

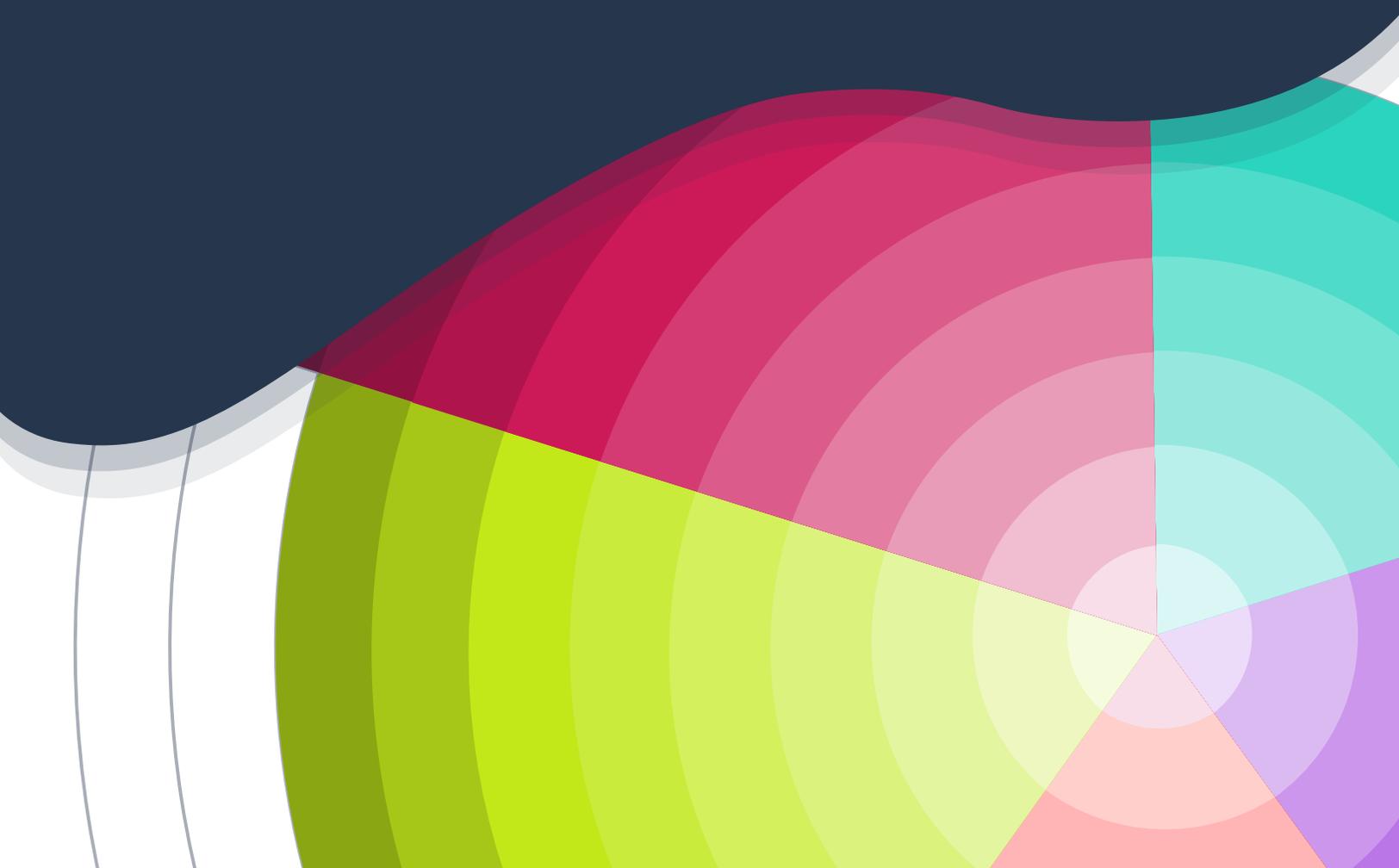


2nd Edition

The State of Educational Opportunity in Tennessee

A Survey of Tennessee Parents

February 2026



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Dear Friends,

Tennessee has a long history of listening to parents and making improvements to our education system rooted in their needs and expectations. Over the past decade, that commitment has led to academic growth and parent satisfaction in Tennessee, even as other states struggled to recover from school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the state set to open a new chapter, with a new gubernatorial administration, this is a moment where listening to families is especially critical.

Parent perspective is the heart of our work at TennesseeCAN, and it is what drives the second edition of the Survey of Educational Opportunity in Tennessee. Developed in partnership with 50CAN and Edge Research, this updated survey captures how families are experiencing the education system now, while also allowing us to see where views have shifted since the last edition, published in November 2024. As conditions for students and schools continue to evolve, so too must our understanding of whether families feel supported, informed and empowered. By returning to this survey, we are able to track patterns over time, compare Tennessee to other states, and identify gaps that demand attention alongside areas of progress.

In Tennessee, 516 parents and guardians of school-aged children participated in the survey between September 30 and December 1, 2025, contributing to a national research effort that includes responses from more than 23,000 families nationwide, along with representative samples in each state and the District of Columbia that allows for state-by-state comparisons.

Several themes stand out from Tennessee's results:



Many Tennessee parents are increasingly satisfied with their schools but not all. Tennessee ranks in the top 25% of states of parents reporting they are very satisfied with their schools and from 2024 to 2025, satisfaction grew three percent. However, with only 49% of families reporting they are very satisfied, schools and districts have an opportunity to further increase satisfaction for all families across the state.



Transparency is lagging. Few parents say they understand how school budgets are set or regularly review school performance data. Families are being asked to trust a system they cannot easily see. Confidence without transparency is fragile.



Choice exists though access is uneven. More families say they feel they have a choice in where their child attends school, reflecting expanded options across the state. Yet roughly one in three parents still does not feel empowered to choose a school that meets their child's needs. For many families, meaningful choice remains limited by geography, information, or access.

The pages that follow include:

- An overview of the survey's **methodology** and how to interpret the results
- A concise **summary** of Tennessee's performance across all five categories and 15 questions
- Visual **comparisons** showing how Tennessee stacks up nationally and how responses have changed since the previous survey

The full Tennessee report is available at tn-can.org. National results, the survey instrument, and the complete dataset can be found at 50can.org.

Our hope is that this second edition continues to support informed decision-making as Tennessee works to expand educational opportunity for every student.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chelsea Crawford".

Chelsea Crawford
Executive Director
TennesseeCAN

Methodology

Edge Research conducted a nationwide survey of 23,104 U.S. parents and guardians of school-aged children (K-12th grade) in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. **In Tennessee, 516 parents and guardians of K-12 children were surveyed.** Respondents could take the survey in either English or Spanish, based on their preference. The survey was in the field from September 30, 2025, to December 1, 2025.

DATA COLLECTION

The survey used a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. First, survey respondents were recruited using online, non-probability samples obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. These surveys were mobile-optimized (meaning participants can take the survey on a PC or mobile device, which helps reach those who do not have internet access but do have a mobile data plan). In states where Edge Research was not able to collect enough surveys using this method, they obtained supplementary text-to-web interviews.

SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

As respondents entered the survey, they submitted demographic information, and quotas were set to ensure the sample is proportionately distributed in accordance with the most recent U.S. Census and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data on U.S. parents in each state. Quotas functioned by predetermining the number of desired respondents by gender identity, race, ethnicity, child’s grade, and grade level in each state. Once the desired number was reached with each quota group, it closed, and additional respondents were turned away. After the survey came out of the field, Edge Research reviewed the data and applied additional weights by income, marital status, parent gender, race/ethnicity, school type, and area (e.g., urban, suburban, small town, rural) within states.

The following tables provide the demographics of survey respondents in Tennessee after weighting.

RACE/ETHNICITY							
Hispanic/Latino of Any Race	White Alone	Black/African American Alone	American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	Asian Alone	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races
6%	75%	14%	0.1%	2%	0.2%	0.3%	2%

INCOME DISTRIBUTION		
Low Income	Middle Income	High Income
45%	46%	9%

SCHOOL LEVEL		
K-5th	6th-8th	9th-12th
44%	23%	33%

¹ <https://www.census.gov/>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/tableviewer/acsProfile/2021>

GRADE OF CHILD

K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
7%	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	9%	8%

SCHOOL TYPE

Local or Traditional Public School	Public Magnet School	Public Charter School	Private Independent School	Parochial/Religious School	Virtual/Online Public School	Homeschool	Microschool	Other Type of School
70%	4%	4%	9%	1%	2%	8%	0.3%	1%

INCOME DEFINITIONS

In the pages that follow, we provide results for low-, middle- and high-income parents. These income buckets were calculated using the Pew Research Center’s study on “The State of the American Middle Class” and their category definitions:

- Middle-income households are defined as those with an income that is two-thirds to double that of the U.S. median household income, after being adjusted for household size.
- Lower-income households have incomes less than two-thirds of the median
- High-income households have incomes that are more than double the median.

