



Tennessee Education Primer

**A GUIDE FOR POLICYMAKERS,
CANDIDATES, AND ADVOCATES**

SUMMER 2022


SCORE
State Collaborative on Reforming Education





Contents

03	INTRODUCTION TO SCORE
05	A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE
09	UNDERSTANDING TENNESSEE’S CURRENT PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM
11	PRIORITIES IN EDUCATION
11	HIGH EXPECTATIONS, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY
12	EDUCATION FUNDING TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS
14	EARLY LITERACY
15	HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL OPTIONS
17	EDUCATION-WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT
19	HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLETION
21	GLOSSARY
25	REFERENCES



Introduction to SCORE

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit education policy and advocacy organization founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate Majority Leader. SCORE advocates for changes that transform education, so Tennessee students develop the knowledge and skills to succeed in school, career, and life.

Every student in Tennessee deserves a high-quality education from kindergarten to career. With this belief in mind, SCORE has four goals for Tennessee focused on preparing students for success:

1. **ALL STUDENTS RECEIVE AN EXCELLENT PUBLIC K-12 EDUCATION**
2. **ALL STUDENTS EARN A CREDENTIAL OR POSTSECONDARY DEGREE**
3. **ALL STUDENTS ARE PREPARED FOR A CAREER THAT ENABLES ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**
4. **ACROSS ALL GOALS, ALL STUDENTS HAVE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS**

To advance these goals and create opportunities for the students of Tennessee, SCORE collects and analyzes data to monitor progress and identify areas for growth; advances research-informed policy priorities in partnership with education leaders, policymakers, and educators; and supports innovative approaches to address key challenges in the state's education system. Some examples of the organization's work since its founding are:

2009: Release of the first **State of Education** in Tennessee, SCORE's annual report, which has been released yearly since

2011: Creation of the **SCORE Prize** to recognize state public schools and districts that are leaders in preparing students for success after high school

2014: First cohort of SCORE's **Tennessee Educator Fellowship**, where teachers, counselors, librarians, and instructional coaches learn about education policy, research, and advocacy with practitioners across the state

2015: Convening of the **Leading Innovation for Tennessee (LIFT)** network under SCORE to improve student success in the state through quality instruction, leadership, and innovative practices

2017: Listening tour with over 1,700 Tennesseans that culminates in five priorities for advancing student achievement in the **Excellence For All** report

2019: SCORE **merger with Complete Tennessee** and expansion of its work into higher education

2019: Continuation of the **Complete Tennessee Leadership Institute (CTLI)** — which Complete Tennessee began in 2016 — under SCORE leadership, maintaining CTLI's focus on increasing higher education credential attainment in communities across Tennessee

2020: Release of **Urgency For Literacy** to outline recommendations to address Tennessee's literacy crisis

2020: Launch of the **COVID Innovation Recovery Network (CIRN)**, a group of six Tennessee school districts focused on accelerating learning and building strong student support practices

2021: Release of **Going Higher** to outline SCORE's recommendations for increasing higher education completion and student success in Tennessee

2021: Release of **Funding for Learning** to outline key principles for education funding reform in Tennessee

2022: Release of recommendations to **Modernize Education Funding** through a redesigned K-12 funding formula

2022: Analysis of Tennessee districts' Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) plans and release of **Trends in Tennessee ESSER Plans Memo** and a dashboard to increase understanding of how districts are spending COVID-19 federal stimulus funds

Throughout the last decade, Tennessee has made notable progress to build an improved, student-focused education system. To continue supporting student success, the state's education policy landscape and strategy must:

- **INSIST ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS BY MEASURING STUDENT PROGRESS AND HOLDING EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPROVED RESULTS**
- **DESIGN EDUCATION FUNDING SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS**
- **PRIORITIZE EARLY LITERACY SUCCESS**
- **SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY, NONPROFIT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL OPTIONS**
- **ALIGN K-12, COLLEGE, AND THE WORKFORCE**
- **ADDRESS THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLETION CRISIS, SPECIFICALLY FOR TENNESSEE'S HIGHEST NEEDS STUDENTS**

Tennessee can — and should — lead the nation in providing high-quality education that prepares students for success in college, career, and life.



A Brief History Of Transforming Education In Tennessee

Tennesseans began taking bold steps to transform public education to better prepare students for success in 2007. Tennessee must maintain that commitment to innovation and continue to put student needs first in order to prepare every student for success from the day they start school to the day they start a career.

K-12 EDUCATION

Tennessee entered the 21st century doing a disservice to students. Classroom expectations were low, and the state assessments did not rigorously measure whether students were learning the skills and knowledge required for success in education and the workforce. While the state said nearly 90 percent of students were proficient in math and English in 2007, national assessments found that fewer than a third of Tennessee students were on track for college or career. That year, this discrepancy was brought to the forefront when Tennessee received an “F” from the US Chamber of Commerce for “truth in advertising” about student achievement. That same report card emphasized how the state was not preparing students for college and career and was not serving low-income students or students of color well. Tennessee had not been honest with students, parents, or taxpayers about how well the public education system was preparing students for the future. Through a shared sense of urgency and strong state leadership, Tennesseans came together to improve outcomes by enacting a bold strategy for education focused on student success:

- **Rigorous academic standards:** State-specific K-12 academic standards that hold students to high expectations and better prepare them for education after high school and the workforce.
- **Stronger educator evaluation:** A fairer, multiple-measure evaluation system for K-12 teachers that helps them hone their craft to improve teaching and learning.
- **Aligned assessment and accountability:** An assessment and accountability system to drive data-driven decision-making and targeted supports for schools and students.

As these efforts unrolled, Tennessee student achievement began to improve. **A study of national math and reading achievement between 2009 and 2015 identified Tennessee as a standout with above-average growth.**¹

Additionally, while the state was among the worst-performing states in the nation in 2009 on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), by 2019, Tennessee had reached or nearly reached the national average in both reading and math.² Even with this improvement, far too many Tennessee students are still unprepared for postsecondary education and the world of work. With a sustained commitment to progress, the state can continue growing and exceed the national average in upcoming years as a leader in student academic achievement.

TENNESSEE DEMONSTRATED FAST GROWTH IN NAEP PROFICIENCY RATES AFTER 2009

	2009	2019	Percentage Point Growth
Fourth-grade reading proficiency	28.0%	34.6%	6.6%
Fourth-grade math proficiency	28.4%	39.9%	11.5%
Eighth-grade reading proficiency	27.9%	31.6%	3.6%
Eighth-grade math proficiency	25.2%	31.2%	6.0%

