain on their operational budgets, as state funding does not provide adequate resources for facilities allowances. Also, 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 and well-equipped facilities, states should grant public charter schools access to available non-LEA public buildings and provide multiple sources of funding and financing for facilities.

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 only two 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.

* State-level guidance defines underutilized as: “Underutilized or vacant property” is defined 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.”⁴¹

Where We Are

In Tennessee, LEAs must make underutilized* and vacant properties available for use by public charter schools. Also, state law requires portions of underutilized properties be made available, allowing co-location in school district 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.

In terms of charter facility financing, Tennessee provides some financing for charter school facilities through a per-pupil facilities allowance calculated in the BEP— our state’s funding mechanism for schools. Public charter schools may also be able to obtain financing through federal tax-credit bond programs. Public charter schools that have the support of their local taxing authority are eligible to 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 also established a new charter school facilities grant program, from which 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, which would provide greater options for school choice. The state should also provide public charter schools access to rent-free facilities leases of underutilized or vacant district property, and a right of first refusal to rent or purchase underutilized or vacant district property at or below market value. Our state should also provide capital financing programs dedicated to public charter schools, such as direct loan or credit enhancement programs.

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

Legislative Highlights

Passage of Public Chapter 307 creates the state's first-ever Charter School Facilities Grant Program. The law authorizes 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 has been funded at six million dollars for 2017-18, with the Governor's office pledging an additional \$12 million to be distributed in the next two years.

Policy in Action

Shelby County Schools (SCS) has established a Charter Compact between the district and the district's public charter schools. This year, the district adopted several recommendations from the Compact including offering district facilities to qualifying public charter schools, rent-free, if the charter school's mission aligns with the district's strategic plan and enrollment shifts within the district.

4

School Improvement Strategies

In 2010, Tennessee established the ASD, a state-managed turnaround model, designed to govern our state's lowest-performing schools, or those ranking in the bottom five percent based on student achievement. In 2012, SCS 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 have clear interventions 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 state- or district-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 the school. The Commissioner appoints the superintendent of the ASD. The ASD is funded through the BEP and has access to the facilities of converted local district-run 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, like that of the ASD with financial, programmatic and staffing flexibility.

T.C.A. § 49-1-602; § 49-1-613; § 49-1-614;
Public Chapter 177

Legislative Highlight

In 2017, the legislature passed Public Chapter 177, which codified much of Tennessee’s ESSA plan into state law. In terms of school improvement, this legislation clarified the entry and exit processes for schools to enter the ASD, as well as specific requirements for district-led turnaround efforts.

Policy in Action

In addition to the ASD and i-Zone school turnaround efforts, the state has proposed a “Partnership Zone” as a school-turnaround strategy for a cluster of schools in Hamilton County. This partnership zone would represent a shared governance model, with both state and local representation, and allow for school-based autonomy in state turnaround efforts.⁴²

Author’s Note

In the previous model policy for the state turnaround interventions, we only outlined recommendations on structure and governance. However, some schools from the original priority list in 2012 have yet to receive any significant intervention. It is crucial that schools do not remain on the Priority List for multiple years without meaningful turnaround efforts—whether through district or state-led turnaround efforts. The ESSA plan’s clarification of turnaround eligibility as well as entry and exit timelines should ensure meaningful and timely intervention for priority schools in the future.

1

Private School Choice Accessibility

Private school choice, like 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.⁴³ Tennessee should ensure that students from at-risk student subgroups, or enrolled in low-performing public schools or districts, have access to high-quality private school choice options.

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 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 for 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 private school choice program for at-risk student subgroups or students in low-performing public schools or districts. 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 as payment-in-full for tuition and school costs.

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 will have an operating private school choice program for students with special needs with the Individualized Education Account Program.

To increase the availability of quality school choices, our state should establish a student scholarship program targeted to at-risk student subgroups in low-performing schools or districts and accepted as payment-in-full at participating schools. Similar to accountability for students enrolled in traditional district schools, the program should also require scholarship students to take 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. (See Private School Choice Accountability below on page 70).

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

Legislative Highlight

In 2017, the legislature passed Public Chapter 305, which clarified enrollment eligibility in the Individualized Education Account program by adding two additional disability categories as eligible to enter the program. These changes make 31,000 students statewide eligible to participate in the IEA program.

①

Private School Choice Accountability

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 operate 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. The state should also collect feedback surveys from participating students and parents on providers. (See Private School Choice Accessibility above on page 68).

T.C.A. § 49-10-1404

Data & Transparency Policies

4

Assessments & Standards

State education standards provide a roadmap for where our students should be at certain milestones in their K-12 education. Over a periodic cycle, the state reviews these standards to ensure they are adequately preparing students for college and the careers of tomorrow. Statewide assessments provide insight into the status of an individual student's movement along that roadmap, telling families and educators where students are progressing.⁴⁴ For those grades where standardized summative 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 can also provide 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.