Following these definitions, Edge Research adjusted the incomes reported in the survey to reflect a three-person household using the equivalence scales technique. Pulling from the U.S. Census 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplements, they used the three-person household income breaks of \$61,000 to \$183,000 as middle, and values above and below those thresholds as lower and upper income respectively. Edge Research also adjusted each household income using Regional Price Parities (RPPs)—indexes from the Bureau of Economic Analysis—that compare local prices to the national average. These tell whether an area is more or less expensive than the country overall. RPPs are applied differently based on what is known about the household’s location. If the exact metro area is known, the RPP is used for that metro area. If the household is in a non-metro (rural or small town) area, the RPP for non-metro areas in that state is used.

DATA QUALITY CONTROL AND STANDARDS

Edge Research employed several practices to ensure data quality. The survey platform used reCAPTCHA to screen for bots. They also applied a third-party tool called Research Defender to screen out known bad actors and respondents with high survey-taking rates. In addition, data was monitored regularly while in the field. Once all responses were collected, they applied additional data cleaning processes, clearing data for cheating, speeding, inattentiveness, and AI-generated responses.

Edge Research follows the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Code of Professional Ethics and Practices to maintain the highest standards of competence, integrity, accountability, and transparency in public opinion and survey research work.

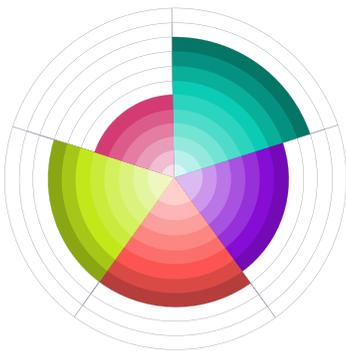
³ <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-asec.2023.html#list-tab-165711867>

⁴ Standards and Ethics - AAPOR

How to Read the Results

One challenge with a survey of this size was how to present the results in an accessible way that doesn't sacrifice the depth of insights. We decided to present the answers in two ways: first with an overview of the results across 15 questions for our state and then with a more in-depth look at how our state compared to all the other states for a few key questions.

OUR STATE SUMMARY



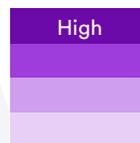
To help make it easier to look at our state's full results at a glance, we present the answers from our parents over two pages. At the top of the first page is the number of parents who participated in the survey.

We also provide a way to view our state's **relative strengths and weaknesses through a circle with five wedges**, one for each of the five categories of the survey: 1) School quality and opportunity (**pink**), 2) Tutoring, summer, and mental health (**green**), 3) Out of school activities (**teal**), 4) Information and engagement (**purple**), and 5) College and career readiness (**orange**).

Each of the five categories is made up of three questions. These are presented below each category with **our state's results compared to other states represented by a tier** shown to the right of each question, from low to high. These tiers are scored from 1 (low) to 4 (high) and the scores across the three questions determine how many rows are colored in for the wedge (up to a possible number of 12 rows).

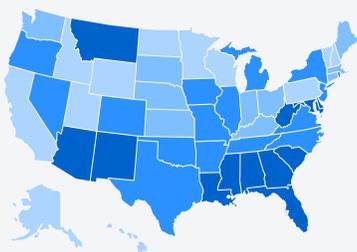
The state results for each question are presented in circles that offer a comparison of the state against the national average and the 2025 results compared to 2024. For yes/no questions, the results are presented as the percentage who said yes, rounded to the nearest whole number. For questions about parents' opinions and attitudes, we utilized a Likert scale and **reported out the percentage choosing the highest option**. For example, on question 1, which measures parents' satisfaction with their child's school, we present the percentage who answered that they were "very satisfied." This helps ground the comparison discussion in a high bar for success.

State Tier



OUR STATE IN CONTEXT

The second section of this report provides comparative results for all 50 states plus D.C., one question at a time.



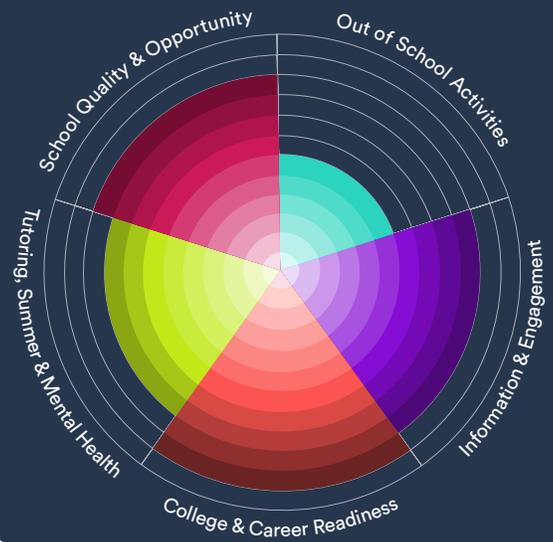
For the maps, a key provides the scale for the map and explains the numbers behind each of the four shades of blue. The darkest shade of blue is always the highest numbers and the lightest shade of blue is always the lowest numbers. Our state is outlined in red.

For the list, states are ordered from highest performing states at the top to lowest performing states at the bottom. Our state is identified with a red box to make it easier to spot.

TENNESSEE

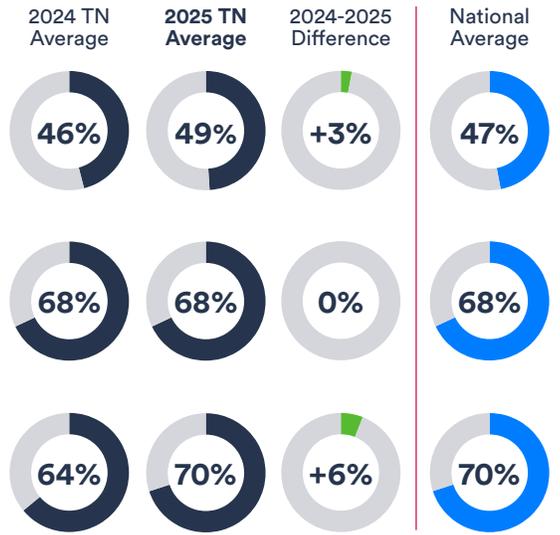


Surveyed September 30 - December 1, 2025
 Sample size (N) = 516 parents and guardians



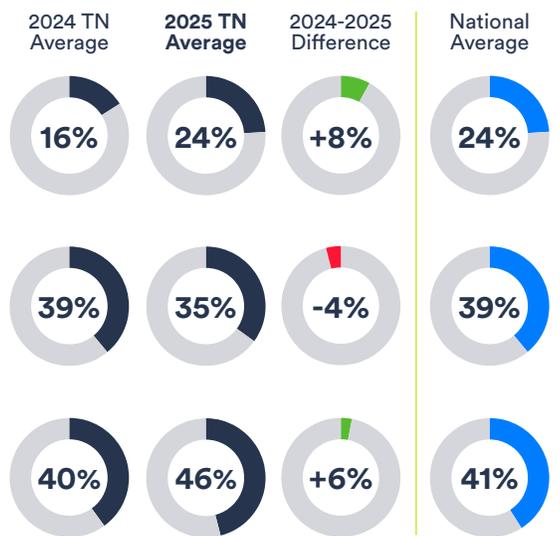
SCHOOL QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

State Tier	Category	Description
High	Very Satisfied with School	Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school
Medium-High	Would Make the Same Choice	Percentage answering that they would send their child to the school they go to today
Medium-High	Feel They Have a Choice	Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends

