



PRIORITIES FOR PROGRESS:

2018-19 STATE OF
EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE



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EXTENDING A DECADE OF PROGRESS FOR STUDENTS

Dear Friends,

Tennessee is undergoing exciting and wide-ranging change in 2019. A new governor and 32 new members of the General Assembly have taken office. Across the executive branch, in the General Assembly, and even here at the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), there are new leaders at work in education.

Yet amid this significant change there also is one constant: All Tennessee students need a high-quality education to graduate high school prepared for postsecondary education, careers, civic engagement, and independence as adults. Tennessee has been working comprehensively toward that goal for more than a decade, producing

historic progress in student achievement and many positive changes for Tennessee's public schools, teachers, and students.

In 2007, a US Chamber of Commerce report showed that Tennessee was behind most other states in expectations for students, measurement of their learning, and accountability for the results. It was not the first time Tennessee had been ranked near the bottom of the nation for education, but the state's response was different. Rather than make jokes or excuses about the poor performance, Tennessee's education, government, business, and philanthropic leaders faced the truth, rolled up our sleeves, and joined forces to do better by our children. Tennessee created strong policies for academic standards, assessment, and accountability, and educators worked tirelessly to improve teaching and learning. As a result, Tennessee today is regarded as a national leader in student achievement growth, innovation in turnaround strategies, and college access initiatives.

This year SCORE marks 10 years of work to improve student achievement in the Volunteer State, and we are tremendously proud of the role we have played in supporting student-focused education policy and practice. Most of all, we are gratified by improvements across the state that directly and positively impact our students. Even with that progress, we know that student growth has slowed in recent years, and challenges related to implementing critical pieces of the state's improvement efforts have been barriers to progress. We believe today's children will have better opportunities than any Tennesseans in history, but across the state we must renew a sense of urgency, innovation, and optimism if we want all students to be prepared for the workforce and the world they will enter.

SCORE's focus on students and commitment to continue the partnership we have built with you – educators, parents, students, policymakers, community partners, advocacy organizations, business leaders – continues with this edition of *The State of Education in Tennessee*. This year's report reviews recent advancements and outlines four priorities for continuing progress in 2019:

- Tennessee must help high school students find routes that lead to postsecondary opportunities and success.
- To continue the state's unprecedented gains in student achievement, Tennessee should champion and defend the education improvements underlying the progress.
- Continued student achievement growth requires great teaching, strong school leadership, and opportunity for deep learning, and Tennessee must provide that in every part of the state.
- For Tennessee students to become the best in the nation by 2025, we must return to the spirit of innovation that ignited the past decade of academic progress.

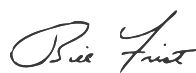
SCORE developed these four priorities in close consultation with the SCORE Steering Committee and through deep conversations with teachers, school and district leaders, policymakers, students, and community and education advocates from across the state. In short, these priorities come from the people of Tennessee and are for the benefit of the students of Tennessee.

Our state's new leadership will be crucial to addressing and advancing these priorities and for continued progress in student achievement. But educators, our governor, and our legislators aren't the only ones who should focus on more improvement.

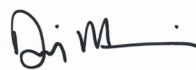
It will take all of us -- as parents and young people, as voters, as community leaders and volunteers, and as employers and members of the workforce -- to build on the foundation of improvement already laid.

Our challenge to keep improving education really is about nothing less than the future prosperity of our communities and state, from Mountain City to Memphis. We must recommit to this work until our education system – from early learning to career – provides every child in Tennessee the access to and the ability to succeed in achieving the American Dream. Let's not forget how far we've come. Let's not lose sight of our goals. Let's move forward together.

Sincerely,



Bill Frist
Chairman and Founder
Former US Senate Majority Leader



David Mansouri
President and CEO



UPDATE ON PROGRESS TOWARD TENNESSEE’S EDUCATION GOALS

Tennessee has seen a decade of improvements in education that have been nothing less than historic, but the state needs to make more progress to reach three goals SCORE has set for student achievement.

1. Continue to be fastest improving and among top half of states in national achievement measures by 2020.



Fastest improving: From 2011 to 2017, Tennessee made some of the fastest gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, ranking third in growth among all states, rising from:

46th to 34th
nationally in
fourth-grade math

45th to 35th
in eighth-grade
math

41st to 34th
in fourth-grade
reading

41st to 38th
in eighth-grade
reading



Some gaps closing: Some of Tennessee’s highest- and lowest-performing students have shown major improvement on NAEP since 2011. Growth for both advanced and lower-scoring students rose at rates among the nation’s fastest.



Top half of states: Tennessee’s fourth-graders ranked 19th in science, while eighth-grade performance ranked 21st.



Urban, suburban, and rural: Tennessee far surpassed the national pace of growth for schools in city, suburban, and rural settings on NAEP since 2011. The state had the nation’s greatest improvements in suburban schools’ scores.



2. Close all achievement gaps by income, race, geographic location, and student need. These gaps should be narrowing on both state and national assessments by 2020.



Achievement gaps persistent: Black and Hispanic students in the state still trail their white peers. White students are more than twice as likely as black students to score at or above NAEP Proficient.



English learners closing gaps: English learners narrowed the gap with their non-English learner peers in math and English language arts on the 2018 TNReady assessment, but students who are not English learners are more than twice as likely to be proficient in grades 3–8 ELA.



Students with disabilities trail peers: Tennessee students with disabilities were three times less likely to be at or above NAEP Proficient in fourth-grade reading and 10 times less likely in eighth-grade reading.

3. Every Tennessee student graduates from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. By 2020, the state is on track to meet the Drive to 55 goal of 55 percent of adults with postsecondary credentials.