Where We Are

In 2010, Tennessee updated its existing education standards to address changing post-secondary 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 3–12 comprise a percentage of the student’s final grade (ranging from 15 to 25 percent). Our state requires annual administration of assessments with the TNReady Assessment for grades 3–8 and End-of-Course Assessments for grades 9–11. Both of these assessments are part of TCAP. 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.⁴⁵

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

Legislative Highlight

In 2016, the Legislature passed Public Chapter 844, the Tennessee Student Assessment Transparency Act, that decreased the total number of required tests, and reduced testing time, by collapsing the ACT Explore and Plan tests into the TNReady assessment for 8th and 10th grade. It also outlines a timeline for releasing test material to the public.

Policy in Action

High academic standards and an aligned, rigorous statewide assessment enjoy strong public support in Tennessee. A recent 2017 poll showed that 79 percent of Republican voters and 85 percent of Democratic voters support higher academic standards while 52 percent of Republican voters and 56 percent of Democratic voters support tougher statewide testing that mirrors what is taught in class.⁴⁶

In 2016 and 2017, Commissioner McQueen reconvened stakeholders representing educators, legislators, parents, school board members, students and communities across the state for an Assessment Task Force. The group will learn of the progress on last year's recommendations, address items requiring further analysis from the first task force, review and assess tests implemented in the 2016–17 school year, provide additional recommendations on testing and give feedback on specific assessment- and accountability-related items.⁴⁷

As part of Tennessee Succeeds and the state ESSA plan, the Department created an optional Tennessee-specific second grade assessment available to districts starting with the 2016–17 school year.⁴⁸

For additional information, see the TN SCORE report on assessments highlighting teacher, principal and district leaders' perspectives.⁴⁹

3

School Accountability Frameworks

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 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.⁵⁰ 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 equitable access to effective teachers.*** 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.⁵¹ The report cards also provide graduation data for high schools, identify growth trends in subject performance and include student subgroup data.

T. C. A. § 49-1-211; § 49-1-228.

Legislative Highlight

In 2016, the Legislature enacted Public Chapter 680, requiring the state to implement an A-F rating system for all schools beginning with the 2017–18 school year and each year thereafter. This satisfies the ESSA requirement for having an identification system of school performance, and the framework is detailed extensively in Tennessee’s ESSA plan.

Policy in Action

TDOE has been working with stakeholders across the state to restructure the school accountability framework in Tennessee. The current recommendations, as outlined in the state’s ESSA plan, align the summative rating system with the overall accountability frameworks.

This new accountability framework will first be implemented in the 2017–18 school year, with the first school letter grades being issued in the fall of 2018.

* 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 teachers is defined as educators receiving an overall evaluation score of “at expectations” or higher.

① Fiscal Transparency

Tennessee is one of a handful of states that continued to increase education funding throughout the recent economic downturn and continues to increase spending each year.⁵² 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 providing 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.

* 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 state's fiscal transparency pilot has not yet been unveiled the rubric score remains the same as in previous years.

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 financial audit to the Commissioner.

A state law passed in 2016, as well as a requirement of ESSA, 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. The Commissioner should use this authority to further strengthen our state's fiscal transparency system, reporting on school-level expenditures, and allowing the public to easily compare per-pupil funding levels between schools.

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

Policy in Action

Tennessee's push for a fiscal transparency predated passage of ESSA, as Tennessee passed a state law in 2016 that required the Commissioner to develop a system for reporting per-pupil funding at the school level. Under ESSA, the U.S. Secretary of Education has allowed states an additional year to implement the fiscal transparency provision. Tennessee has opted to use this additional year to pilot a fiscal transparency system for several school districts during the 2017–18 school year before moving toward full implementation in 2018–19.

School Systems Policies

0

Student Placement/Classroom Assignment

With an ineffective teacher, a student loses an average of 3.5 months of learning per year.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ Student placement ensures 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 of 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 reports data on the distribution of effective teachers and the number of student 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 for consecutive years due to staffing constraints.

* This reporting would be reported by school district and school and should include disaggregation by student subgroups.

** 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.

Where We Are

In Tennessee, individual teacher effectiveness data is not public record and cannot be included on a 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 may request a school transfer, subject to decision by the local board and judicial review.

Equitable access to highly effective teachers should be reported at the district and school level and disaggregated by student subgroup populations. 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 years.