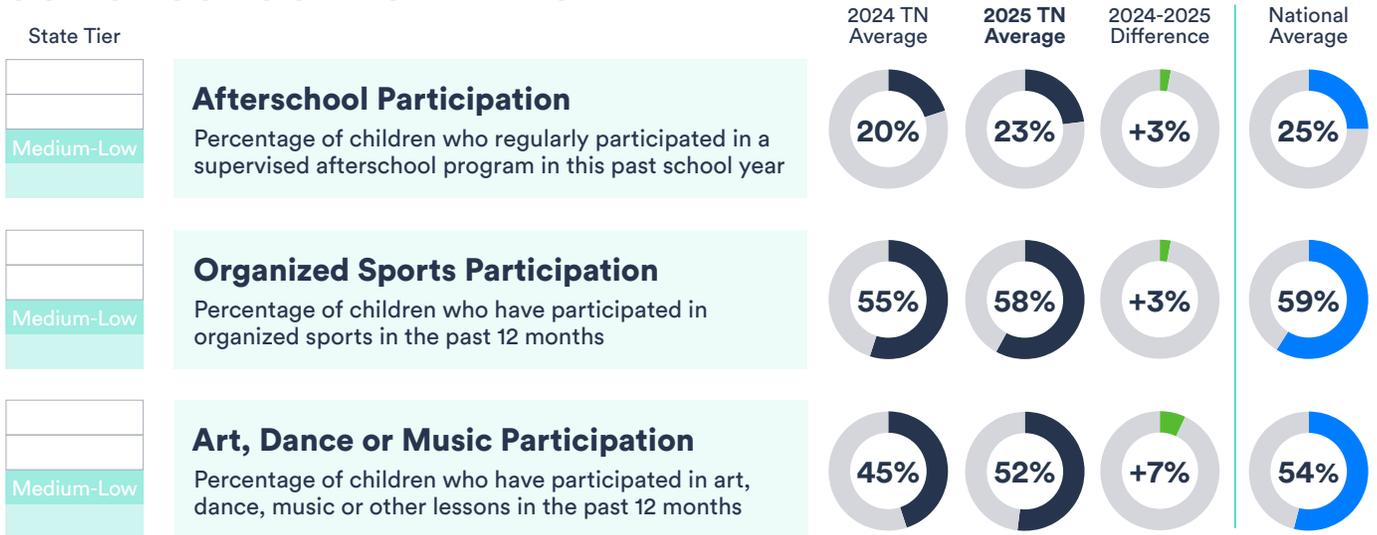


TUTORING, SUMMER AND MENTAL HEALTH

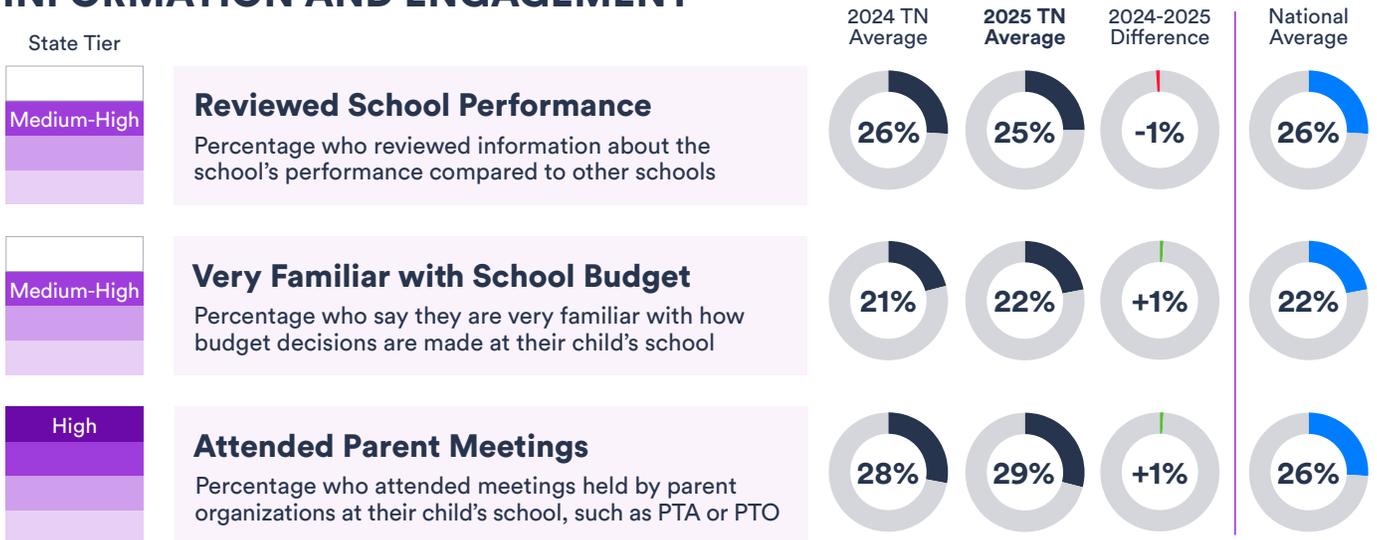
State Tier	Category	Description
Medium-High	Tutoring Participation	Percentage of children who have received academic tutoring in this past school year
Medium-Low	Summer Program Participation	Percentage of children who participated in a supervised summer program
High	Very Satisfied with Mental Health Support	Percentage answering they are very satisfied with how the school supports their child's mental health needs



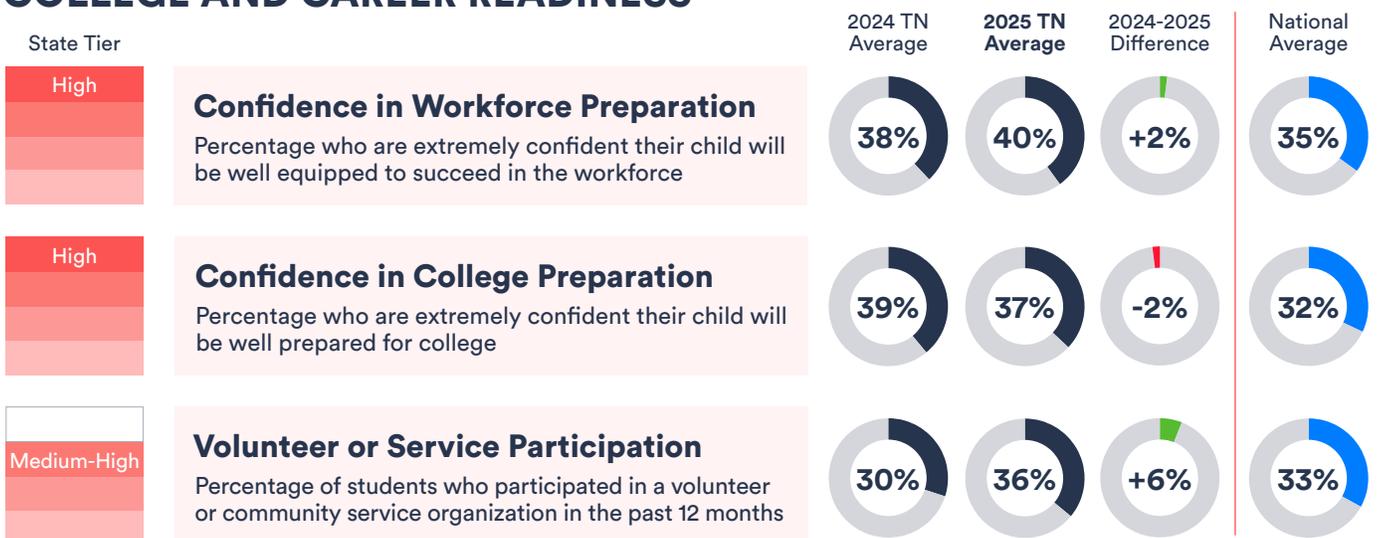
OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT



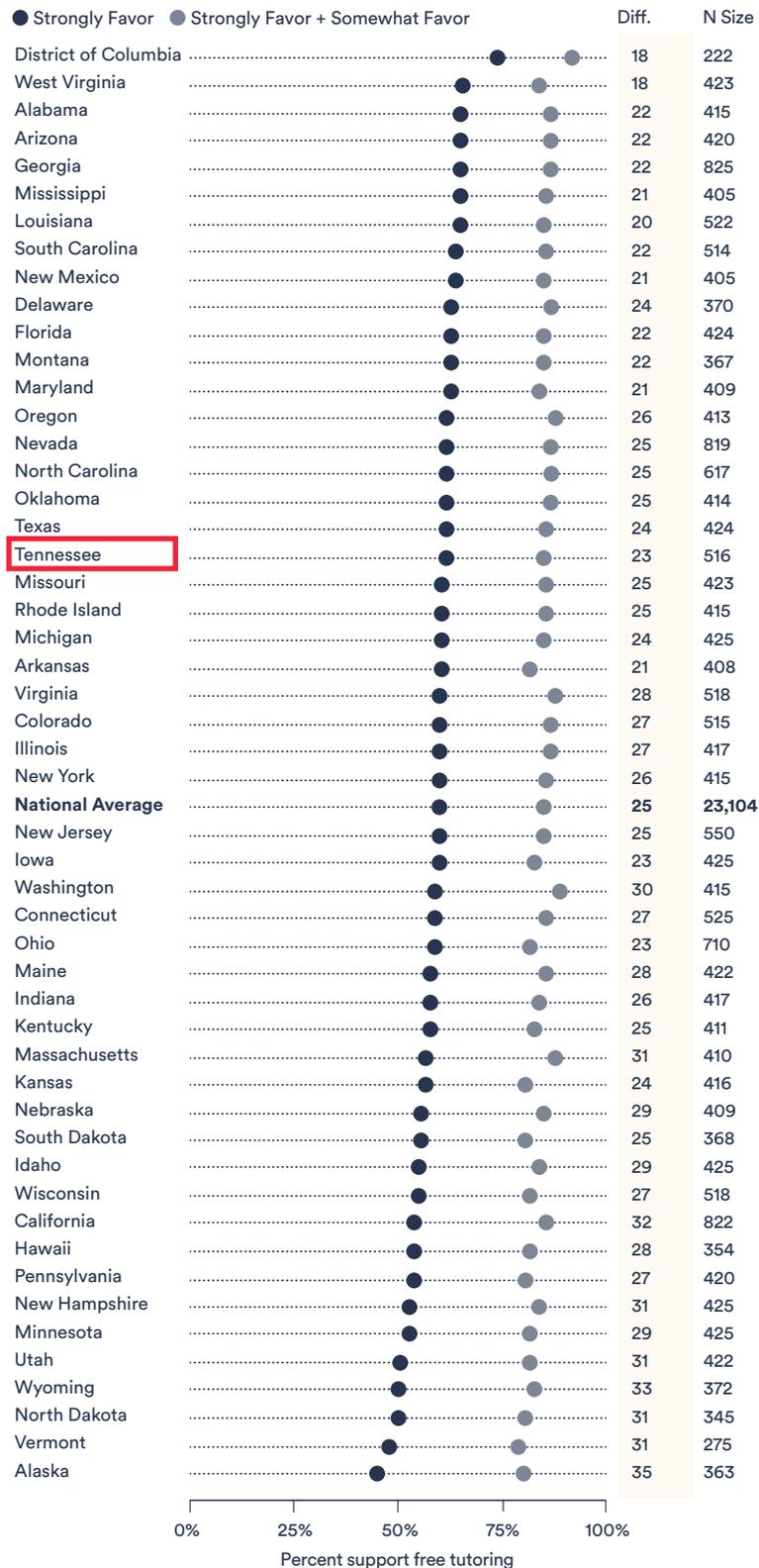
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Tennessee in Context: A 50-State Perspective