Promising improvement on ACT: Tennessee's average composite score for 2018 was 20.2, the highest ever. However, only one in six students were college ready in all four ACT subjects.



More access to early postsecondary opportunities: More Tennessee high school students take college-level academic and career and technical education courses: 43 percent of the public school graduating class of 2017 took at least one such course.



More students need to finish: The average graduation rate at Tennessee two- and four-year public postsecondary institutions is below 45 percent. For the first Tennessee Promise cohort, 52.2 percent of students had graduated from community college or were still enrolled in college after five semesters, about 3 points higher than students not enrolled in the program.



Drive to 55 progress: Adults holding postsecondary credentials or degrees reached 41 percent in 2018, up 10 points in 10 years. To reach the 55 percent level by 2025, credential and degree attainment must grow 2 points annually.

2018 IN REVIEW

WHERE TENNESSEE STANDS

For the past decade, Tennessee has been among the fastest-improving states in the nation in K-12 education. Student achievement made substantial jumps forward in multiple subjects and grade levels. The state also is making progress on the five Excellence for All priorities set in 2017 by SCORE in collaboration with many educators, policymakers, and leaders of communities, business, and philanthropy. Improvements include increased focus and first steps to help more students make a successful transition from high school to college or career training, improvements in third-grade reading on statewide assessments, new initiatives to improve school leadership, and accountability ratings for schools that provide the deepest look to date at whether achievement gaps are closing for students who are traditionally underserved.

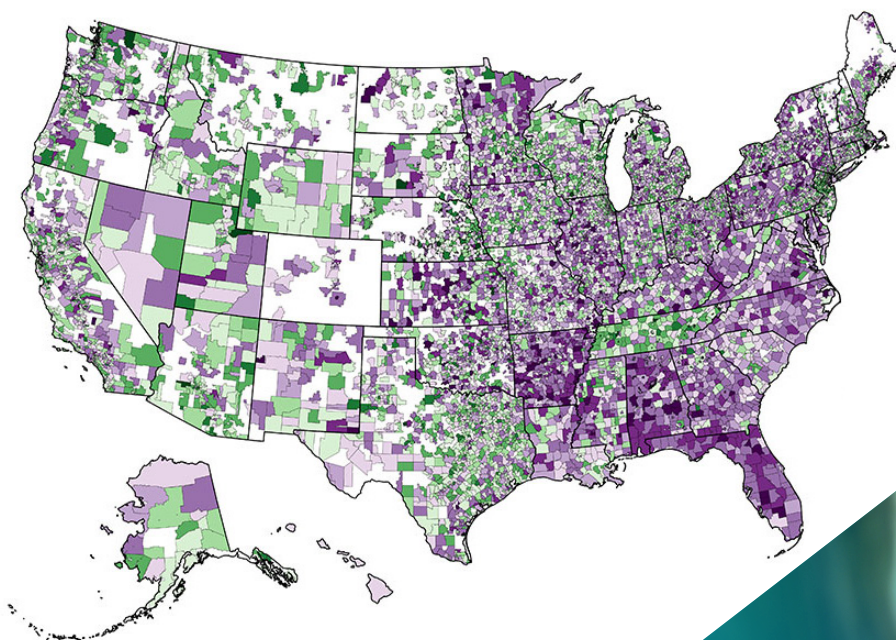
The state's improvement efforts stood out on a Stanford University scholar's in-depth analysis of student-achievement trends across the nation in math and reading between 2009 and 2015. The report showed that Tennessee students made some of the largest improvements on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in fourth-grade reading and math, and between fourth and eighth grades. Tennessee appeared as a bright green rectangle, surrounded by purple states and districts that had made much smaller gains.¹

New leaders in Tennessee have opportunities to build on this success -- and to address student achievement challenges that continue in the state.

AVERAGE TEST SCORE GROWTH RATES (MATH AND READING AVERAGED), US PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS, 2009-2015

Average achievement growth, grades 3-8

- More than 1.3 grades per grade
- 1.2 to 1.3 grades per grade
- 1.1 to 1.2 grades per grade
- 1.05 to 1.1 grades per grade
- 1 to 1.05 grades per grade
- 0.95 to 1 grades per grade
- 0.9 to 0.95 grades per grade
- 0.8 to 0.9 grades per grade
- 0.7 to 0.8 grades per grade
- Less than 0.7 grades per grade
- Missing



Source: Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis

FAST START HAS SLOWED: Despite having some of the nation's biggest gains in student achievement from 2011 to 2017, the pace of Tennessee's student achievement progress has been slower since 2013.

On the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), fourth-grade math performance was significantly lower in 2017 than 2015, displacing Tennessee from the top half of states and lowering the state's ranking to 34th. The 2017 results in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and eighth-grade math were about the same as 2015.²

Compared to the state's 2017 TNReady scores, achievement on the 2018 TNReady assessments dropped in all middle grades subjects and high school English and science. Early-grades students made slight gains in reading. English language arts (ELA) scores in grades 3-5 improved 2 points after years of stagnation, although fewer than four of 10 students are meeting grade-level ELA expectations.³

According to two different national studies, Tennessee is now a national leader in closing the "honesty gap" between student proficiency rates on NAEP and the state assessment, TNReady. Eleven years ago, such progress seemed unimaginable for Tennessee. In 2007, the state's leaders and educators

were embarrassed to be handed an F for "truth in advertising" about student proficiency in a US Chamber of Commerce report. Since the introduction of the more rigorous TNReady assessment, the gap with NAEP has narrowed by 50 to 60 points in math and reading. In eighth-grade reading, the gap has been eliminated.⁴ Tennessee parents and the public are receiving a more accurate view of how well students are mastering content that will prepare them for success in college and career. Nationally, Tennessee is one of only seven states to make this level of progress.⁵

RESEARCH-BASED INFORMATION: In preparing this annual report, SCORE collected extensive input from Tennesseans as well as national education experts, visited schools, analyzed student achievement data, and reviewed relevant research. SCORE conducted conversations across Tennessee with more than 200 teachers, 50 school leaders and coaches, 30 superintendents, and 150 students, as well as many national experts, leaders, and researchers. Combined, the progress monitoring section and the priorities section lay out the actions that have happened and still need to happen to continue moving toward the goal of preparing all students for postsecondary education, the workforce, and success in adulthood.