Tennessee's NAEP proficiency rates, 2009 and 2019

Source: NAEP, 2019

HIGHER EDUCATION

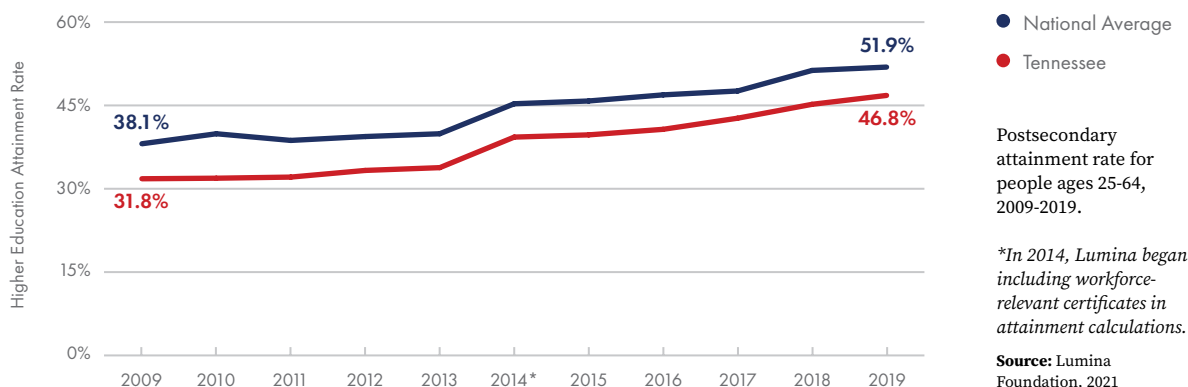
These transformative efforts were not limited to K-12. Before 2010, less than 32 percent of Tennesseans had a higher education credential, but research revealed that the nation's changing economy would require most people to have some type of credential beyond high school.³ To become a leader in this area, the second decade of the 21st century saw Tennessee take bold, innovative action to improve higher education and career outcomes, including:

- The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (CCTA) to establish a funding formula that rewards colleges and universities for retaining and graduating students.
- A state initiative called Drive to 55 that set a goal for 55 percent of adult Tennesseans to hold a degree or certificate beyond high school by 2025.

- The Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect last-dollar tuition scholarships to expand access to community colleges and Tennessee's colleges of applied technology (TCATs).
- Expanded access to college coursework for students in high school, with an emphasis on earning credentials aligned to workforce demand.

The focus on student success in higher education resulted in steady progress. Tennessee's higher education attainment rates increased by 15 percentage points between 2009 and 2019.⁴ Still, that growth has not been enough to meet or surpass the national average. The state must remain committed to better serving its higher education students – meaning more students enrolling in and completing higher education – to ensure Tennessee is building a workforce to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's jobs.

TENNESSEE'S HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT RATE HAS GROWN CONSISTENTLY BUT TRAILS THE NATION



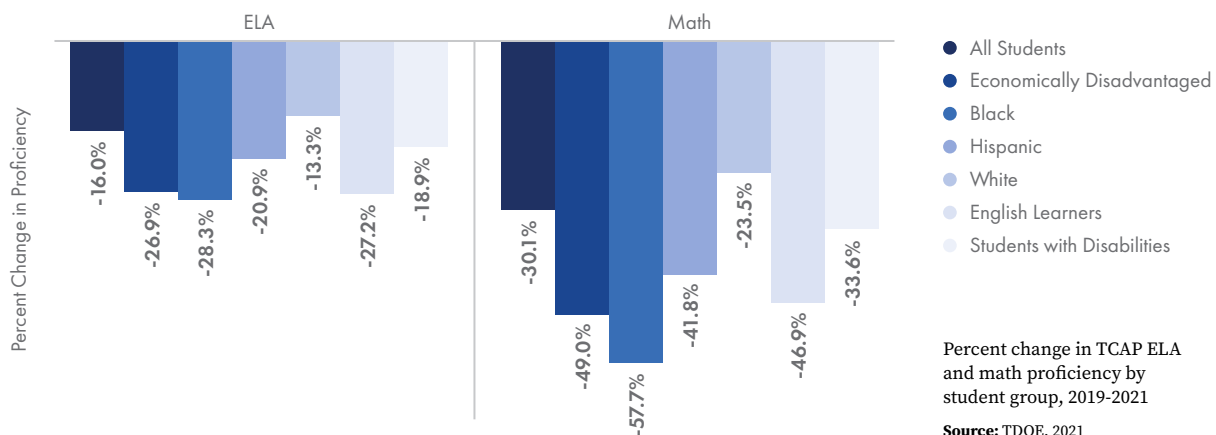


LEARNING ACCELERATION

After years of progress, education systems around the world confronted an unprecedented and all-encompassing challenge in the spring of 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic. This public health crisis disrupted every aspect of education in Tennessee. Colleges, universities, and K-12 districts had to quickly shift to virtual learning; educators had to adapt teaching practices; and students, families, educators, and staff alike had to navigate confusing and unpredictable challenges related to virtual instruction, quarantines, and lack of the usual in-person supports.

The pandemic created severe consequences for all students, and the impact is still being felt and understood. The 2021 state assessments revealed that many K-12 student gains in reading and math proficiency made prior to the pandemic disappeared amid the COVID-19 education disruptions. English language arts (ELA) proficiency rates for students in grades 3-8 dropped between 13 percent and 28 percent from 2019 to 2021.⁵ Drops in math were almost double, falling by between 24 percent and 58 percent.⁶ The state's sharpest percent declines were for Black and economically disadvantaged students. Tennessee not only needs to accelerate learning to recover from pandemic-related learning disruptions but also needs to grow beyond the pre-pandemic rates.

EVERY STUDENT GROUP LOST GROUND IN MATH AND ENGLISH BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021



The pandemic also had a significant impact on students' decisions to attend higher education. Community college first-time freshman enrollment declined by 18 percent between 2019 and 2021. Black student enrollment, which was already notably lower than White student enrollment, demonstrated the most significant decline,

falling by 31 percent between 2019 and 2021. Overall, the impacts of the pandemic will likely be felt in the higher education system for years to come, with subsequent impacts on both individual earning potential and the supply of trained individuals to meet workforce needs.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE FIRST-TIME FRESHMAN ENROLLMENT DECLINED DURING THE PANDEMIC

	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Percent Change Between 2019 and 2021
Black Student Enrollment	3,459	2,663	2,404	-30.5%
White Student Enrollment	13,967	12,171	11,507	-17.6%
Hispanic Student Enrollment	1,802	1,574	1,635	-9.3%
All Student Enrollment	20,756	17,799	16,928	-18.4%

Community college first-time freshman headcount, 2019-2021

Source: TBR, 2021

To address the impact of COVID-19 on education, Tennessee acted quickly to support students, in many ways leading the nation in pandemic-related recovery. Initiatives to recover and accelerate student learning included:

- The Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act: This legislation established required summer learning programs that provide extra time and instructional support for students in grades 3-8.⁷ It also created the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps) to provide ongoing high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring to support learning acceleration efforts.⁸
- Strategic federal stimulus spending strategies: The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) directed over \$4 billion of federal stimulus

funds toward supports for academics (such as literacy initiatives and online resources), student readiness (such as access to advanced coursework and expansion of innovative high school grants), and educators (such as Grow Your Own educator pipeline programs).⁹

- Maintaining education funding: The state preserved funding for the existing K-12 and higher education funding formulas to ensure schools and institutions of higher education did not experience decreases from the previous year.¹⁰

The state must remain committed to its new education initiatives and continually identify new opportunities to support not only short-term recovery but also the long-term acceleration of student success across K-12 and higher education.