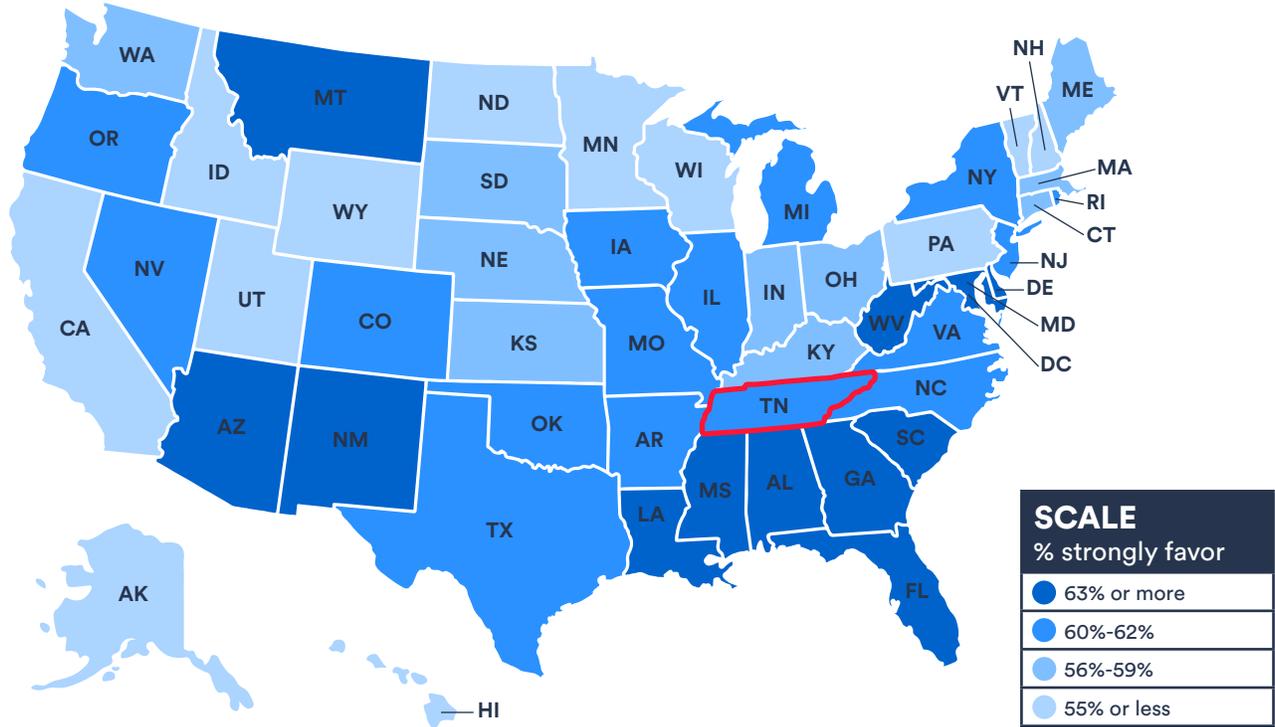
SUPPORT FOR FREE TUTORING BY STATE

Percentage answering they favor free tutoring for K-12 students who fall below grade level



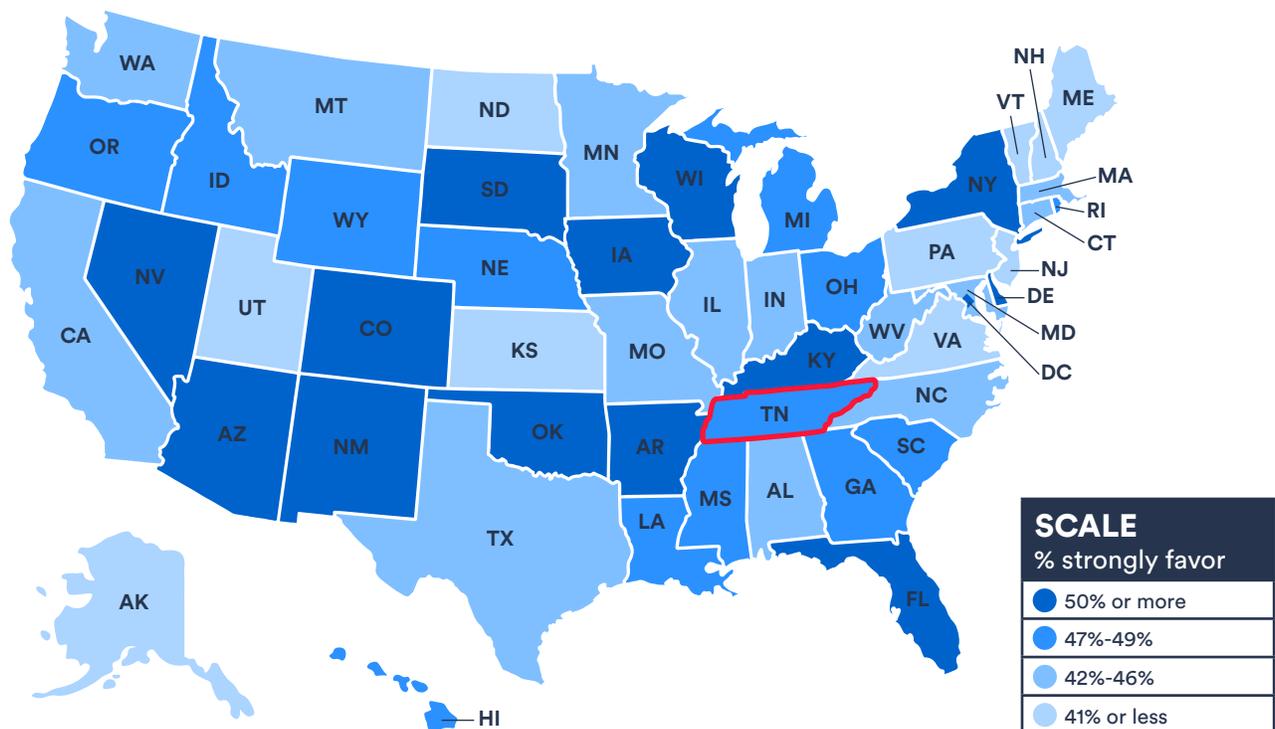
STRONGLY FAVOR FOR FREE TUTORING BY STATE

Percentage answering they strongly favor free tutoring for K-12 students who fall below grade level



