

# TennesseeCAN 2020 Legislative Session Summary



TennesseeCAN empowers parents, community members, and policymakers to advocate for improved K-12 education policies that put Tennessee children first. We believe students succeed when they are taught by well-supported, effective educators and that all students deserve equitable access to a high-quality education.

The 2020 legislative session was interrupted and impacted greatly by the COVID-19 pandemic. TennesseeCAN’s legislative agenda was also interrupted, including the Student Placement bill, which would have required a study to be conducted regarding the placement of students in effective classrooms. Additionally, Governor Lee’s literacy bill, which would have created new literacy standards for students in K-3rd grade, was removed from the budget due to the legislature focusing on passing essential and COVID-related legislation.

Despite these setbacks, our work this session has helped ensure that Tennessee continues to champion education policies that focus on excellence, equity, choice, and transparency while seeking to improve academic outcomes for all Tennessee children.

## Top Highlights:

- [HB2300/SB2512](#) *Taken Off Notice*  
*School Accountability*—TennesseeCAN opposed passage of this legislation, as it would have removed the A-F grade accountability measure for schools. The A-F grading scale for schools evaluates schools based on student achievement and student assessment results, providing more information regarding school quality. This legislation would have diminished accountability standards for our schools.
- [HB2407/SB1637](#) *Passed*  
*Student Accommodations*—This legislation allows students who receive testing accommodations through an IEP or section 504 plan to also receive those accommodations on state testing measures. This is good legislation that will provide students with disabilities more equitable access to success.
- [HB1550/SB1787](#) *Failed*  
*School Vouchers*—TennesseeCAN strongly opposed this legislation, which would have deleted the Tennessee Education Savings Account Pilot Program. Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) provide parents the opportunity to customize their child’s education through direct access to education funding.



Win



Win



Win

- [HB0038/SB0496](#) *Taken Off Notice*  
*Assessments*—This legislation would have deleted state-mandated testing for Kindergarten through 2nd grade. Additionally, it would have changed the teacher evaluation criteria to 60% classroom observation and 40% student achievement, based on data chosen at the local level. This legislation would have impacted Tennessee’s compliance with federal regulations regarding accountability. Additionally, this bill would have lowered expectations for teacher evaluation and would result in varied and incomparable results of teacher effectiveness across the state. It should be noted that this legislation passed on the House floor.



Win

- [HB2425/SB2214](#) *Taken Off Notice*  
*Teacher Evaluation*—This legislation would have allowed for 50% of a teacher’s annual evaluation criteria to be composed of student achievement measures other than student growth composites generated from assessments. This legislation would have lowered the significance of assessments in evaluating teacher performance, which could have unintended consequences on the objective and reliable data of teacher effectiveness across the state.



Win

**COVID-19 Legislation:**

- [HB2470/SB1974](#) *Passed*  
*Education Task Force*—TennesseeCAN supported this legislation in light of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple tornados in the spring of 2020. This legislation establishes the nine-member task force, which will focus on the short- and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in 2020 on education in the state. They will make recommendations on ways to close the education gap caused by these events.



Win

- [HB2818/SB2672](#) *Passed*  
*State Board of Education*—TennesseeCAN supported passage of this legislation, which protected the health and safety of students across Tennessee. The bill as amended allowed the State Board of Education to promulgate emergency rules to address any concerns created by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, this legislation allowed the commissioner to waive state testing mandates for the 2019-2020 school year, as well as the 180-day school year requirement.

- [HB2229/SB2160](#) *Taken Off Notice*  
*Literacy*—This legislation revamps Tennessee’s Kindergarten through 3rd grade literacy instruction program. The State Board of Education would promulgate new standards for literacy, from which each Local Education Agency (LEA) must adapt their reading and literacy curriculum. The intent of this legislation was to address the low reading proficiency rates for students in Tennessee. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recession, the fiscal note was too large for this legislation to pass through this session.

- HB2267/SB2200 *Taken Off Notice*  
*Mental Health Trust Fund*—This bill would have created a “K-12 Mental Health Trust Fund,” which would have established funds to be used by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use and the Department of Education for mental and behavioral services for Tennessee youth. LEAs would be allowed to apply for funds in order to support the mental health of their students through services and programming funded through this trust fund. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this trust fund was taken off notice for its fiscal impact.

### **Additional Legislative Highlights:**

In addition to our top-tier priorities listed above, there were several pieces of legislation that are relevant to our core policy priorities: Excellence, Equity, Choice, and Transparency. Below is a list of additional bills that we tracked and engaged on throughout the 2020 legislative session.

#### *Excellence*

- HB1835/SB1790 *Passed*  
*Class Size*—Allows the commissioner to grant an LEA a waiver of average class limit for purposes of the LEA funding a Grow Your Own program. Grow Your Own programs aim to get high-quality instructors in the classroom through LEA and local educator preparation program partnerships. This legislation would allow LEAs to more easily engage in these partnerships.
- HB2881/SB2717 *Taken Off Notice*  
*Teachers*—This legislation would establish an easier process for teachers from other states to receive Tennessee licensure. The Department of Education would have been required to issue an equivalent Tennessee license for any endorsement or license they may have in another state. This legislation sought to make it easier for high-quality teachers to move to and begin teaching in Tennessee.

#### *Equity*

- HB0736/SB1260 *Passed*  
*Career-Based Experiences*—This legislation allows LEAs to provide career-based experiences to high school students, as well as allows students to participate in any available career-based experiences. Additionally, it allows the establishment of partnerships with industry and local businesses in order to provide these experiences for students.

### *Choice*

- HB1993/SB2343 *Taken Off Notice*  
*Open Enrollment*—This bill required each LEA to have an open enrollment period in which a student could transfer to a school within the LEA that the student was not zoned for. This would have allowed for greater parental choice for their child and would have granted access to more schools within a school district.

### *Transparency*

- HB1008/SB1247 *Passed*  
*Achievement School District*—This legislation requires schools in the ASD to remain there until they are authorized to return to their LEA, according to a transition plan. The bill also requires the commissioner to develop and monitor these transition plans.
- HB1975/SB2262 *Passed*  
*State Board of Education*—This bill adds offenses for which, upon conviction, the state board of education automatically revokes a teacher's or administrator's license.