

2025 Legislative Highlights



Executive Summary

At TennesseeCAN, we believe every student deserves a K-12 education that prepares them for lifelong success, and we advocate for smart policies and strong leadership to achieve this vision.

The 2025 legislative session was among the most consequential for Tennessee students and families in recent memory, with momentous victories in student-centered policymaking in the first year of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly.

TennesseeCAN played a leading role in shaping and advancing this work. In partnership with lawmakers, education leaders, and community stakeholders, we supported policies that will expand access to high-quality schools and improve outcomes for students across the state.

This year, we championed the **Education Freedom Act**, securing universal private school choice for 20,000 students starting next school year. We advanced **charter school reforms** to strengthen the approval and renewal process for high-quality charter schools and capture new funding for school facilities. We also worked successfully to defend and protect Tennessee's commitment to **assessment and accountability** policies that have proven to improve student learning.

Together, these policy wins reflect our belief that all students deserve access to excellent schools and move us closer to the reality where all students receive a high quality education. By expanding education freedom while ensuring transparency on school performance, state leaders empowered Tennessee families and furthered our focus on academic achievement and improvement.

This document overviews these and other key K-21 education policies passed this year that will guide TennesseeCAN's efforts to support implementation and inform our plans for future policy and advocacy that benefits the students and families of Tennessee.



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We work on behalf of
Tennessee's
~1M+ students
 in K-12, empowering:



Their Families

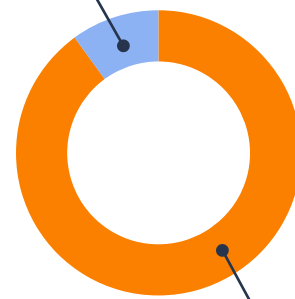


Their Teachers



Their Schools

10% of students are in charter/other schools

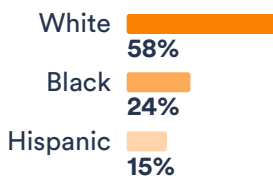


90% of students are in public schools

971,000+



students in 147 public school districts



Other demographics:

29% economically disadvantaged

15% students with disabilities

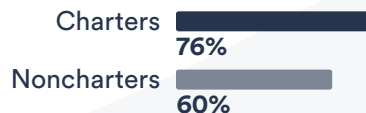
9% English learners

44,000+



students in 115 public charter schools

Charters are outperforming their traditional public school peers.



Other demographics:

44% economically disadvantaged

87% students of color

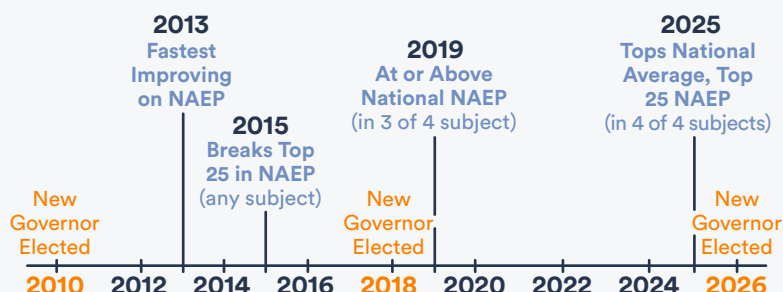
120,000+



students in private or other new school models



~78,000
 educators in Tennessee



41% 3rd graders on track in ELA

34% 8th graders on track in math

27.4% students meeting/exceeding expectations in Algebra I

39.5% high schoolers meeting/exceeding expectations in U.S. History

Legislative and Budget Highlights

This year's legislative session delivered transformational change in education, not only did we expand school choice, but we also strengthened the overall quality and accountability of Tennessee's K–12 system. Lawmakers advanced policies that support families in choosing their children's education, empower charter schools with the tools they need to succeed, and ensure state dollars follow students more transparently and efficiently. These reforms reflect a broader commitment to student-centered policy and the belief that all children—regardless of zip code—deserve access to high-quality learning environments.

At the same time, the legislature addressed key operational challenges facing schools and districts. From expanding licensure pathways for career and technical education teachers to supporting data-driven school turnaround strategies, the bills passed this session recognize the complexity of running effective schools and the need for targeted solutions. Legislation on cell phone use, educator compensation, and student literacy screening underscore the state's growing focus on both academic outcomes and the day-to-day factors that shape the learning experience. Taken together, these measures represent meaningful progress toward a more flexible, accountable, and student-focused education system in Tennessee.

In addition to significant policy gains, the FY25 budget reflects continued investment in education. Lawmakers approved \$244 million in new recurring funds for the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) formula, including allocations to raise teacher salaries—a clear recognition of the essential role educators play in student success. This sustained funding growth helps ensure that public schools are better equipped to meet student needs while attracting and retaining high-quality teachers.

The budget also includes targeted investments to support literacy, expand career and technical education opportunities, and improve school safety. These funding priorities align with many of the session's key policy initiatives, reinforcing the legislature's commitment to both innovation and instructional quality. Together, these budgetary and legislative actions represent the value and importance our elected officials place on students receiving a quality education.

Legislative Wins

The **Education Freedom Act (SB6001/HB6004)** marks a historic expansion of school choice in Tennessee. This legislation establishes a universal education savings account (ESA) program, offering scholarships to 20,000 students beginning in the next academic year. With parents in the driver's seat and in control of their child's education, families may use these funds for a range of educational expenses, including private school tuition, tutoring, curriculum, and other approved services.