Understanding Tennessee's Current Public Education System



EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

K-12

957,423 STUDENTS ENROLLED
IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 60.1%** WHITE
- 24.3%** BLACK
- 12.3%** HISPANIC
- 2.6%** ASIAN
- >1%** AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE
- 33.5%** ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
- 7.8%** ENGLISH LEARNERS
- 13.5%** STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
- 4.6%** ENROLLED IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS



1,806
SCHOOLS



68,838
TEACHERS

Source: TDOE, 2021

HIGHER EDUCATION

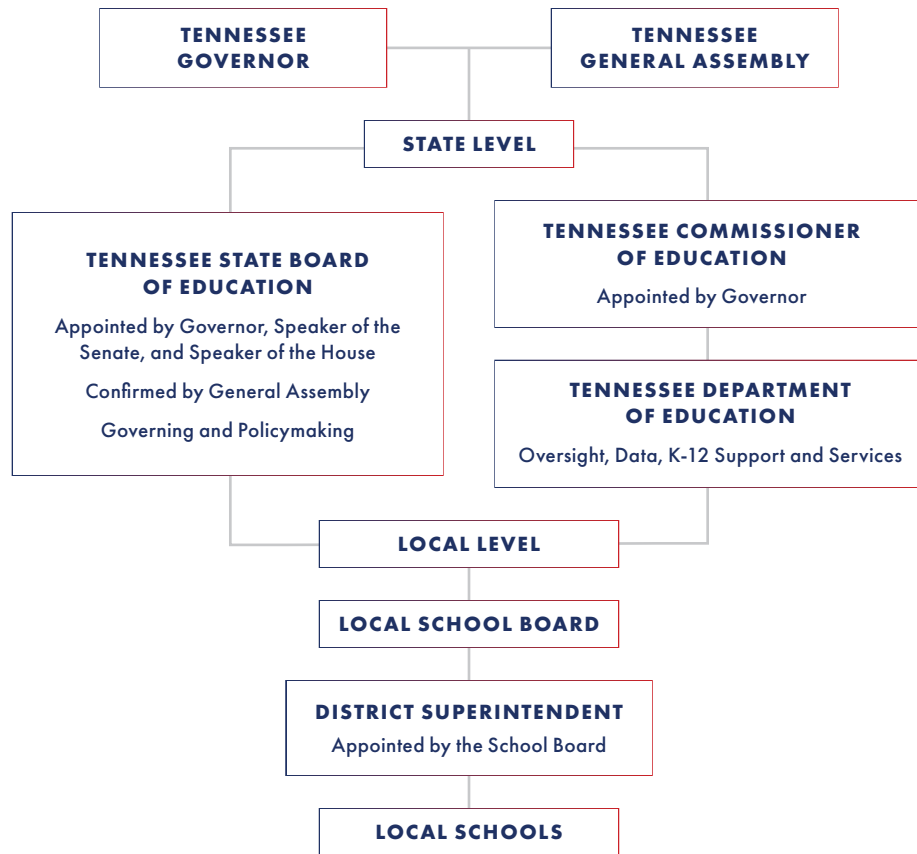
219,657 STUDENTS ENROLLED
IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- 59.2%** FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE
- 67.6%** WHITE UNDERGRADUATE (NOT HISPANIC)
- 17.0%** BLACK UNDERGRADUATE (NOT HISPANIC)
- 6.0%** HISPANIC UNDERGRADUATE
- 19.8%** ADULT UNDERGRADUATE
- 48.5%** PELL-ELIGIBLE UNDERGRADUATE

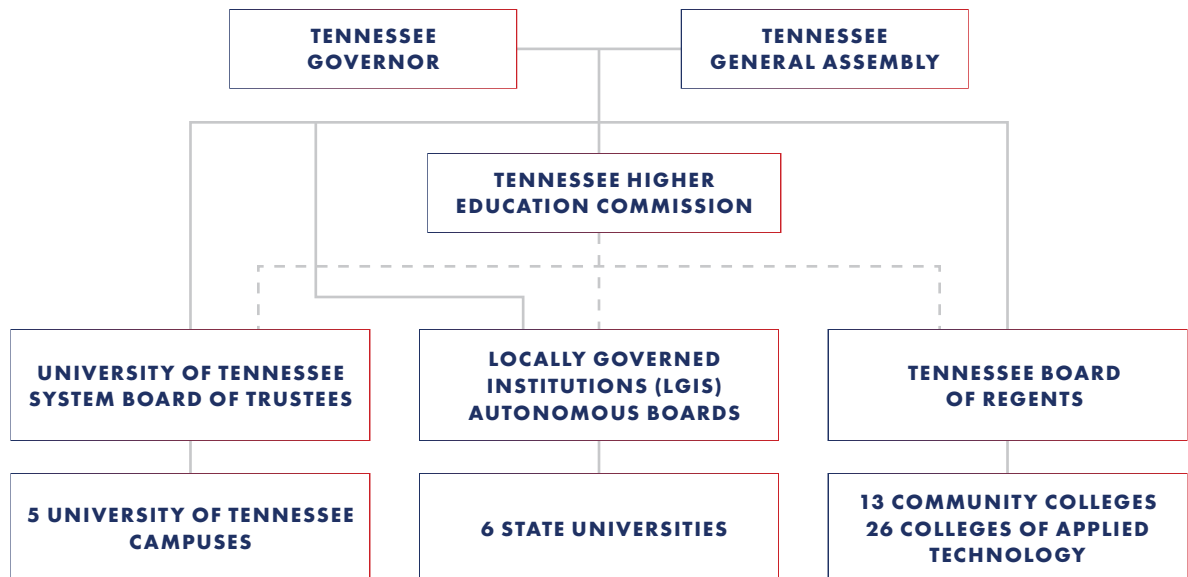
- 13** COMMUNITY COLLEGES
- 26** COLLEGES OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY
- 6** LOCALLY GOVERNED INSTITUTIONS
- 5** UT SYSTEM CAMPUSES

Source: THEC, 2021

K-12 EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



Note: dotted line represents coordination governance function, solid line represents direct governance function

Priorities In Education

INSISTING ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS, MEASURING STUDENT PROGRESS AND HOLDING EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPROVED RESULTS

Why do high standards, assessment, and accountability matter?

Student progress must remain grounded in the belief that all Tennessee students are capable of high levels of achievement with the right support. Progress in K-12 education relies on high expectations, ambitious and measurable goals for student achievement, and strong accountability systems. Maintaining these high expectations and achieving these goals is impossible without effective teachers, the most influential in-school factor for improving student achievement.¹¹

Where is Tennessee now?

Tennessee has several foundational policies to support high expectations that are rooted in strong data collection practices that inform ongoing improvement efforts to advance student achievement. To start, the state has been at the forefront of principal and teacher evaluation efforts by establishing the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM). TEAM is a multiple-measure evaluation system that includes observations, student growth data, and student performance data to offer a comprehensive picture of teacher impact on student success and drive continuous improvement.¹² Tennessee's teacher evaluation system has positively impacted student achievement in the state, illustrating how ongoing feedback supports teachers in improving practice to better serve students.¹³

To establish ambitious student academic goals, Tennessee educators developed state academic standards that detail what each student should know in each subject and grade. The standards intend to ensure students graduate high school ready to succeed in higher education and the workforce.¹⁴

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) is administered annually and monitors student progress toward the standards. TCAP results are used to measure student proficiency and growth in the state's accountability system alongside other indicators such as chronic absenteeism, English language proficiency assessment, graduation rates, and how ready students

are when they graduate. These indicators are used to designate high-performing schools and districts, as well as those in need of improvement. As of the 2021-22 school year, the indicators will also be used to assign school letter grades. This strong system of state assessment and accountability encourages districts and schools to make strategic decisions that serve students well and provides reliable information to educators, policymakers, and families about student academic performance by districts and schools.