A VISION TO BECOME BEST IN THE NATION

In 2017 SCORE released *Excellence for All: Lifting Tennessee Students To Best In The Nation*, a report that reviewed Tennessee's 10 years of progress in improving education and outlined five major priorities through 2025 for continuing student achievement growth. SCORE developed this report in collaboration with educators, policymakers, the business community, parents, and students across the state, identifying these priorities:

- Ensure high school is the on-ramp to postsecondary studies and jobs
- Provide Tennessee students with the greatest needs a high-quality education
- Make Tennessee the best state to live, work, and grow as a teacher
- Support every student to become a strong reader and writer
- Develop school leaders who are ready to lead people and learning

In 2018, Tennessee as a state showed progress in addressing the priorities across multiple fronts.

PREPARING MORE STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Current levels of education among working age adults in Tennessee do not meet job-market demands, nor do they allow many Tennesseans to earn a living wage. State data show that the roughly one-third of recent high school graduates who go directly into the workforce without any postsecondary training earn on average about \$11,500 a year, more than \$600 below the federal poverty level for a single person. One review of Tennessee job listings found that six of 10 postings required at least an associate degree.⁶

For Tennessee to continue to attract economic development and high-wage jobs, more students will need to make a successful transition from high school to careers and college. The "Drive to 55" campaign

began in 2013 with the goal of having 55 percent of Tennessee adults hold a two- or four-year degree or meaningful industry credential by 2025. Since then, the state has made progress: The rates of adults with those degrees or credentials rose from 33.8 percent in 2013 to 40.7 percent in 2016.⁷ Some of the growth is because industry certifications were included starting in 2014.

ENSURE HIGH SCHOOL
IS THE ON-RAMP TO
POSTSECONDARY
STUDY AND WORK

Tennessee voters strongly support efforts to improve students' opportunities after high school. In August 2018, 59 percent of voters surveyed by SCORE said students are not prepared for the workforce, and nearly half of voters said students are not ready for college. A majority of voters favored four specific readiness strategies: **expanding access to post-high school education, more opportunities for students to earn industry certification, having a work-based learning** experience, and **better college and career counseling** for every high school student.⁸

While Tennessee has made great strides in strengthening K-12 and postsecondary education, the state has not fully connected this work to economic development and job creation at the state and local levels. The state's (and the nation's) approach to supporting students through high school into postsecondary education and the workforce still lacks full coordination, alignment, and accountability.

MORE ENROLL BUT MOST LEAVE WITH NO DEGREE: Since Tennessee Promise was introduced, more Tennessee students are starting college. The state's college-going rate for new high school graduates in fall 2017 was 63 percent, more than 6 percentage points higher than just three years earlier. Nearly 222,000 students of all ages enrolled in state community colleges and public universities for 2018-19, nearly 1,700 students more than before Tennessee Promise began.⁹

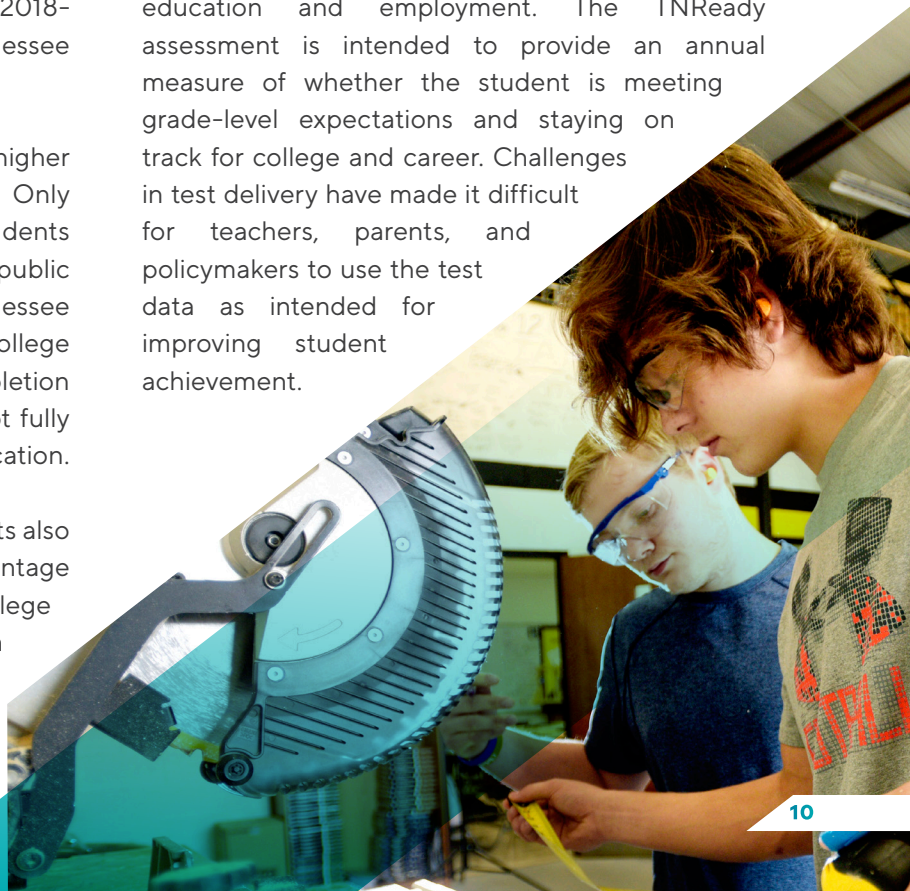
However, most students who enroll in higher education do not go on to earn a degree. Only about 45 percent of Tennessee college students graduate from state two- and four-year public colleges and universities within six years. Tennessee Promise has lowered financial barriers to college for many students, and the low degree completion rate indicates that Tennessee students are not fully academically prepared for postsecondary education.