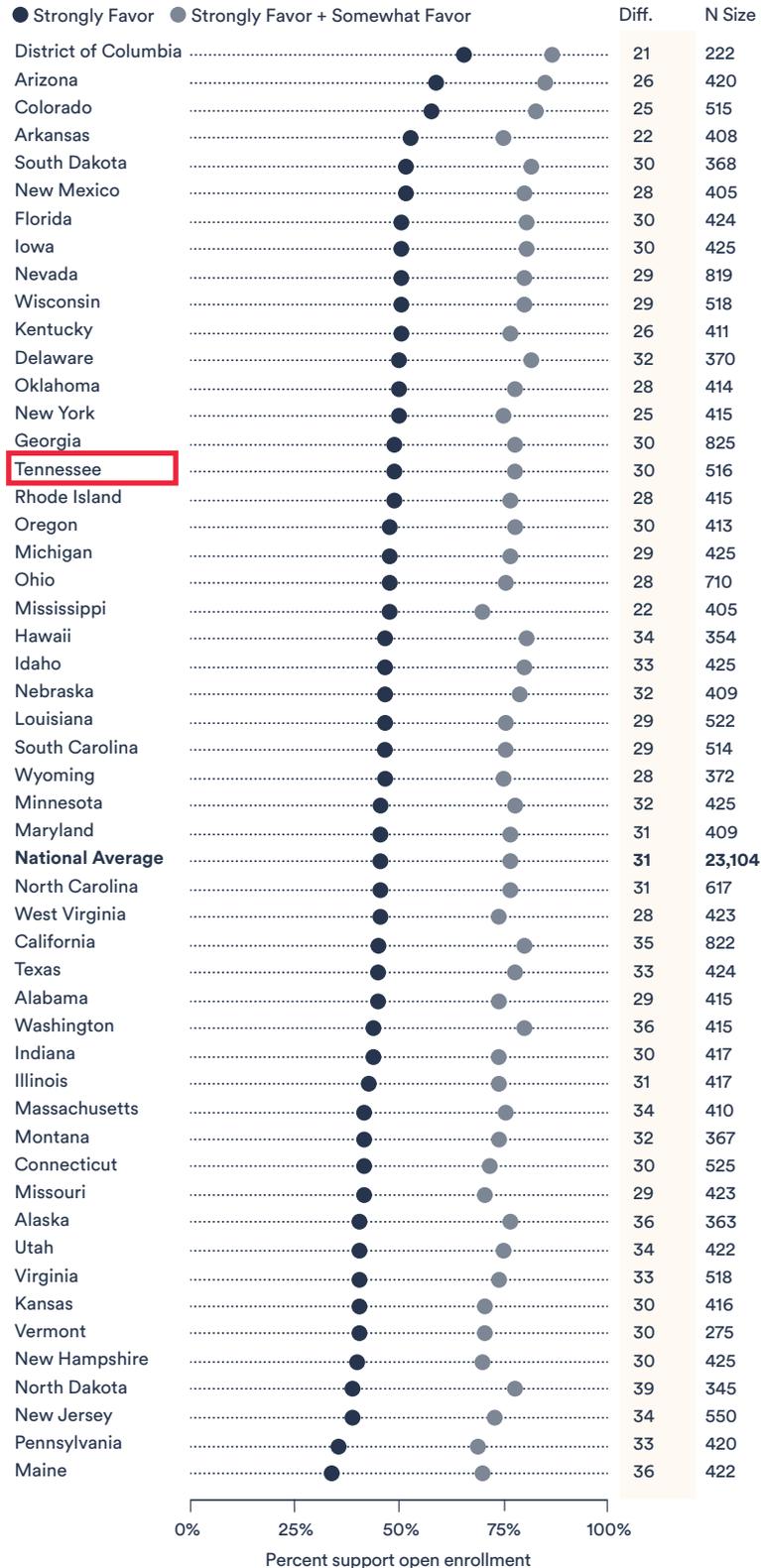
STRONGLY FAVOR OPEN ENROLLMENT BY STATE

Percentage answering they strongly favor open enrollment, where students are allowed to transfer to the public school of their choice



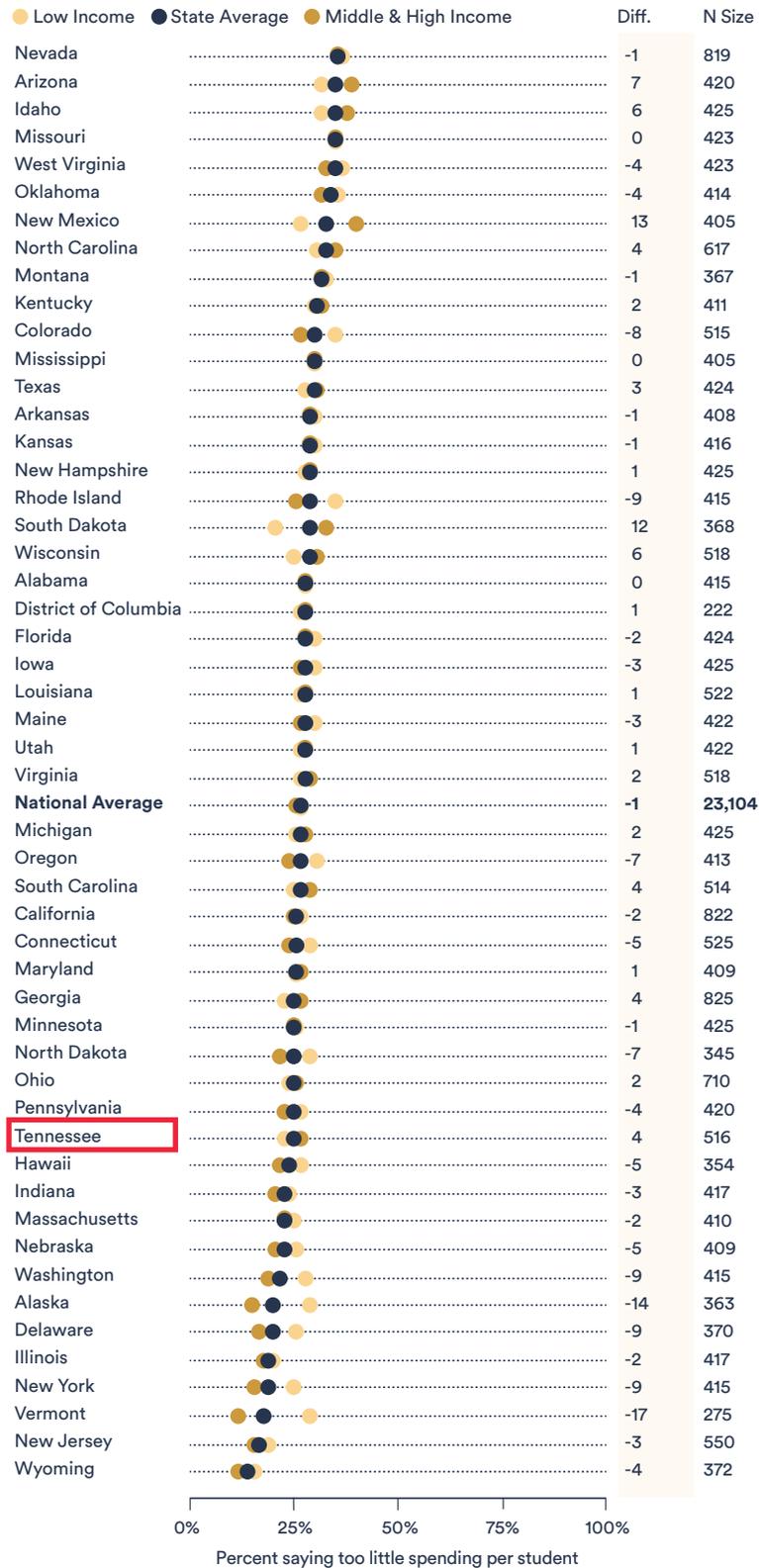
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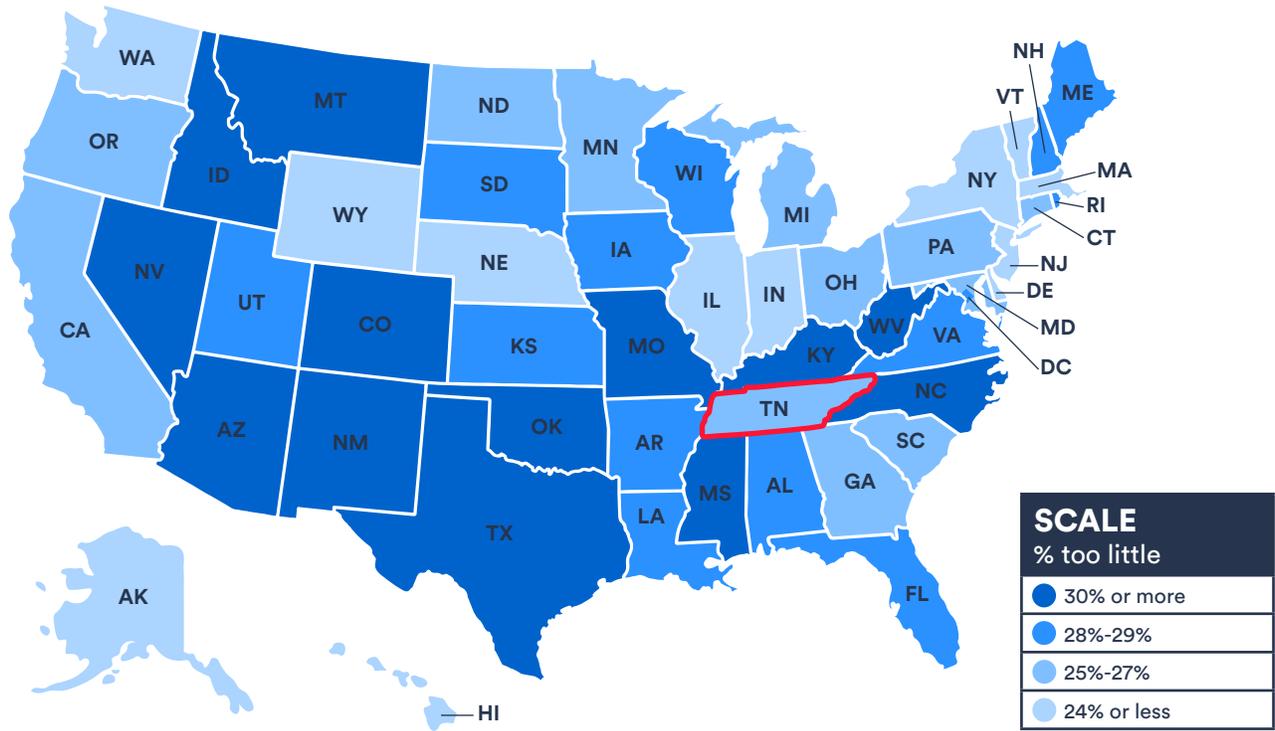
SUPPORT MORE FUNDING BY STATE & INCOME