Much of this data is publicly available through the Tennessee State Report Card.¹⁵ Tennessee should uphold these foundational policies while strengthening data collection and reporting to increase transparency and drive improvement.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Protect state assessments and accountability systems to ensure a comparable understanding of progress toward standards and inform targeted supports.**
- **Establish high standards for teachers from day one through educator preparation providers (EPPs).** Tennessee should also continue publicly reporting information about EPP performance.
- **Maintain a strong principal and teacher evaluation system with multiple measures of quality, including growth, proficiency, and observations.**
- **Transparently report on progress toward goals and take action when necessary.** District and school-level data should be publicly reported and disaggregated by student demographic groups whenever possible to provide policymakers, educators, and families with the information they need to make well-informed decisions.

DESIGNING EDUCATION FUNDING SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

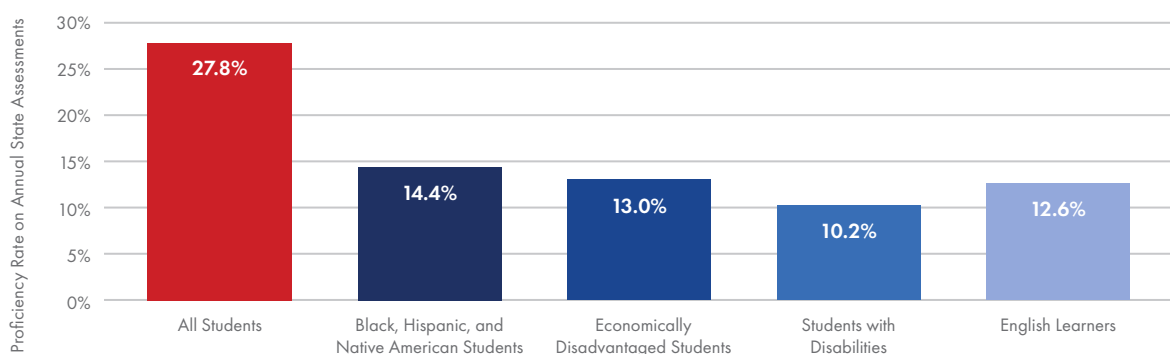
Why does education funding matter?

Districts, schools, and teachers require adequate resources to support all students to meet state expectations for academic success. Recent research reveals that increased education spending to address student learning needs can result in improved academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and life outcomes for students – particularly for students from historically underserved groups.¹⁶

Where is Tennessee now?

Following a decade of rapid improvement in student achievement, Tennessee's progress slowed. In recent years, multiple indicators show the state's K-12 education system has some ways to go. In particular, the system underperforms for economically disadvantaged students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities.¹⁷

TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDERPERFORMS FOR ALL STUDENTS, AND PARTICULARLY FOR STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED GROUPS



TDOE success rate by student group, 2021

Source: TDOE, 2021

Tennessee's education finance system is an important mechanism to propel students toward academic success. From late 2021 to early 2022, the administration coordinated a statewide stakeholder engagement process to modernize education funding that resulted in a proposal to invest an additional \$1 billion in a new student-based funding formula, known as the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA). TISA was designed to replace the 30-year-old Basic Education Program (BEP), a resource-based formula that generated funds based on the cost of resources such as technology, transportation, and teacher salaries. However, lists of resources and their costs quickly become outdated, and a focus on resources fails to target state funds to meet individual student need in every school. TISA takes a different approach.

Through TISA, each student generates the same base funding amount. In addition to the base amount, the new formula generates more funding to address individual student needs by applying weights for students who are economically disadvantaged, go to school with concentrated poverty, attend school in a rural district, and/or have unique learning needs (such as students with disabilities and English learners). The system also includes direct funding for students who are in grades K-3 to support early literacy instruction, rising fourth graders who need additional support to read on grade level, students who attend charter schools to account for facility needs, students in CTE programs, and students taking and retaking the ACT. Lastly, TISA offers districts the opportunity to earn bonus incentive funds for achieving certain student outcomes. The base and weights are funded by the state with a local funding match, while direct funding and outcome incentive funding are entirely covered by state funds. TISA passed into law in 2022 and will be implemented in the 2023-2024 year – an important first step to transform the state's education funding system to better meet student need.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Support strong implementation of TISA.** Prioritize clear and consistent communication with districts, schools, and education stakeholders around TISA to ensure a smooth and transparent implementation process.
- **Monitor how well TISA targets funds to student needs.** Targeting investments with a prioritized set of weights to address individual student learning needs can help accelerate the state's academic achievement. Ongoing analysis of how funds reach high-need districts and schools will help the public understand if the areas of the highest need are receiving additional resources as intended.
- **Prioritize transparent reporting of spending patterns.** Public reporting is required for per-pupil expenditures, student demographics, student achievement, educator compensation, and how districts and schools are investing in key resources to improve the student experience. This data must be accessible to the public and easily comparable across similar schools and districts to facilitate a stronger understanding of effective spending decisions.
- **Learn from implementation and feedback for continuous improvement.** Innovative TISA elements such as the outcomes incentives should be prioritized for regular review to identify opportunities for improvement and refinement.



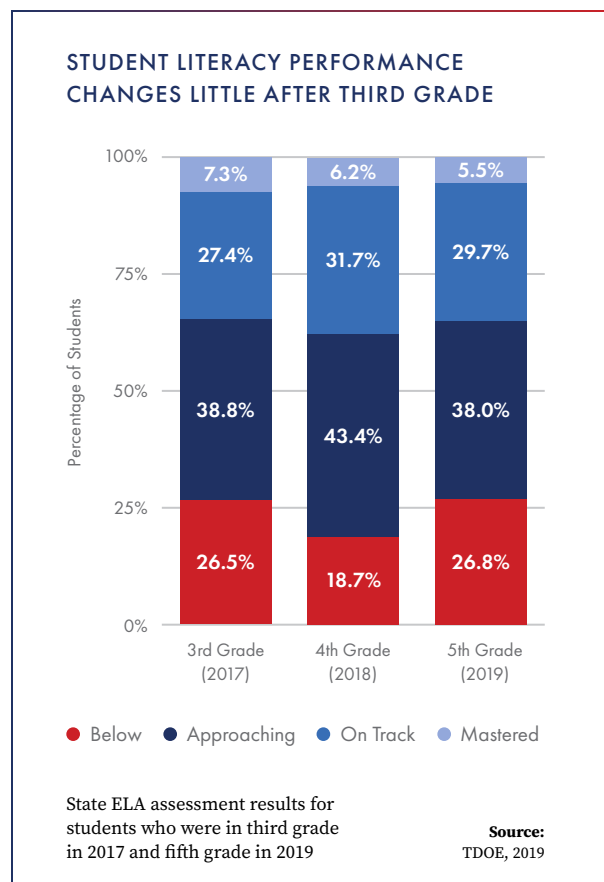
PRIORITIZING EARLY LITERACY SUCCESS

Why does early literacy matter?

Students who are not proficient in reading by the end of the third grade are four times more likely not to graduate high school on time, and this trend is even more pronounced for low-income students.¹⁸ Tennessee should continue providing the necessary supports early on to ensure all students can learn to be great readers and writers.

Where is Tennessee now?

Tennessee data indicate that only 29.8 percent of the state's students are proficient in English language arts (ELA).¹⁹ State-specific data reinforce that third grade is a critical transition point. Tennessee students who are not proficient in ELA by third grade generally do not become proficient in the following years, likely resulting in challenges in school that will only amplify with age.