Assessment results for late high school students also show a lack of preparedness. In 2018, the percentage of high schools on track to graduate college and career ready was 29 percent in English and 23 percent in math. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) has

worked to improve student performance on the ACT by becoming the first state in the nation to offer a free ACT retake to all public school seniors. **With the retake results included, Tennessee's average ACT composite score for 2018 graduates was 20.2, the state's highest score ever.** The retake also helped 1,463 more students earn a HOPE Scholarship in 2018 by scoring 21 or above. Nevertheless, ACT results show that for the class of 2018, less than half met college-ready benchmarks in reading and less than a third met benchmarks in math and science.¹⁰

2018 was the first year Tennessee schools and districts reported results on the Ready Graduate indicator, a measure of student readiness for college and career that projects students' future beyond high school graduation. Among 2018 graduates, 43.2 percent of students achieved a 21 or higher composite score on the ACT, reaching one of the Ready Graduate indicators. Other indicators include completing early postsecondary opportunities, earning industry certifications, and earning a qualifying score on the ASVAB military qualifying exam.

Tennessee's current academic standards were set with the goal of ensuring students graduate with the knowledge and skills demanded by postsecondary education and employment. The TNReady assessment is intended to provide an annual measure of whether the student is meeting grade-level expectations and staying on track for college and career. Challenges in test delivery have made it difficult for teachers, parents, and policymakers to use the test data as intended for improving student achievement.



BROADER OPTIONS FOR BETTER PREPARATION:

Increasing numbers of Tennessee students are taking college-level academic and career and technical education (CTE) courses while in high school, which boosts students' opportunities to enter and complete college and postsecondary career programs: About 44 percent of Tennessee's graduating class of 2018 took at least one postsecondary-level course while in high school.¹¹ However, major gaps exist in course-taking by race and income, with less than 30 percent of black students and students from low-income families taking such courses.

Research shows that students, and particularly those from low-income families, benefit from participating in early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) and are more likely to finish college or career training if they enroll in such opportunities in high school.¹² For this reason, postsecondary opportunities in high school are now a major part of the state's Ready Graduate requirements, and schools and districts will be measured in part on student enrollment in these courses. Educators in the state said they are concerned about the quality of some courses, particularly in dual enrollment and local dual-credit courses.

In the last several years, the Tennessee Department of Education has begun overhauling the state's CTE programs, instituting annual reviews of all CTE courses of study and aligning programs to industry needs. However, there are additional opportunities for improvement, including access to high-quality CTE teachers and ensuring CTE courses articulate into meaningful industry credentials.

Educators and industry leaders told SCORE that the state can and should do more to improve access to high-quality CTE educators and better align CTE courses to local industry needs. Research in 2018 provided stronger evidence than before that high-quality CTE programs open doors to postsecondary education and workforce opportunities.¹³

NEW STEPS FOR GREATER SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL:

Some students may not even consider college and career options unless they receive strong advising in high school. Yet the task often is left to teachers, who lack the formal training, expertise, and time to provide such guidance.

On the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, 44 percent of responding teachers said they are the professionals most heavily involved in helping students identify postsecondary options. Fifty-eight percent of the



state's teachers say they rely on their own base of knowledge in advising students.¹⁴ School counselors often do not have the capacity to do more college and career advising.¹⁵ In conversations with educators statewide, teachers and administrators reported that counselors often are burdened with non-advising duties. Furthermore, many counselor preparation programs focus on mental and social health advising. Asked if teachers should be responsible for student advising, educators were concerned it would become "one more thing" added to teachers' long list of duties.

School counselors routinely are responsible for postsecondary guidance for between 300 and 400 students in Tennessee. This ratio exceeds the American School Counselor Association's recommended limit of 250 students.¹⁶ In 2018, the Tennessee State Board of Education adopted the Counselors Association's standard that designates 80 percent of school counselors' time for direct services to students. In the past, many school counselors performed non-counseling duties such as administering state tests in their schools. The new standards will help counselors focus more on addressing barriers to student learning and guidance in their college and career choices.

Other innovations may help improve student advising. The Ayers Foundation and other organizations in the state are working on students' access to college, especially in rural areas. The foundation's 20 years of work shows that advising for students is as important as financial barriers to college. This work includes grants to schools supporting field trips to colleges, more personalized and frequent advising, and better monitoring of students' postsecondary outcomes.¹⁷ Additionally, tnAchieves, the organization that partners with Tennessee Promise in 85 counties, recruits and trains 7,500 volunteer mentors to serve nearly 60,000 Tennessee Promise applicants as they transition from high school to college.¹⁸ Advise TN, an initiative of Governor Haslam and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, provides 33 college advisors to communities that have not traditionally had strong college-going cultures.

MORE MOMENTUM FOR READINESS POLICIES: New ideas to address the issue of postsecondary and workforce readiness emerged in 2018 in Tennessee. The General Assembly made it easier for employers to offer work-based learning and internships by creating a \$1 million grant program.