SB1310/HB1322 is the comprehensive charter policy package that streamlines the approval and renewal process for public charter schools. The bill strengthens the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission's oversight authority, simplifies application requirements, and ensures consistency in authorizing practices. These reforms also reduce red tape and increase predictability for proven charter operators, helping them serve more students in need of high-quality options.

SB1379/HB1175 makes changes to the existing public charter school facility laws. Public charter schools have a right of first refusal to vacant and underutilized property of an LEA. This update provides a right of second refusal to child care agencies, unless there are no public charter schools, then the child care agency has a right of first refusal.

SB1019/HB1163 amends the state's funding formula implementation to ensure that funds generated for public charter schools under the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act are delivered directly to the charter school rather than being routed through the LEA. This change enhances financial transparency, ensures that funding reaches the students it is intended to support, and reinforces the autonomy and accountability of public charter schools.

SB1273/HB1307 expands Tennessee's school turnaround and intervention strategy for low-performing schools. The program emphasizes strategic partnerships, data-informed interventions, and evidence-based practices tailored to the needs of specific communities. By broadening the program's reach, this bill equips the state to act decisively in schools where students have historically lacked access to a quality education, while incorporating lessons learned from prior turnaround efforts.

SB688/HB708 expands the state board's power to subpoena the appearance of persons or the production of items the chair of the state board, or the chair's designee, considers material or relevant to an accountability hearing for a local education agency operating a public school, or a public charter school, receiving a "D" or "F" letter grade. This ensures public transparency and community accountability around school performance.

SB729/HB759 allows an LEA to adopt and implement a merit-based pay structure for educators to award additional compensation to high-performing educators and to incentivize educators to meet and exceed expectations. This expands flexibility for districts to leverage resources to recruit and retain top teaching talent.

SB897/HB932 requires each local board of education and public charter school governing body to adopt and implement a wireless communication device policy for students and to publish the policy on its website. This supports teachers and learning in the classroom, while empowering districts with local control to create a policy that meet the needs of their students and families.

SB1018/HB997 prohibits a county LEA or public charter school authorized to operate in a county LEA from charging registration fees, enrollment fees, or tuition for a student who resides in the county and who transfers to a public charter school authorized to operate in the county LEA from another LEA located in the same county. This breaks barriers for access and choice for families who want to enroll in a charter school.

SB1311/HB1323 creates a limited occupational teaching license for individuals who have not completed a traditional educator preparation program but are otherwise qualified to teach specific CTE courses. It allows teachers holding an endorsement exemption to teach courses that include an end-of-year assessment. Additionally, the legislation permits teachers with a postsecondary teaching license to add endorsements to their K–12 license for subjects they previously taught at the postsecondary level.

SB1423/HB1377 requires each local board of education and public charter school governing body to develop and implement a policy to provide, with each K-8 student's report card, the student's score on the universal reading screener if administered to the student in the current school year, and the results of the dyslexia screener most recently administered to the student, if applicable.

SB415/HB675 originally proposed sweeping roll-backs on how we measure student learning and teacher performance, but TennesseeCAN and its advocacy partners worked to amend the proposal and successfully defend the state's accountability framework to ensure high expectations remain for students, schools, and teachers. The final version created a study committee that is tasked with studying teacher and principal evaluations, student assessments, instructional time requirements, high school academic standards, and educator licensure and compensation. The committee must report its findings and any legislative recommendations to the General Assembly by December 31, 2025.

Budget Wins

- **\$244 million** increase in TISA dollars for the 25-26 school year, bringing the total TISA investment in K-12 students, schools and teachers to more than \$6.9 billion next year
- **\$198.4 million** for teacher bonuses, recognizing Tennessee educators' leadership in student achievement and growth
- **\$145.9 million** for Education Freedom Scholarships to empower parents with more choices in choosing the school that works best for their children
- **\$62.7 million** for K-12 infrastructure and facilities improvements
- **\$27.3 million** for summer learning programs to help students catch up and accelerate their learning between school years
- **\$25 million** further investment in the Fast Growth Fund, to support fast-growing districts
- **\$20 million** for charter school facilities, the largest ever single-year allocation to ensure proper facilities for students in these schools
- **\$20 million** for the school safety grant fund and \$5 million for School Resource Officers (SROs)
- **\$5 million** to create a loan fund to help charter schools afford to borrow to build or buy facilities, allowing more resources to flow to the classroom

Looking Ahead

Tennessee has made incredible progress over the past 20 years to improve student opportunities and outcomes, and unlike most other states, have supported our children to recover from pandemic learning loss and accelerate their learning.

While policies passed in Tennessee’s 2025 legislative session are driving more improvement for students and families by expanding opportunity, strengthening school quality, and demanding results, our data also makes clear that too many of our children are still lagging behind. In fact, in many cases, the majority of our children are NOT on track academically.

As we look ahead, TennesseeCAN remains committed to ensuring that policy victories translate into real learning impact across the state and that Tennessee’s investments in education are making a difference.

Our elected officials have demonstrated time and again their willingness to invest in schools and teachers, and we can continue to move policies forward that create high-quality educational opportunities for every student.

By advancing smart, student-focused spending and holding school systems accountable for outcomes in 2026 and beyond, we can make sure every child—regardless of their circumstances, background or zip code—has access to a great education and the tools they need to thrive.