Recognizing the urgent need to address early literacy, the General Assembly passed the Tennessee Literacy Success Act in early 2021 in a special session called by Governor Bill Lee. The act requires districts to develop Foundational Literacy Skills Plans, requires districts to administer an approved universal reading screener three times per year to all K-3 students to identify reading needs and direct supports, and requires teachers to complete professional development in foundational literacy.²⁰ Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Education launched a Reading 360 initiative to provide schools and districts with optional reading resources and supports.²¹ To ensure student needs are met, efforts for addressing Tennessee's early literacy crisis must persist and be monitored closely.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Provide ongoing implementation support for the Tennessee Literacy Success Act.** For legislation to have a positive impact, the Tennessee Department of Education, districts, educators, and other education stakeholders must collaborate to ensure the universal reading screeners, Foundational Literacy Skills Plans, and professional development opportunities are functioning well.
- **Prioritize the use of high-quality literacy instructional materials.** Adopting high-quality materials aligned with state expectations will be most successful if paired with professional development and educator training for leveraging the materials effectively.²²
- **Publicly report literacy data and progress toward goals to identify needs.** Annual monitoring and public reporting on reading proficiency progress (by student demographic and socioeconomic status groups) at the state, school, and district levels will allow education stakeholders to determine what changes need to be made to ensure early literacy strategies are serving students well.

SUPPORTING HIGH-QUALITY NONPROFIT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL OPTIONS

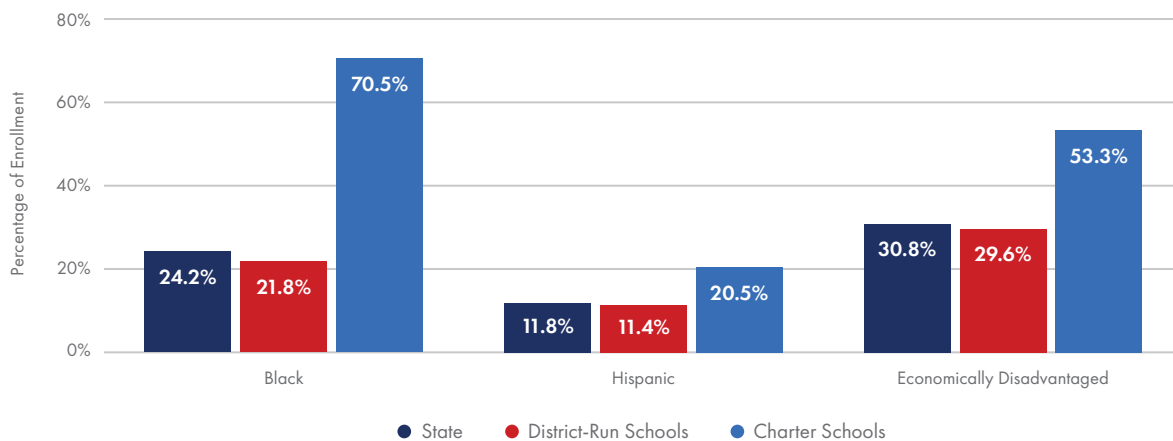
Why do high-quality public charter schools matter?

Research on charter schools located across the nation's largest urban districts shows that students enrolled in a public charter school can experience greater learning compared to students enrolled in traditional public schools, equivalent to 40 additional days of math instruction and 28 additional days of reading instruction each year.²³ But, high-quality public charter schools still face obstacles to operation and expansion in Tennessee, including limited funding for facilities and lengthy processes for authorization.²⁴

Where is Tennessee now?

There are more than 110 nonprofit public charter schools in Tennessee serving over 44,000 students.²⁵ Since the first Tennessee public charter school opened in 2003, the state's charter sector has experienced several pivotal changes. In 2011, the General Assembly passed legislation to support charter expansion by removing the cap on the number of charter schools in operation and opening up charter enrollment to all the state's students.²⁶ To address some charter facility needs, Governor Haslam established a charter facilities fund in 2017.²⁷ Additionally, in 2019 the state established an independent Public Charter School Commission as an appellate authorizer for schools who successfully appeal charter denial decisions.²⁸ Today, Tennessee's public charter sector serves a larger proportion of the state's students from historically underserved groups than district-run schools, with more than 90 percent of charter school students being students of color.²⁹

CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVE A HIGHER PROPORTION OF TENNESSEE'S DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS



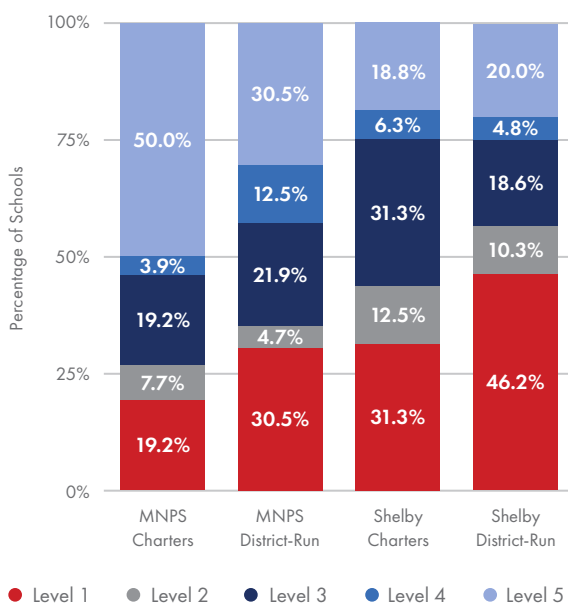
Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged student enrollment by public school type

Source: TDOE, 2020

Pre-pandemic data demonstrate how a greater proportion of public charter schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools and Memphis-Shelby County Schools, the two districts with the largest number of the state's

charter schools, achieve at or above expected student growth (i.e., score Level 3 or above) when compared to district-run schools.³⁰

CHARTERS HAVE OUTPERFORMED DISTRICT-RUN SCHOOLS IN STUDENT GROWTH



Note: Level 5 is most effective, Level 4 is above average effectiveness, Level 3 is average effectiveness, Level 2 is approaching average effectiveness, and Level 1 is least effective.

TVAAS composite rating for Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and Memphis-Shelby County Schools by school type, 2019

Source:
TDOE, 2019

Tennessee remains committed to supporting high-quality nonprofit public charter schools. Governor Bill Lee dedicated \$10 million of his COVID-19 Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) to charter school support and expansion grants. Furthermore, the charter facilities fund received a new \$16 million recurring investment in fiscal year 2022-2023.³¹ Still, facilities remain a significant need. A 2019 capital needs survey found that Tennessee's public charter schools reported \$35 million in urgent capital needs that year and \$75 million in anticipated capital costs over the next five years.³² The state should continue to address challenges that may prevent high-quality nonprofit public charter schools from expanding in Tennessee.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Remove barriers to the expansion of high-quality nonprofit public charter schools across the state.** The state should incentivize the replication of charter schools with a record of success and ensure authorizer pathways exist that enable high-quality charter schools to operate.
- **Ensure consistent data collection about charter schools.** Collecting and publicly reporting data about charter school enrollment, academic performance, and funding (to name a few examples) will give students and families transparent information about their public-school options.
- **Support effective authorizer practices.** Authorizers should be trained and held accountable for approving public charter schools to open in Tennessee that have a strong plan for serving their community and providing ongoing monitoring to ensure schools are effectively serving students.
- **Address funding disparities for charter schools.** Creating a permanent solution for charter facility needs will address a challenge that deters new public charter schools from opening and detracts existing public charter schools from focusing on what matters most – students.