TENNESSEE K-12 TO JOBS DESIGN COMMITTEE KEY FINDINGS

A statewide committee of 39 education, business and government leaders convened by SCORE in 2018 looked into solutions for helping more students successfully transition from high school to success in college, technical training, and the workplace. The committee's findings included:

- Align the work of K-12, postsecondary, and economic and workforce development at the state and regional level
 - Regions and local communities need support to innovate and align education and workforce development to meet local needs
 - Ensure regional labor market information on in-demand and emerging industries informs high school and postsecondary programs of study and credentials
 - Launch an agenda to improve college advising and career counseling for students and parents
 - Ensure broad access to high-quality early postsecondary opportunities in every school district
 - Develop plans to increase work-based learning and apprenticeships in high school and postsecondary programs
 - Continue and strengthen the state's improvements in college completion
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Despite the progress in improving postsecondary outcomes, Tennessee remains in the bottom 10 states nationally in postsecondary attainment. In response to growing interest from policymakers and voters, SCORE convened a committee to explore postsecondary education and workforce readiness issues, and with the support of 40 partners sponsored the Future Ready Summit: Helping Students Discover Successful Routes to College, Career & Opportunity. During this summit, 350 educators, policymakers, and community and business leaders learned about the status of the work in Tennessee and in other states.

Building a truly seamless K-12 -to postsecondary-to workforce system that serves every student and community well is Tennessee's next frontier in education.

OTHER WORK ON READINESS

- Tennessee Department of Education's Division of College and Career and Technical Education begins multi-phase work of aligning CTE offerings with local and industry needs. (2017)
- TDOE's Perkins Reserve Consolidated Grant streamlines the awarding of \$2.2 million to improve high-quality career pathways. (June 2018)
- Governor Haslam announces reorganization of Tennessee Pathways as part of the Drive to 55 Initiative alongside other statewide programs to improve postsecondary attainment. (July 2018)
- SCORE undertakes a High School Learning Tour to better understand how Tennessee's high schools are preparing students for college and career. (October 2018)

HELP FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLS WITH GREATEST NEEDS

Tennessee has made some progress in improving outcomes for historically underserved students.

Achievement gaps between students from low-income families and their peers narrowed in 2017 on NAEP, continuing the decade of improvement on that measure.

Some alarming trends also linger in the state. The 2017 NAEP results showed substantial disparity between students of color and those from low-income families compared to their white and more affluent peers. For example, the percentage of white students in Tennessee scoring at or above the NAEP Proficient level in fourth-grade math is more than 2½ times the rate of black students at the same level. In eighth-grade math, the percentage of students from low-income families scoring proficient is only half the rate of their more affluent peers.

PROVIDE STUDENTS
WITH THE GREATEST
NEEDS A HIGH-
QUALITY EDUCATION

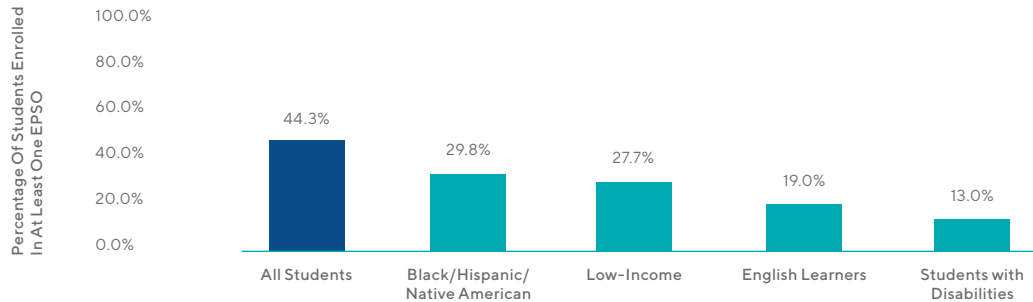
Also, the gap between Tennessee students scoring at the 90th percentile and the 10th percentile is widening, growing by 16.2 points since 2011. While this is less than the national average gap growth of 26.1 points, Tennessee's high-performing students are improving faster than their lower-performing peers.

On TNReady in 2018, English learners narrowed the gap with their non-English learner peers in math and English/language arts. Still, fewer than 0.5 percent of the state's English learners scored at or above the NAEP Proficient level in eighth-grade reading, compared with 12 percent in neighboring Arkansas. Similar gaps are present for the state's English learners in fourth-grade reading.

Tennessee students with disabilities were three times less likely to be at or above NAEP's Proficient in fourth-grade reading and 10 times less likely to be at Proficient in eighth-grade reading.

ACCESS TO EARLY POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES

Tennessee students with the greatest needs are less likely to enroll in an early postsecondary opportunity, further exacerbating inequities in future opportunities.



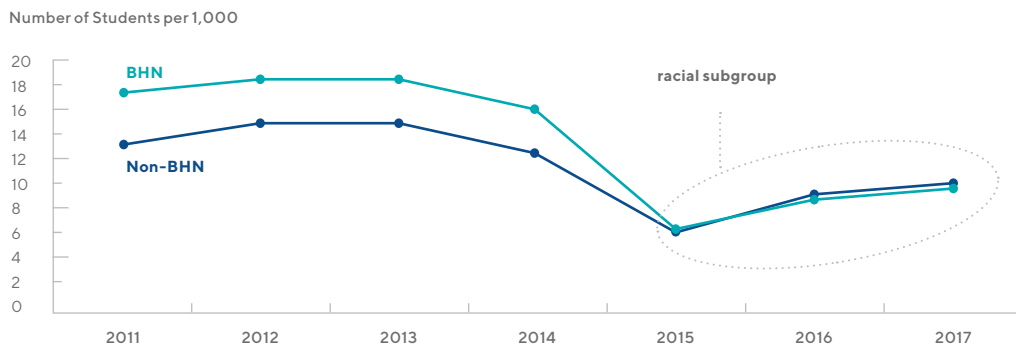
Source: Tennessee Department of Education