Percentage who think their state spends too little per public school student after being told how much their state spends per student



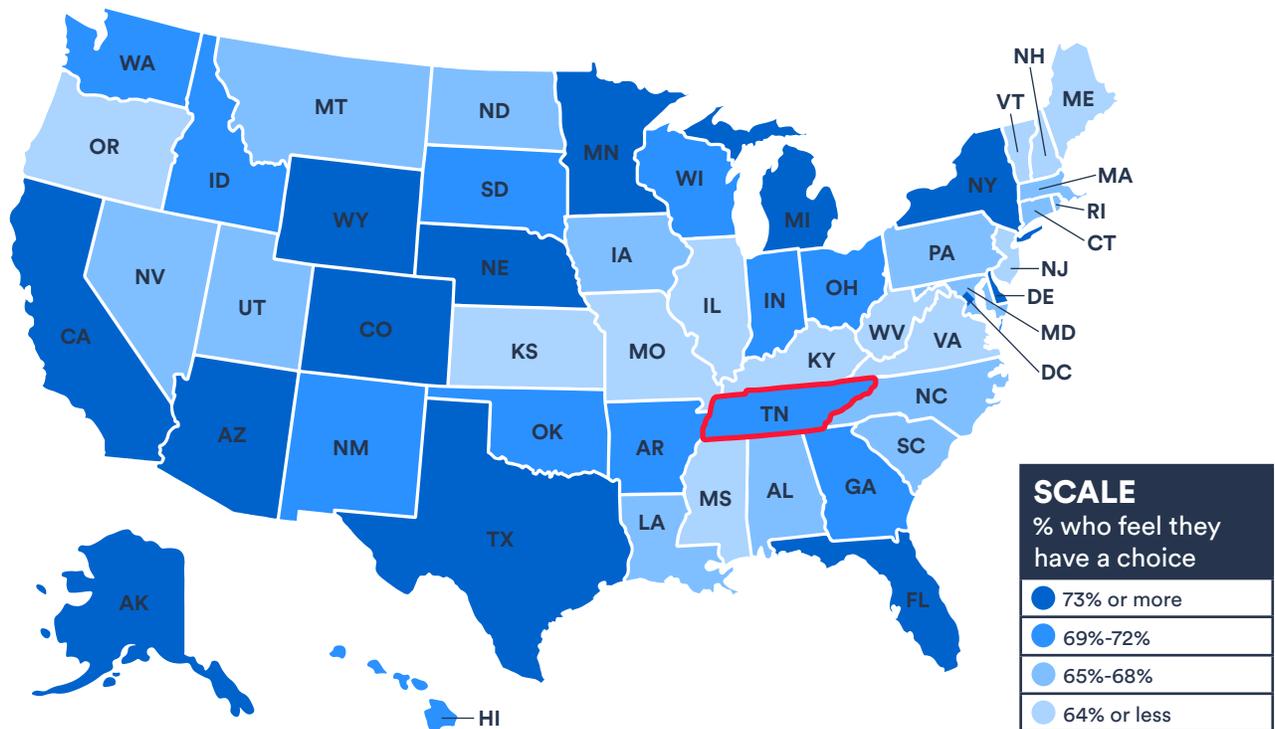
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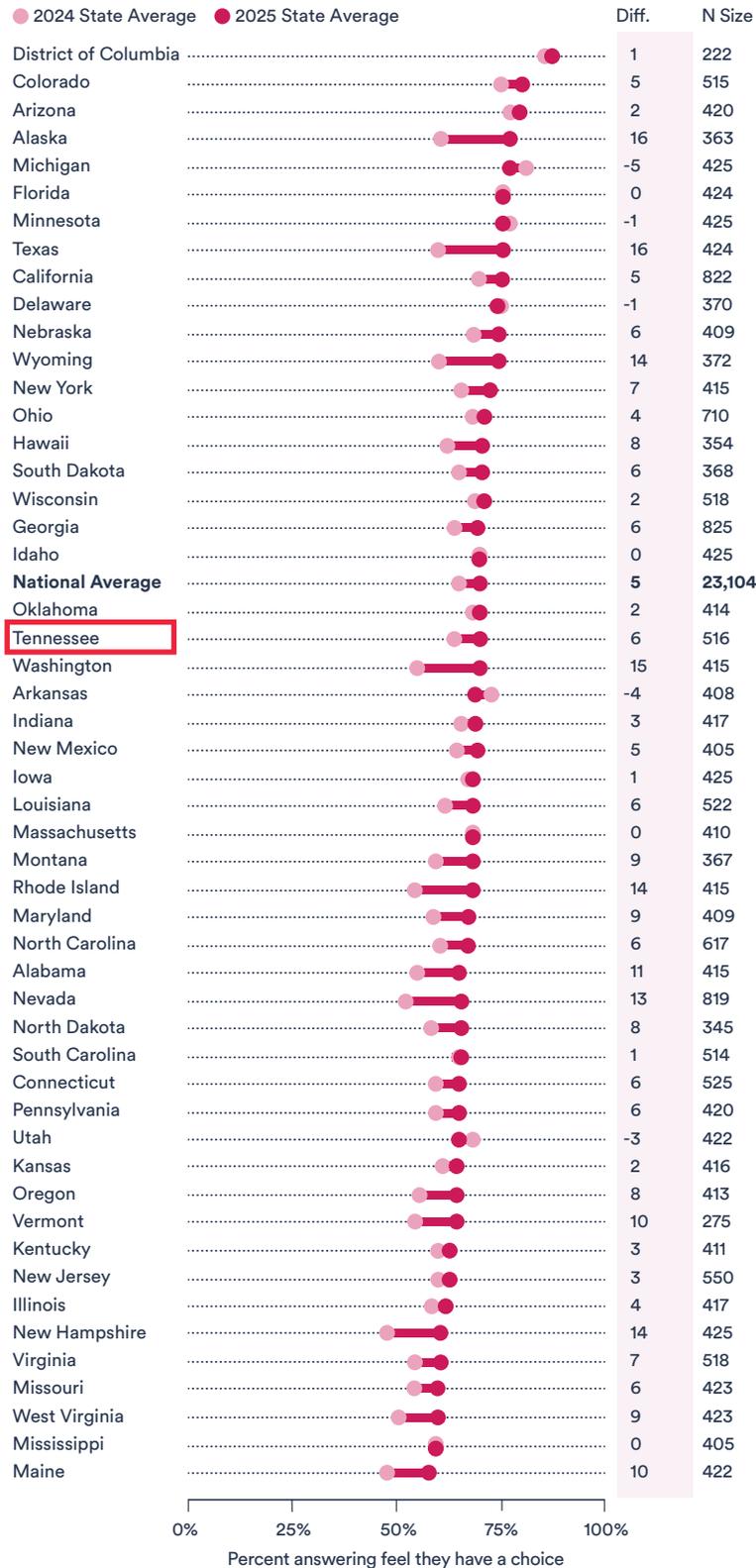
FEEL THEY HAVE A CHOICE BY STATE