ALIGNING K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE WORKFORCE

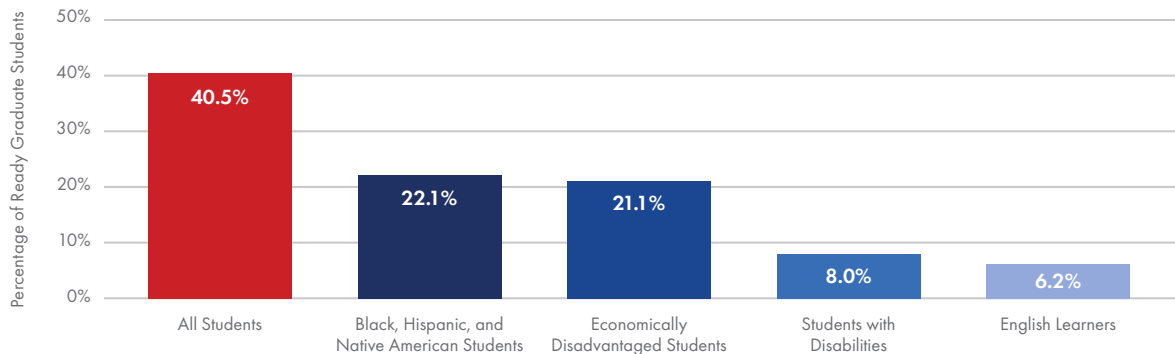
Why does alignment across education and the workforce matter?

Tennessee's economy requires workers to be lifelong learners who have earned a high-quality credential such as an industry certification or degree. Great collaboration and alignment between K-12, higher education, and employers can support students' readiness to make the most of career opportunities.

Where is Tennessee now?

Tennessee boasts a high school graduation rate of 89.6 percent, above the national average.³³ However, those students are not necessarily prepared for success in what comes after high school. Tennessee's Ready Graduate rate, which measures whether students are ready for college and career, is only 40.5 percent.³⁴ The Ready Graduate percentage is even lower for students from historically underserved groups: 21 percent for economically disadvantaged students and 22 percent for Black, Hispanic, and Native American students combined.³⁵

NOT ALL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE PREPARED FOR SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE



TDOE Ready Graduate rates by student group, class of 2020

Source: TDOE, 2021

Promisingly, 49.8 percent of Tennessee graduates have taken two or more career and technical education (CTE) courses within a program of study, suggesting that schools are considering workforce preparation options.³⁶ However, more can be done to align these CTE opportunities to workforce needs. Only 31 percent of credentials earned in K-12 education are in demand by

employers offering jobs that pay a living wage (defined as over \$15 an hour).³⁷ The state should strengthen its education system by aligning data and needs across K-12, higher education, and the workforce to ensure students have access to opportunities that lead to highly demanded, well-paid occupations.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Strengthen career and technical education and work-based learning by aligning the knowledge, skills, and credentials gained by students with employer needs.** All students should be aware of these valuable opportunities, and the state should collect detailed data on student participation.
- **Connect K-12, college, and workforce data to understand student progress through education to career.** This data can be used to increase alignment with industry and improve students' experiences in education.
- **Encourage partnerships across K-12, higher education, and the workforce to better prepare students for success.** Partnerships can exist through school programs, formal apprenticeship programs, and innovative school models such as early college high schools – to name a few examples.
- **Invest in and expand high-quality college and career advising across K-12 and higher education.** Counselors and advisors can discuss college and career aspirations, support students in maximizing their potential as learners throughout their education, and help students seamlessly transition to their next steps.





ADDRESSING THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLETION CRISIS

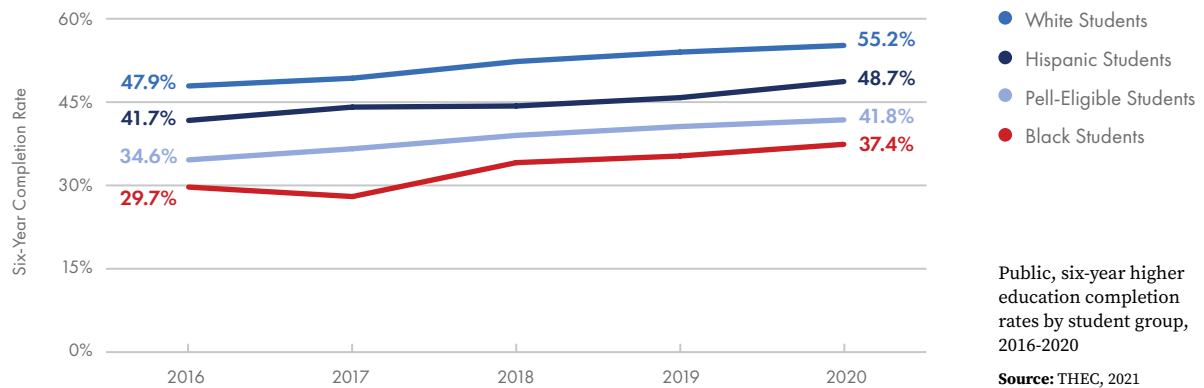
Why does completing higher education matter?

Higher education, which includes certificates, two-year degrees, four-year degrees, and any education-related program after high school, is critical for both state and individual economic prosperity. To meet workforce needs, Tennessee set a statewide goal for 55 percent of the state's adults to hold some kind of credential beyond high school by 2025.³⁸ Additionally, Tennessee's higher education graduates with full-time jobs earn, on average, one and a half times more each year than high school graduates who do not enroll in higher education.³⁹ All Tennesseans stand to benefit when the state's education system supports the majority of students to complete a credential in higher education.

Where is Tennessee now?

Tennessee's current higher education attainment rate is 46.8 percent, a notable increase from 31.8 percent in 2009.⁴⁰ However, the rate remains below the national average of 51.9 percent, and institutions have failed to narrow their extensive completion gaps for Black, Hispanic, and low-income (Pell-eligible) students.⁴¹ Higher education must do more to specifically serve the state's low-income students and students of color.

TENNESSEE'S HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLETION GAPS PERSIST OVER TIME



Tennessee has made significant progress in access to higher education through two landmark last-dollar scholarships programs for community and technical colleges: Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect. After the introduction of Tennessee Promise, the state's full-time first-time undergraduate enrollment at community colleges increased by around 40 percent.⁴² Other state initiatives such as the Tennessee Transfer Pathways (which outline blocks of course credit guaranteed to transfer between community colleges and universities), and the Completion Grants pilot (a four-year pilot to provide grants to students to address nonacademic challenges that may lead to dropping out), have built upon state financial aid and institution student support programs to better serve students once they reach higher education. However, the state's completion rates indicate room for improvement. Access is only the first step – the state must sharpen its focus on improving completion rates and closing completion gaps.

What are the priorities moving forward?

- **Prioritize clear statewide higher education completion goals for students from historically underserved groups and publicly report progress toward goals.**
- **Promote smooth transitions for students to and through higher education.** Key transition points in higher education include the summer after high school graduation, the summer after the first year enrolled in higher education, and transfers between institutions.
- **Invest in research-supported higher education completion strategies.** Research indicates that strategies such as completion coaches, cohort-based learning communities, and grants to help with nontuition costs are promising strategies to encourage higher education completion.⁴³
- **Reward institutions of higher education for completing students and closing attainment gaps through the state's outcomes-based funding formula.** To recognize that the state cannot meet workforce needs or completion goals without closing its completion gaps, institutions should be incentivized to support students from historically underserved groups, such as Black and Hispanic students.