STATE RESPONSE IS PROMISING: Despite these gaps, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) intervention strategy to address these issues already appears to be helping. The Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTI²) program, which went statewide in 2014, gives teachers a framework for intervening when students need more academic

support. The RTI² process can be used to develop a support plan for many different students, but the state also uses it to determine when students are eligible for special education or learning disability services. The state has invested about \$13 million to provide at least one RTI² coordinator in every school district.¹⁹



GRADES K-5 IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY BY RACE



Source: Tennessee Department of Education

Since the introduction of RTI², **the state's racial/ethnic gap in specific learning-disability identification in grades K-5 has been eliminated**, and the gap in boys being disproportionately more often identified for such services has narrowed substantially. On a state survey, most educators report that RTI² is a critical strategy for supporting struggling students. Middle and high school educators, though, expressed a need for more support in RTI² implementation, echoing research about ways to improve RTI².²⁰ In 2018, the state pledged to streamline how the program works, and to enhance support and resources for schools and districts.

In 2018, the Tennessee Department of Education published the Leaders for Equity Playbook to help schools and districts consider ways to help more of the state's historically underserved students succeed and provide more equitable educational opportunities for all. The state convened educators and community stakeholders from across the state to develop the guide, which includes a framework that schools and districts can use in their own communities. The playbook encourages schools to identify common biases and misconceptions about students from different backgrounds, and to commit to specific actions for improvement.²¹

Research shows that regular absences from school

– even just a few – can have a major impact on students' achievement and their chances to graduate and pursue next steps in education. Economically disadvantaged students in Tennessee are more likely to be chronically out of school than other students. Slightly more than one-fifth of Tennessee students from low-income families missed 10 percent or more of class time in the 2017-18 school year, the equivalent of 18 or more school days. Chronic absenteeism was also reported for nearly one in five students with disabilities.²²

Tennessee's new school rating system includes a measure of chronically out of school, and some districts and schools have responded with new suspension policies intended to remove one barrier to keeping students in class. Educators told SCORE that they need more support to address some of the potential causes of student chronic absenteeism, especially involving factors outside the school.



TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS

The United States Department of Education approved Tennessee Succeeds, the state's plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act, in August 2017. Tennessee's plan applies state-specific solutions for meeting the needs of Tennessee students, particularly for historically underserved students. There are several important updates in the plan:

- **More information on student outcomes:** Districts and students are now receiving more feedback about the academic success of students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English learners.
 - **Chronically out-of-school:** A new measure grounded in the connections between student opportunity to learn and school attendance.
 - **Ready Graduate Indicator:** A new measure that highlights high school students' opportunities to earn college credit or industry certification.
 - **Revised school turnaround approach:** Establishes more collaborative approaches to turning around low-performing schools.
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ENHANCED SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY: The TDOE has begun to implement Tennessee Succeeds, the state's detailed plan for meeting all portions of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In Tennessee's school-accountability plan under Tennessee Succeeds, schools must continue to show specific levels of growth in achievement for all students and for historically underserved students. Schools also must better prepare students for success after high school, among many other measures.

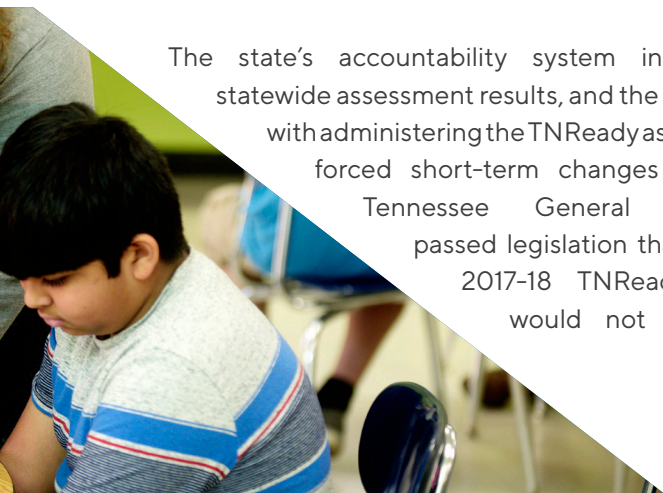
Tennessee Succeeds has put a sharper focus on how well every district and school is serving students of color, English learners, and students who are disabled or economically disadvantaged. The plan's accountability ratings provide breakdowns of performance for those students in all schools to help shine a light on disparities in achievement that are not narrowing. Tennessee's ESSA plan has been rated one of the nation's best for its accountability system.²³

The state's accountability system incorporates statewide assessment results, and the challenges with administering the TNReady assessments forced short-term changes after the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation that ensured 2017-18 TNReady results would not negatively

affect accountability for teachers, schools, and districts. The state's 2018 list of Priority Schools—those that score in the lowest 5 percent on statewide assessments and did not show high student growth—did not include scores from the 2017-18 exams.

In addition to the state's Priority Schools, Tennessee identified 102 schools in 40 districts as in need of additional targeted support and improvement. These schools either received a score of 1.0 or less on the state's new accountability framework and ranked in the bottom 5 percent for at least one student subgroup or ranked in the bottom 5 percent for two or more student subgroups.

Two issues stand in the way of Tennessee's new accountability system functioning as intended to improve education for students with the greatest needs and lowest academic performance. First, the state needs to successfully implement TNReady so the assessment data are available for gauging where intervention has been successful and where more action is needed. Because educators at the local level will be crucial to the success of any intervention, the state also will need to build their understanding of the new accountability measures. In conversations across the state, educators were aware of the state's accountability changes, but most could not identify strategies or resources to produce progress on the new measures.