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

4

Forced Placement/Mutual Consent

Teachers should be given their 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 fitted, there is a negative impact on school culture.⁵⁵ In SCS, mutual consent hires were more likely to rank in the highest teacher effectiveness category and less likely to rank in the lowest category.⁵⁶ Principals need to feel empowered to hire staff based on merit and fit rather than require placements based on tenured positions on a list or other arbitrary measures. Similarly, teachers should also have a say in their place of employment. Thus, 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)

②

Fair Funding Formula

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.⁵⁷ In Tennessee, the BEP, the funding mechanism 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 funding responsive to individual needs, regardless of the school district or school choice option enrolled; valid and reliable information about student characteristics are used to consider student needs.

Where We Are

Tennessee’s funding mechanism, the BEP, calculates funding allocations for districts based on 45 components. Some of the components calculate staffing requirements based on educational needs. The formula does not adequately include targeted funding that takes into account individual student or school need, but is heavily influenced by the local district’s ability to contribute.

Tennessee should change its funding formula for education 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 the student 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

Legislative Highlight

In 2017, as part of the state budget, the Legislature enacted Public Chapter 460, which included significant investments in education. This year’s budget made important investments, including nearly \$250 million in new funding for K–12 education, including a \$200 million increase for the BEP—one of the largest funding increases in Tennessee history. Additional highlights included: \$100.4 million in teacher compensation, \$22.2 million for educating English learners, \$10 million to support turnaround work for priority schools, \$6 million for charter school facilities grants, and \$4.5 million for the “Read to be Ready” program to promote early literacy.

Policy in Action

Notably, in 2015, Tennessee ranked as the sixth best state when it comes to allocating more resources to high-need districts, and is one of only a handful of states that actually allocates more to these districts than to low-need districts. Tennessee allocates 27 percent more in state funding to these high-need districts.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ Additionally, Shelby County Schools decided to pilot student-based budgeting beginning in the 2017-18 school year.⁶⁰

0

Class Size Mandates/Spending Flexibility

When considering policies that influence student outcomes, we must determine more than just the presence or absence of any measurable positive effect. We must also consider whether these policies can deliver the most impactful use of education dollars for their associated costs. One costly state policy, aside from teacher salaries and benefits schedules, that restricts the way schools spend scarce funds is class-size mandates. Notwithstanding the demonstrated benefits of smaller classes among certain student populations, class-size mandates must still be considered in the context of alternative uses of tax dollars for education.⁶¹ Effective teachers could be granted opportunities to teach additional students to free up needed resources for other staffing and services. Thus, Tennessee should provide local school leaders with the flexibility to staff their schools according to their unique student needs and remove arbitrary restrictions on how funds can be used.

Policy Rubric

- ① 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 mechanism, 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.

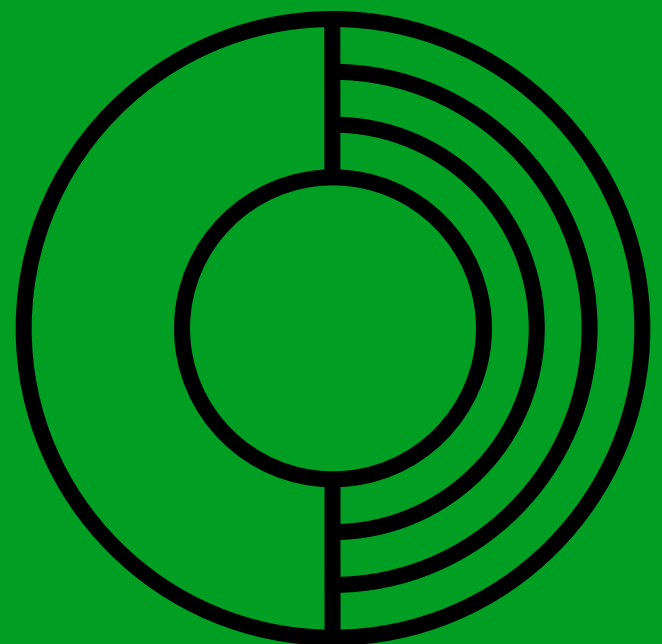
Our state should eliminate class size restrictions above the third grade and permit local districts to determine class size guidance to allow greater flexibility in academic programming and resource allocation.

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

During the summer of 2017, TennesseeCAN surveyed district leaders across our state and found that over 50 percent of district leaders who responded would support removing mandatory class-size averages in order to receive greater flexibility in budgeting and spending.⁶²

Percentage of district leaders who support removing mandatory class-size averages

50%



A Note on Class Size Mandates

We fully recognize there are benefits to smaller class sizes in certain classrooms with highly effective teachers.⁶³ 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, formerly StudentsFirst Tennessee, 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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This report and other resources are available for download at www.tn-can.org

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