Glossary

Topic	Terms to Recognize
<p>Insisting on high expectations by measuring student progress and holding education stakeholders accountable for improved results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Standards: Academic standards are concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. Academic standards describe educational objectives, but do not deal with teaching practice, curriculum, or assessment methods. • Assessment: Assessment refers to methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students. Formative assessments are used to monitor progress and provide quick feedback to inform instruction, while summative assessments, such as TCAP, document student learning at the end of an instructional unit. • Educator Preparation Report Card: The Educator Preparation Report Card publicly reports key metrics of educator preparation providers across the state, including placement and retention rates, scores on licensure exams, and teacher impact data based on Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) scores. State law requires the publication of these metrics each year. • Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Signed into law in December 2015, ESSA is the most recent version of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Under ESSA, states are required to test students in reading and math in grades 3-8 annually and once in high school. States must continue reporting performance for all students as well as for specific student groups (e.g., economically disadvantaged, English learners, etc.) to hold high standards of accountability. • State Report Card: Tennessee's State Report Card is a tool that allows families and community members to access key information about every school and district in the state, including how well schools and districts are serving specific students. The report card includes key indicators such as student enrollment, proficiency rates on annual state tests, chronic absenteeism rate, and graduation rate. • Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP): TCAP is the state's testing program for students in grades 3-11 and includes assessments in math, English language arts, social studies, and science. Exams are aligned to the state's academic standards and provide data to calculate student proficiency and growth measures. • Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM): TEAM is the state-developed teacher evaluation system implemented in 2011-12. TEAM combines quantitative and qualitative components and incorporates frequent observation, constructive feedback, student learning measures, and aligned development opportunities. • Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS): TVAAS aims to measure the impact a district, school, or teacher has on the academic growth of individual students and groups of students from one school year to the next. TVAAS scores are calculated from all years of available prior student performance on state assessments. TVAAS provides one of multiple measures for teacher evaluations.

Topic	Terms to Recognize
Designing education funding systems to support student success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Education Program (BEP): Prior to TISA, the state of Tennessee determined how to allocate funds to districts through the BEP. Created in 1992, the BEP calculated each district's funding across four categories of resources: instructional salaries, instructional benefits, classroom costs, and nonclassroom costs. The BEP included 46 components across the four categories, such as teachers, principals, textbooks, and transportation. • Fiscal Capacity: Fiscal capacity is the percentage of the total local share that each county must contribute to education funding. The fiscal capacity calculation determines this contribution based on each county's ability to raise local revenues to pay for education. This calculation is the average of two formulas: one established by the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) at the University of Tennessee and one established by the Tennessee advisory commission on intergovernmental relations (TACIR). • Maintenance of Effort: The maintenance of effort requirement prohibits counties from decreasing the amount of local funds allocated toward education from year to year. Even if county contributions exceed the required local contributions, they must maintain that funding amount at a minimum each year. • Resource-Based: A resource-based funding formula determines the cost of funding education based on a list of specific resources such as teacher salaries and instructional materials. • Required Local Contribution: Required local contribution is the dollar amount of local funds each county must contribute to the local share, as determined by the funding formula calculation and fiscal capacity calculation. Almost all counties contribute more funds to education than their required local contribution. • State and Local Share: State and local share refer to the total percentage of funds generated by the state's education funding formula that the state and locals cover. In TISA, the state covers 70 percent of all funds generated through the base and weights. The remaining 30 percent is the local share, though each local contribution will depend on the county's fiscal capacity calculation. There is no local share for the direct funding and outcome incentive funding components of TISA. • Student-Based: A student-based funding formula determines the cost of funding education based on the number of students enrolled and the specific learning needs of each individual student. This funding mechanism includes a base funding amount per student, with additional weights for students who need more resources to meet the state's academic expectations. • Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act (TISA): Adopted in the 2022 legislative session, TISA is a student-based formula that includes four major components: base funding, weights, direct funding, and outcomes funding. • Weights: A multiplier on the base funding amount in a student-based funding formula to generate additional funding for specific student groups.
Prioritizing early literacy success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator Preparation Provider (EPP): Educator preparation providers are the institutions that provide teacher candidates with instruction to prepare them for licensure. EPPs that lead to licensure must be approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education. For approval, EPPs must meet the standards, procedures, and guidelines outlined in the State Board educator preparation policies and rules. • Foundational Literacy Skills Plans: The Tennessee Literacy Success Act requires districts to develop Foundational Literacy Skills Plans to outline their approach to improve student literacy rooted in a focus on foundational literacy skills. The plans include six sections: the amount of time devoted to foundational literacy skills, foundational skills instructional materials, the selected universal reading screener, interventions and supports for students, a parent notification plan, and a professional development plan. • Literacy Standard for EPPs: The State Board established literacy standards for educator preparation providers that outline a deep understanding of foundational literacy skills as a standard for teacher candidates. These standards intend to prepare educators to teach critical foundational literacy skills to students.



Topic	Terms to Recognize
Supporting high-quality nonprofit public charter school options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizer: Charter authorizers are bodies that determine whether new charter schools can open, set expectations for charter performance, and oversee charter operations and progress toward goals. Authorizers in Tennessee include local school boards, the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, and the Achievement School District. • Authorizer Evaluation: Tennessee's State Board of Education is responsible for periodically evaluating charter authorizers across the state. The evaluations identify areas of noncompliance that authorizers must remedy. At a minimum, authorizers are evaluated once every two years – though authorizers with low compliance may be evaluated at a higher frequency. • Charter Agreement: Charter agreements are fixed-term renewable agreements between a charter school, the charter operator, and their charter authorizer that outline the performance expectations for each group. • Charter Management Organization (CMO): CMOs are nonprofit educational organizations that operate charter schools. • Charter School: Public charter schools are independently run schools that are publicly funded and approved by an authorizer. Charter schools have a high level of accountability through their authorizer and potential for school closure, but have increased flexibility around personnel, financial, and instructional decisions at the school level. All charter schools in Tennessee are public schools and operated by nonprofit organizations. • Conversion: Existing schools can convert to a charter school through three pathways: if 60 percent of parents of children enrolled or 60 percent of the school's teachers petition the local board and the local board approves, if a charter operator applies to a local board to convert an existing school to a charter school, or if the local board converts an existing school on its own initiative. • Education Service Provider (ESP): ESPs are for-profit organizations that operate charter schools. Current state law prohibits for-profit charter operators from operating in Tennessee. • Tennessee Public Charter School Commission: The Tennessee Public Charter commission hears new start, revocation, and renewal charter school appeals. If a charter application is denied by a local school board authorizer, the school has the option to submit an appeal to the Commission. The decision of the Commission is final. Additionally, certain high-performing charter schools in the Achievement School District, the state's turnaround district, may have the opportunity to apply directly to the Commission for authorization.