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Tennessee identifies its lowest performing schools regularly to provide additional support for improvement and the opportunity for schools that show improvement to exit priority status. With the TNReady assessment challenges in the 2017-18 school year, additional processes were put in place to identify the state's priority and focus schools.

- **Priority Schools** are those in the bottom 5 percent of achievement for school years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 and don't meet student growth safe harbor or have a graduation rate of less than 67 percent in 2017-2018. Improvement options include the Achievement School District, district-led Innovation Zones, and the state and district collaborative approach of the Partnership Model.
 - **Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools** include all 2018 Priority Schools plus those that would fall into the bottom 5 percent of schools using 2017-2018 data.
 - **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement schools** are those who either have an overall school accountability score of 1.0 or less and rank in the bottom five percent for at least one accountability student group or rank in the bottom five percent for two or more student groups.
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LESSONS IN TURNAROUND: The state's school improvement efforts continue to evolve as Tennessee implements Tennessee Succeeds.

New research shows successes, challenges and valuable lessons from the state's school improvement strategies, including the statewide Achievement School District, designed to provide additional support for educators and students in some of the state's lowest performing struggling schools. The Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) found in 2018 that, while results in individual schools varied, district-run Innovation Zone (iZone) schools overall showed sustained improvements in student achievement compared with other schools identified as Priority Schools by the state.²⁶ Through five years of iZone implementation, the schools showed improved test scores in reading, math, and science. While studies of national school improvement grants have found that increasing resources by itself has not delivered student achievement gains across the nation, the experience in Tennessee suggests that pairing additional resources, support, and flexibility with a statewide lever in the form of the ASD could help improve student achievement at the local level.²⁷

Research on Tennessee's multi-pronged school turnaround work points to several strategies that are working, including a clear model of intervention

led by the district in partnership with the state, the use of comprehensive needs assessments, hiring and retaining effective teachers, providing an aligned curriculum and strong instructional support, improving school leadership, and ensuring conditions for continuous improvement at the school level.²⁸

The TDOE launched a new turnaround option in 2017 with Hamilton County Schools, creating the Hamilton County Partnership Network to advance school improvement in five of Chattanooga's Priority Schools. An advisory board jointly appointed by the state and district will set improvement goals for the schools.²⁹ This updated approach encourages shared ownership between the state and the local district of the school improvement work.

One essential strategy for school improvement is ensuring the most effective teachers work with the students who need them the most. District and state leaders told SCORE that the issues with TNReady test delivery and the decision to limit how districts can use the data in human capital decisions has left them feeling constrained in their ability to make strategic staffing decisions. While Tennessee already requires districts to implement differentiated pay for teachers, opportunities remain to expand strategic compensation to ensure more of the state's most effective teachers work with students who need them most.

ENSURING HIGH LEVELS OF EXPECTATIONS, INSTRUCTION

The national nonprofit education organization TNTP recently found in a study released in September 2018 that students' aspirations far exceed what schools often provide, especially with regard to instruction. The report calls this situation "The Opportunity Myth." From the report:

"We've been telling students that doing well in school creates opportunities—that showing up, doing the work, and meeting teachers' expectations will prepare them for their futures. Unfortunately, that's a myth. ... Far too many students graduate from high school still unprepared for the lives they want to lead. ... In fact, most students—and especially students of color, those from low-income families, those with mild to moderate disabilities, and English learners—spent the vast majority of their school days missing out on four crucial resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations."²⁴

TNTP studied nearly 4,000 students in five diverse school systems across the country to learn more about their experiences. Among its key findings: that "students spent more than 500 hours per school year on assignments that weren't appropriate for their grade and with instruction that didn't ask enough of them—the equivalent of six months of wasted class time in each core subject."

Patterns similar to those identified in the "Opportunity Myth" can be found in Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Education's CORE offices led Literacy Learning Walks that found that roughly 10 percent of over 700 observed lessons met the rigor and depth of the expectations of Tennessee's literacy standards.²⁵

Many Tennessee schools and districts are addressing these sobering findings. In Jackson-Madison County Public Schools, students across all grades are provided more rigorous instruction and more meaningful assignments using stronger, aligned instructional materials. In addition to providing teachers with strong materials, teachers receive deep professional learning on how to use the materials. The district leadership team has developed a shared vision of what excellent instruction should look like. In the last two years, the leadership team monitored progress through conducting more than 1,600 non-evaluative classroom observations and has seen impressive improvements on rigorous, standards-aligned instruction.



PROGRESS FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS:

Tennessee's approach to public charter schools has expanded access to a high-quality education for students, and particularly for historically underserved students. Since the first public charter school opened in Tennessee in 2003, the sector has grown to 111 schools serving more than 37,000 students in Shelby, Davidson, Hamilton, and Knox counties. In recent years, value-added data show that proportionally, a greater percentage of public charter schools in Nashville and Memphis are growing students by at least one year of learning for one year of schooling compared to their traditional public school counterparts.

Finding facilities has been a particular challenge to the expansion of high-quality public charter schools. Governor Haslam introduced and the General Assembly approved the Tennessee High-Quality Charter Schools Act in 2017 to provide \$6 million for three years to 67 schools through the Charter School Facilities Program. Legislation also was passed in 2018 to allow public charter schools to tap federal funds to bolster special education programs and to receive the same grants or loans as traditional schools for energy-efficient facilities. The 2017 High Quality Charter Schools Act helped improve local authorizing processes, but there are additional opportunities to

ensure more students have access to high-quality public schools.