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



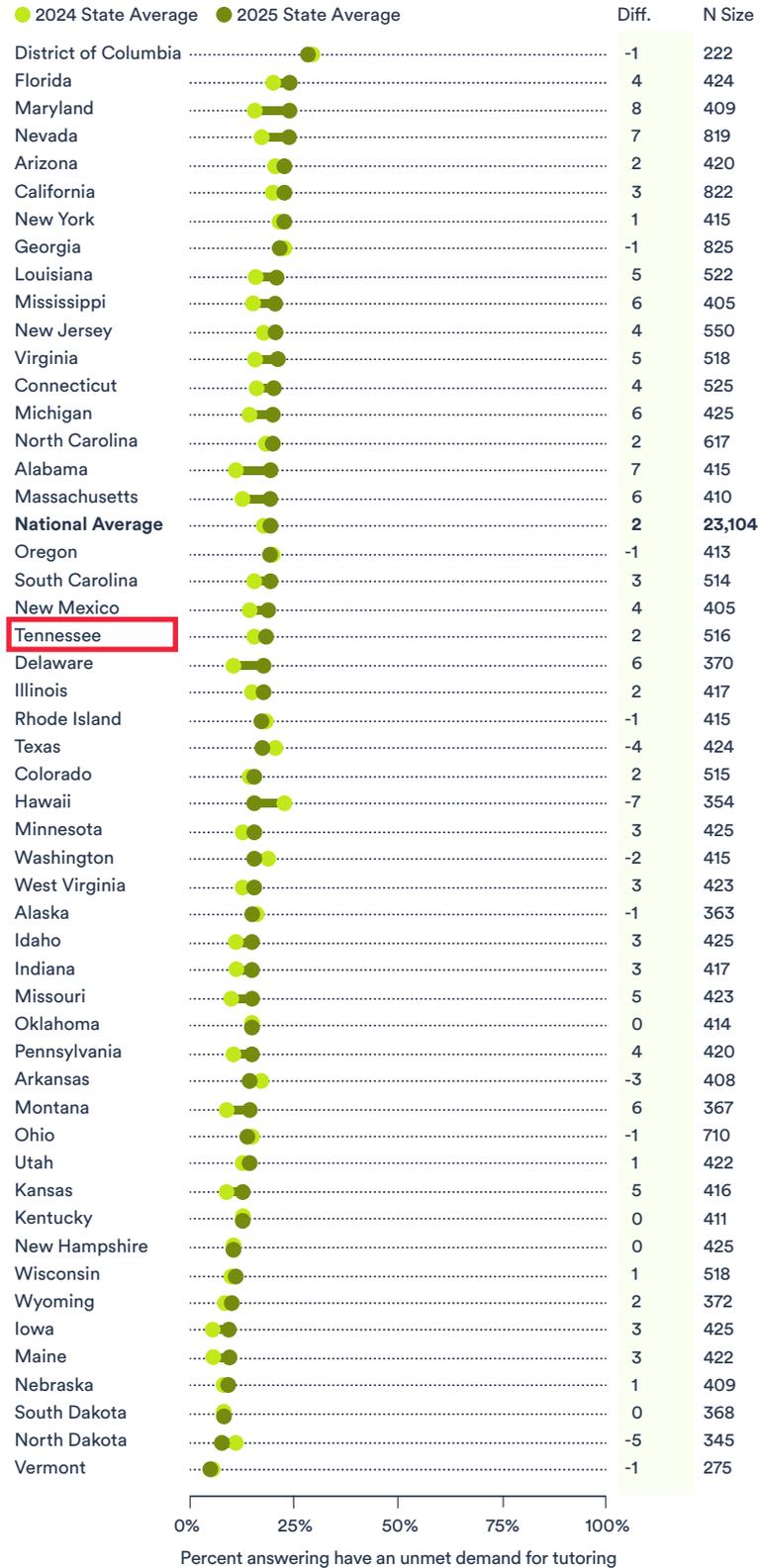
FEEL THEY HAVE A CHOICE BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



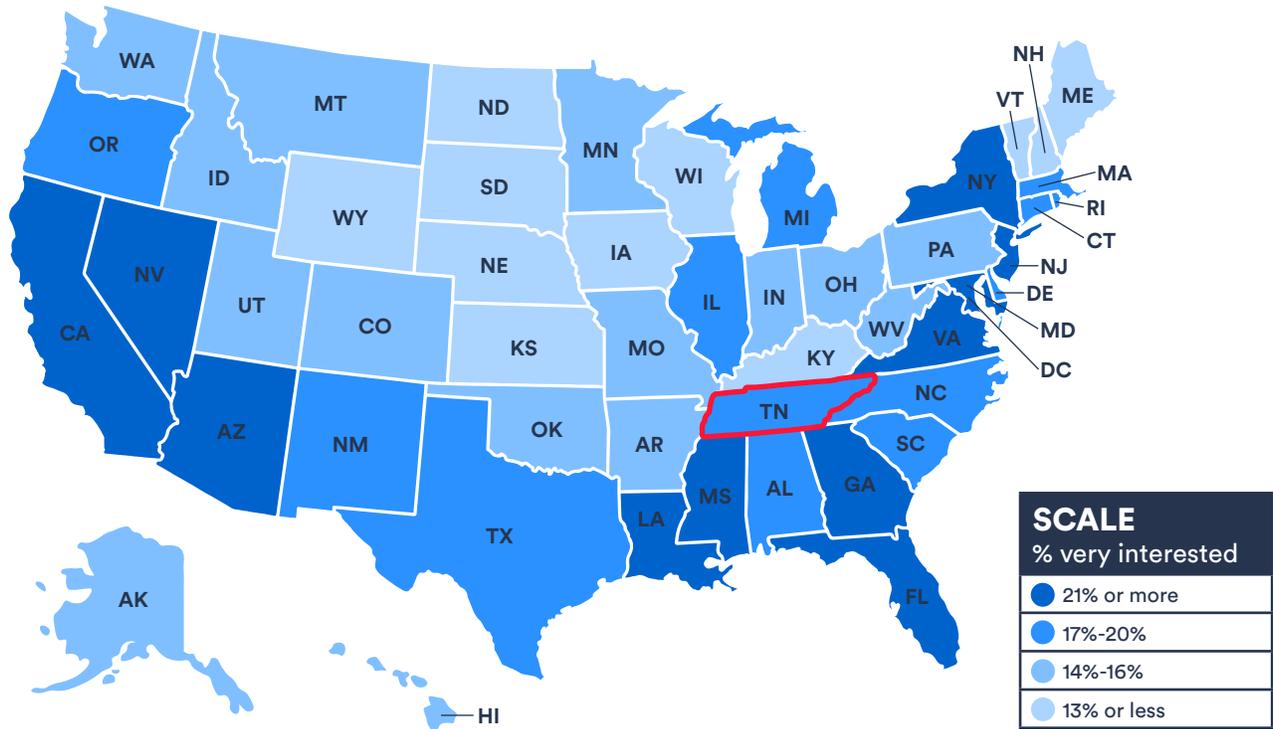
UNMET DEMAND FOR TUTORING BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage of families who don't have a tutor who are very interested in tutoring