Topic	Terms to Recognize
Aligning K-12, higher education, and the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and Technical Education (CTE): Career and technical education refers to courses and programs aligned to workforce needs. CTE occurs in secondary and higher education settings, and helps students develop academic and technical skills to succeed in both education and the workplace. Tennessee's CTE experiences are organized into 16 broad categories that represent almost every occupation, including hospitality, information technology, health science, and agriculture. • Competency-based education: Competency-based education systems require students to demonstrate that they have mastered specific knowledge, skills, and abilities as opposed to fulfilling certain seat time requirements. If aligned with industry needs, competency-based education assures employers that students have specific skills needed to succeed in the workplace. • P20 Connect: P20 Connect is Tennessee's longitudinal data system. The system brings together a variety of institutional data (Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, etc.) to securely link information across K-12, higher education, and the workforce. The P20 Connect system is housed under the Office of Evidence and Impact (OEI) in the Department of Finance & Administration. • Ready Graduate: Ready Graduate rate is an accountability indicator in Tennessee's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan and measures the percentage of graduating high school students who meet certain success milestones that increase their probability of enrolling in higher education and securing employment. Students are considered a "Ready Graduate" if they obtain certain combinations of readiness indicators, including participating in AP or dual enrollment courses, receiving an industry certification, and earning a 21 or higher on the ACT. • Work-Based Learning (WBL): Work-based learning is one method for students to develop skills to help them succeed in higher education and the workforce. WBL combines academic, technical, and critical thinking skills through engaging with industry, allowing students to gain skills while exploring possible career options. WBL activities range from job shadowing and career fairs to service-learning and internships.
Addressing the higher education completion crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement gap: Any disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and students of color or students from higher-income and lower-income households. • Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs): Courses or exams that give students a chance to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school, including dual enrollment, dual credit, Advanced Placement, and Industry Certification. • Outcomes-based funding formula: The funding mechanism for Tennessee's institutions of higher education that relies on key outcomes such as student progression and completion. • Summer melt: The phenomenon when a high school senior who intends to attend higher education does not begin attending higher education in the fall. • Tennessee Promise: A last-dollar scholarship program for Tennessee's high school graduates seeking a credential at a community college, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), or other eligible institution. The scholarship amount is based on a student's remaining financial need to cover the cost of tuition and fees after all other grant aid is applied. • Tennessee Reconnect: A last-dollar scholarship program for Tennessee's adults seeking to reengage with the education system at a Tennessee community college, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), or other eligible institution. The scholarship amount is based on a student's remaining financial need to cover the cost of tuition and fees after all other grant aid is applied. Students are eligible if they have not previously earned an associate or baccalaureate degree and are either 23 or older or qualify for independent on the FAFSA. • Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTPs): A pathway for students beginning studies at a community college or similar two-year program that assures credits will transfer toward earning a bachelor's degree at participating degree programs in the state.

References

1. Reardon, Sean F. "Educational opportunity in early and middle childhood: Using full population administrative data to study variation by place and age." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5 (2019).
2. National Assessment of Educational Progress (2022).
3. *A Stronger Nation*. Lumina Foundation (2021); Carenvale, Anthony P. and Stephen J. Rose. *The Undereducated American*. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (2014).
4. *A Stronger Nation*. Lumina Foundation (2021).
5. TDOE (2021).
6. TDOE (2021).
7. Tennessee Public Chapter 1, 112th General Assembly First Extraordinary Session.
8. Tennessee Public Chapter 1, 112th General Assembly First Extraordinary Session.
9. "TDOE Announces State Spending Strategy for Nearly \$4.2 Billion in Historic Federal Stimulus Funding for K-12 Education." *Tennessee Department of Education* (May 2021).
10. "The Budget: Fiscal Year 2021-2022." *State of Tennessee* (2021).
11. Oppen, Isaac M. *Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement*. RAND Corporation. (2019); Chetty, Raj, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff. "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood." *American Economic Review* (2014).
12. "TEAM: Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model". *Tennessee Department of Education*.
13. Guthrie, J. Edward, Mónica Hernández and Jason Grissom. *Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee: What We Have Learned from a Decade of Research*. Tennessee Education Research Alliance (July 2021).
14. "Academic Standards." *Tennessee Department of Education*.
15. "State Report Card." *Tennessee Department of Education*.
16. Candelaria, Christopher A., and Kenneth Shores. *Court-Ordered Finance Reforms in the Adequacy Era: Heterogenous Causal Effects and Sensitivity*. Education Finance and Policy (2019); LaFortune, Julien, Jesse Rothstein, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach. *School Finance Reform and the Distribution of Student Achievement*. American Economic Association (2018).
17. Tennessee State Report Card (2021).
18. Hernandez, Donald J. *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation (January 2011).
19. Tennessee State Report Card (2021).
20. Tennessee Public Chapter 3, 112th General Assembly First Extraordinary Session.
21. "Reading 360." *Tennessee Department of Education*.
22. Steiner, David. *Staying on the Shelf: Why Rigorous New Curricula Aren't Being Used*. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute (November 2019); Taylor, Joseph A., Stephen R. Getty, Susan M. Kowalski, Christopher D. Wilson, Janet Carlson, and Pamela Van Scotter. "An efficacy trial of research-based curriculum materials with curriculum-based professional development." *American Educational Research Journal* (2015).
23. *Urban Charter School Study*. Center for Research on Education Outcomes (March 2015).
24. *A Synthesis of Research on Charter School Facilities*. National Charter School Resource Center (October 2020); Ziebarth, Todd. *State Policy Snapshot: Facilities Funding for Public Charter Schools*. Charter School Facility Center (June 2019).
25. *2021 Impact Report*. Tennessee Charter School Center (2021).
26. *2021 Impact Report*. Tennessee Charter School Center (2021).
27. Aldrich, Marta. *Charter school facility funding would double under Tennessee governor's plan*. Chalkbeat (March 2019).
28. *2021 Impact Report*. Tennessee Charter School Center (2021).
29. *2021 Impact Report*. Tennessee Charter School Center (2021).
30. TDOE (2019).
31. "The Budget: Fiscal Year 2022-2023." *State of Tennessee* (2022).
32. *2019 Impact Report*. Tennessee Charter School Center (2019).
33. Tennessee State Report Card (2021); National Center for Education Statistics (2019).
34. TDOE (2021).
35. TDOE (2021).
36. Tennessee State Report Card (2021).
37. *State Summary: Tennessee. Excel in Ed and Burning Glass Technologies – Credentials Matter* (2020).
38. Drive to 55 Alliance (2018).
39. *Higher Ed By The Numbers*. Tennessee SCORE (2021).
40. *A Stronger Nation*. Lumina Foundation (2021).
41. *A Stronger Nation*. Lumina Foundation (2021).
42. Nguyen, Hieu. "Free college? Assessing enrollment responses to the Tennessee Promise program." *Labour Economics* (2020).
43. Bettinger, Eric P. and Rachel B. Baker. "The Effects of Student Coaching: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Advising". *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (March 2014); Bloom, Dan and Colleen Sommo. *Building Learning Communities: Early Results from the Opening Doors Demonstration at Kingsborough Community College*. MDRC (June 2005); Sommo, Colleen, Alexander K. Mayer, Timothy Rudd, and Dan Cullinan. *Commencement: Six-Year Effects of a Freshman Learning Community Program at Kingsborough Community College*. MDRC (July 2012); Anderson, Drew M. "When financial aid is scarce: The challenges of allocating college aid where it is needed most." *Journal of Public Economics* (October 2020); Fain, Paul. "Small Grants, Big Impact." *Inside Higher Ed* (February 2016).





TNSCORE.ORG

1207 18TH AVENUE SOUTH, SUITE 326

NASHVILLE, TN 37212

615.727.1545 • INFO@TNSCORE.ORG

 @SCORE4SCHOOLS  FB.COM/SCORE4SCHOOLS

 YOUTUBE.COM/TNSCORE4SCHOOLS