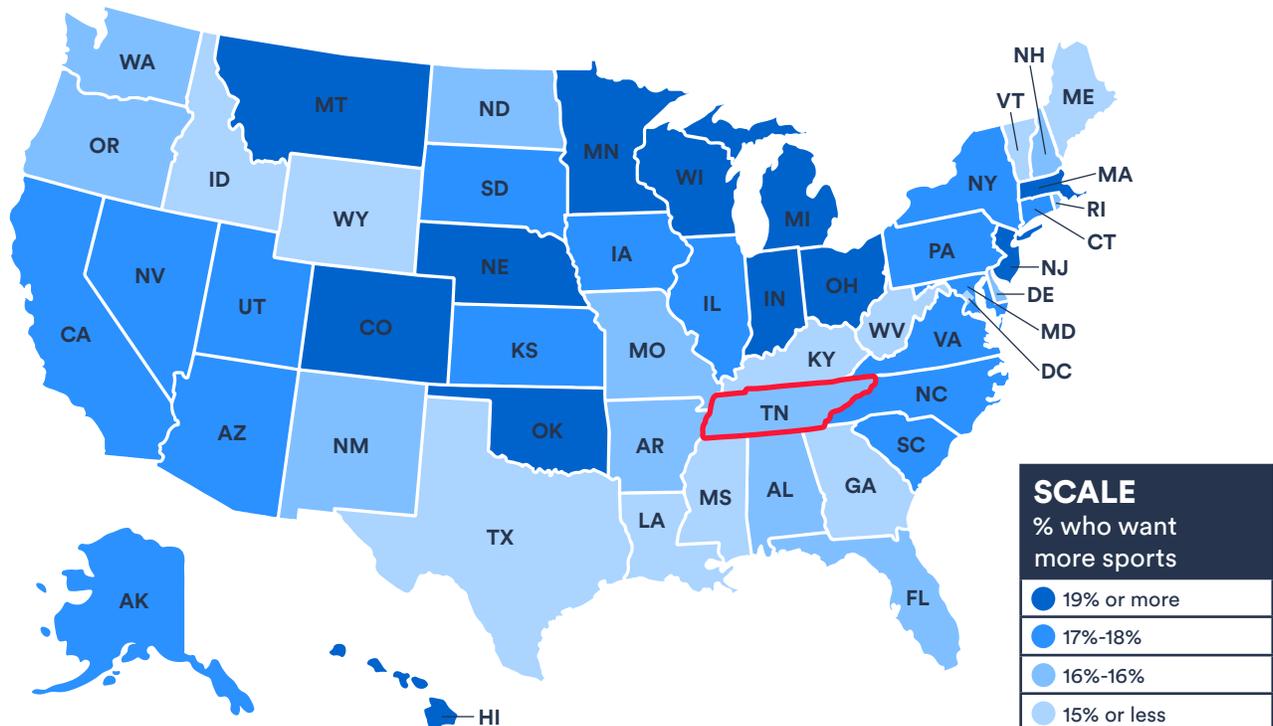
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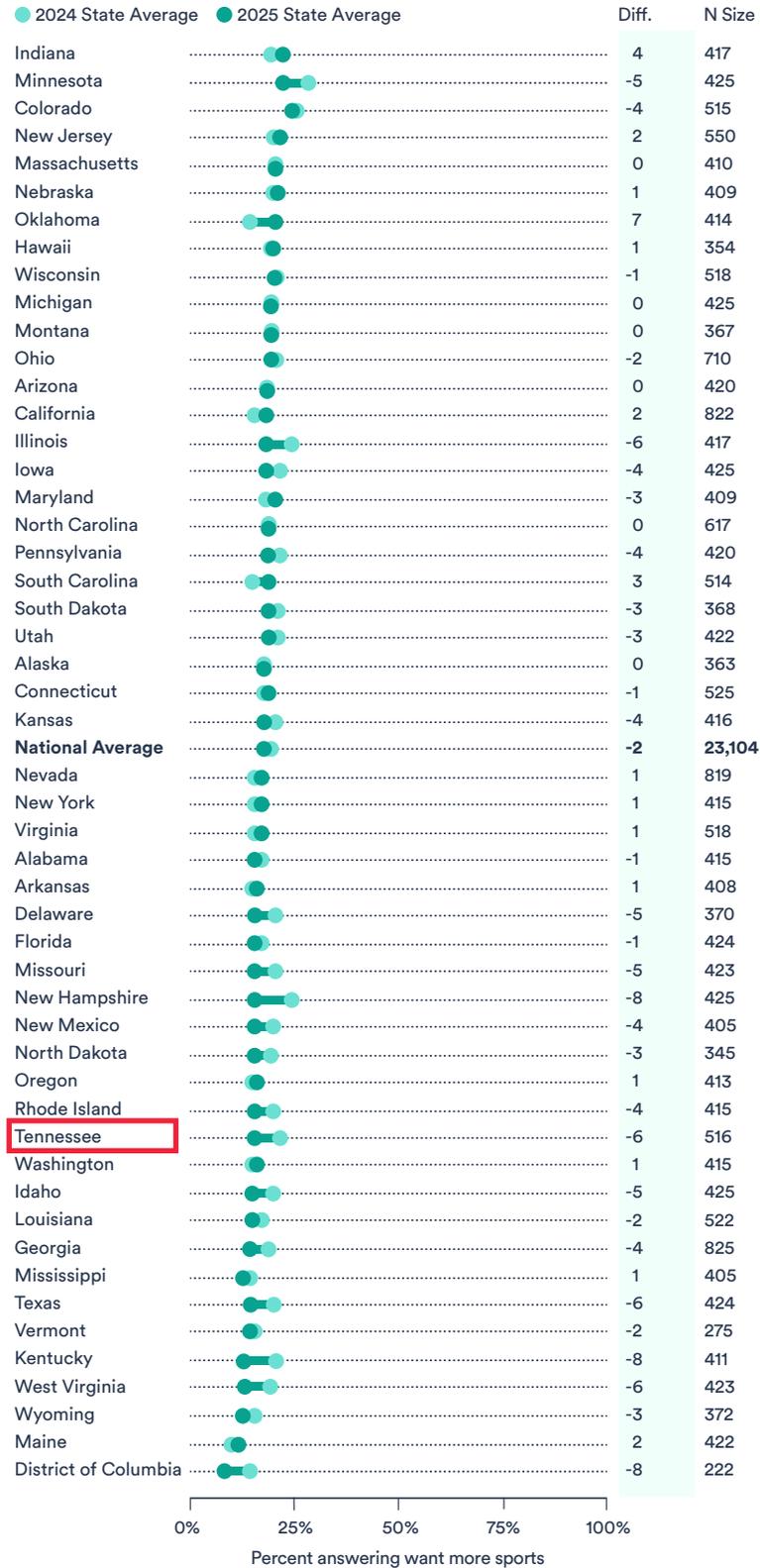
WANT MORE SPORTS BY STATE

Percentage who said if they had more time and/or money, organized sports would be the activity most beneficial to their child



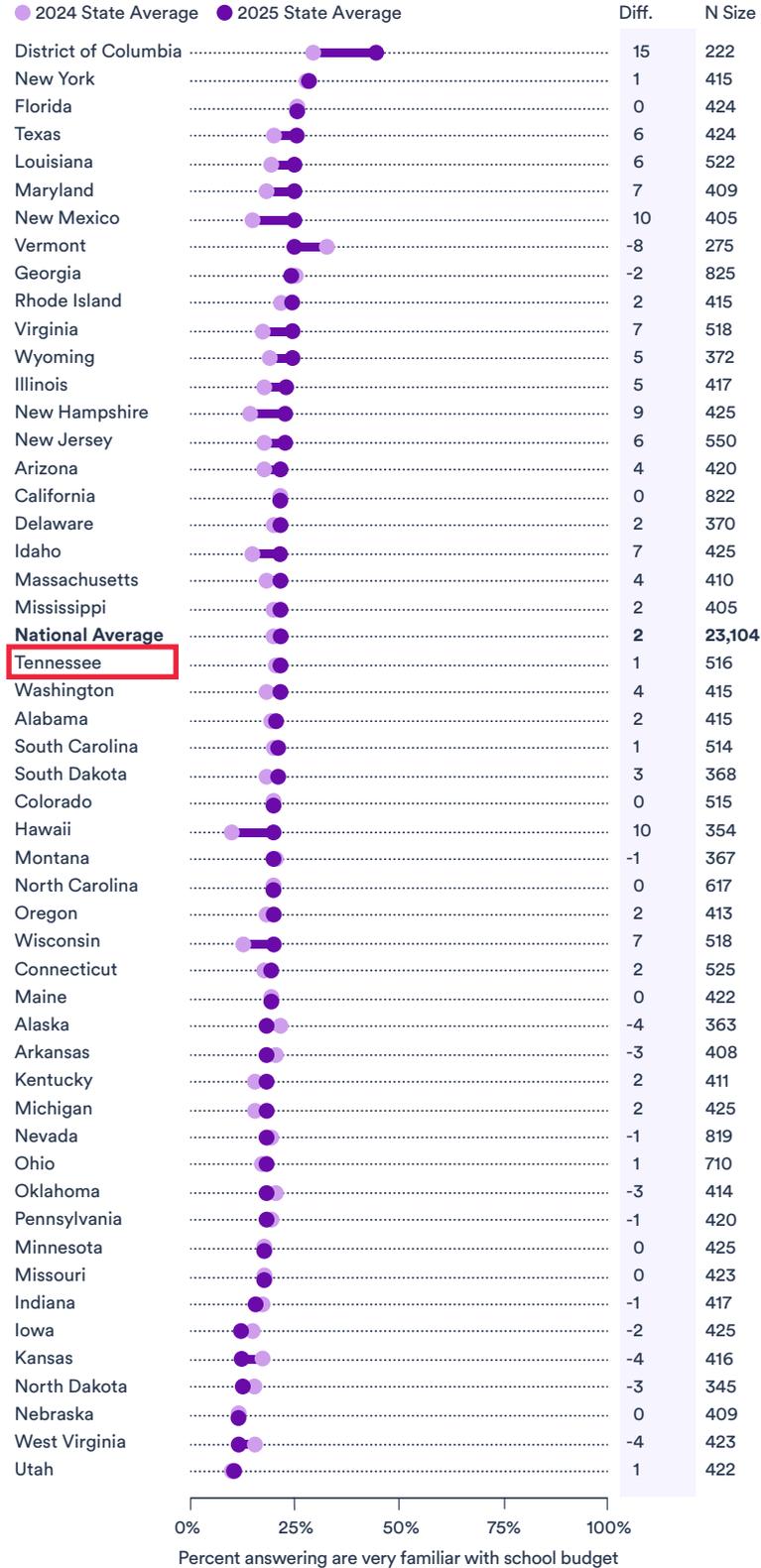
WANT MORE SPORTS BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage who said if they had more time and/or money, organized sports would be the activity most beneficial to their child



VERY FAMILIAR WITH SCHOOL BUDGET BY STATE & YEAR

Percentage who say they are very familiar with how budget decisions are made at their child's school



ABOUT TENNESSEECAN

TennesseeCAN advocates for the success of every Tennessee student by supporting access to great schools and great teachers. We work with local stakeholders– from parents and community members to policymakers– to identify and advance common-sense policies that put the needs of students first. Core to our work is our belief that students and their families deserve equitable access to high-quality educational options, opportunities and resources.

ABOUT 50CAN

50CAN is an education advocacy organization focused on building the dynamic, student-centered education system of the future so that all kids, regardless of address, receive a high quality education. At the center of this work is our support for local education advocates who together have secured more than 275 transformative policy wins since our founding in 2011. This advocacy work is complemented by fellowships to spark and amplify the voices of changemakers, support for educational entrepreneurs as they build proof points of a better tomorrow, and efforts to help elected leaders better serve the public through a deeper understanding of education policy.

ABOUT EDGE RESEARCH

Edge Research tells data-driven stories that make our clients' programs, products, and brands successful. One of Edge's key verticals is education, which ranges from early childhood development, to K-12 and postsecondary education, to lifelong learning. We work for dozens of foundations, advocacy organizations, curriculum providers, associations, districts, schools and universities. Edge is constantly in the field talking to parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other education decision makers – getting the pulse on the issues that matter most.