MORE SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITY: Research documents that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as intensive poverty, abuse, exposure to drug abuse or violence, and other factors can cause such stress for children that it affects brain activity and learning skills.³⁰ Tennessee has made some efforts to address ACEs, including a Tennessee Department of Education-funded pilot on trauma-informed practices to empower school leaders and teachers to address ACEs in the school and classroom.³¹

Research shows that children in our state born to mothers who used opioids during pregnancy are considerably more likely to be evaluated and qualify for special education services.³² Interventions for students with greater or special needs may be particularly important as Tennessee continues to deal with the impact of the opioid epidemic on children.

To remain among the fastest-improving states in student achievement, Tennessee needs additional strategies to accelerate learning and expand opportunities for students with the greatest needs.





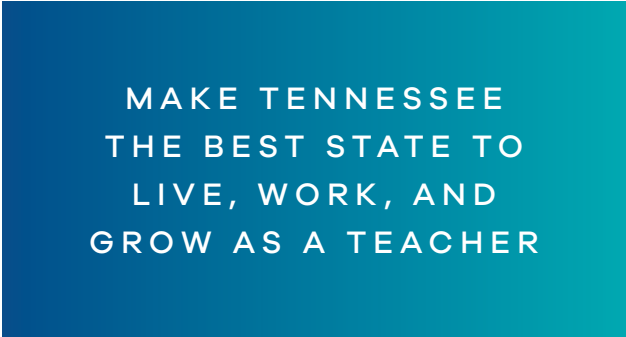
OTHER WORK FOR STUDENTS WITH THE GREATEST NEEDS

- SCORE and Nashville Health convened the Better Health, Better Learning Summit to highlight the connections between health and education outcomes. Topics covered included adverse childhood experiences, nutrition, rural health access, physical activity, and cross-sector partnerships. (August 2017)
 - TDOE released the Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook as a support tool outlining seven equity commitments to help leaders shift mindsets and practice that will benefit all students. (May 2018)
 - Tennessee was the sole winner of \$4.3 million Centers for Disease Control grant to supports professional learning for educators to improve student health and academic achievement. (July 2018)
 - The state budget included \$13.3 million in recurring Basic Education Program funding to ensure each school district has an RTI² coordinator. (2018)
 - The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition launched the Mosaic Fellowship to identify, convene, and build a network of leaders of color to shape the future of the educational excellence and equity movement. (2017)
 - Public Chapter 767: Charter School Special Education Funding. Allowed charter schools to access federal dollars for special education students as traditional public schools would. (2018)
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INCREASING SUPPORT FOR TENNESSEE TEACHERS

Tennessee has made substantial progress in making the state a better place to live, work, and grow as a teacher, in recognition of teachers as the most important in-school factor that influences student learning.³³ The state has provided new tools to help teachers improve their practice, and recent research specific to Tennessee supports that strategy. Tennessee teachers are also more engaged than ever in informing policy and practice statewide, and teacher leadership opportunities have been prioritized.³⁴

At the same time, there are additional ways to elevate teachers and the profession by connecting teacher evaluation feedback to professional learning, improving teacher preparation and racial and ethnic diversity, and developing compensation strategies to provide struggling schools with excellent teaching and leadership.



MAKE TENNESSEE
THE BEST STATE TO
LIVE, WORK, AND
GROW AS A TEACHER

Research released in 2018 by TERA finds that Tennessee teachers improve their practice over the course of their careers.³⁵ The research shows that teacher improvement — indicated by student test scores and classroom observations — is happening at about the same rates in low- and high-poverty schools. This growth varies depending on the school the teacher works in, suggesting that some places in Tennessee are doing a better job of getting teachers to improve faster. And there is evidence that teachers have shown more improvement in recent years. TERA's findings suggest that Tennessee educators can grow their skills throughout their careers, contrary to some earlier research suggesting that teacher improvement plateaus after four years.³⁶

VALUE OF QUALITY FEEDBACK: In extensive conversations with teachers across the state, SCORE found strong support for the state's foundations for improving teaching and learning: rigorous standards, annual aligned assessment, and multiple-measure teacher evaluations. On the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, 72 percent of teachers said they believed Tennessee's teacher-evaluation process has led to improvements in their teaching, and 69 percent believe it has led to improvements in student learning.

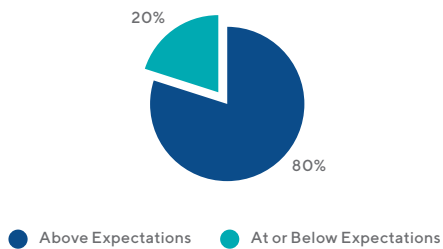
Teachers told SCORE that they value feedback from principals and other classroom observers who have expertise in instruction and their academic subject. At the same time, teachers and school and district leaders say they need additional support to improve instruction — including access to high-quality instructional materials they can use in classrooms. They also say they need strong, personalized professional development opportunities to sharpen their practice and learn from colleagues.

The state's educator evaluation system currently shows that more than 80 percent of teachers are rated as "exceeding expectations" in classroom observations.³⁷ These high ratings conflict with continuing gaps in student achievement and persistent challenges related to student growth. On the 2018 TNReady results, large majorities of students are not yet meeting expectations. About one-third of Tennessee students read proficiently by third grade. About one-third of students are on grade level in middle school math. About one-third of high school students are proficient in social studies. TERA's research demonstrates that school districts that provide more differentiated feedback to teachers see greater growth in their teachers. School leaders and other educators need better training, tools, and support to deliver that feedback.

Teachers also rely on statewide assessment data, and especially student growth, to refine their instruction and improve as professionals. TNReady content is regarded by teachers as an excellent measure of whether students have met the academic standards, but educators have expressed deep frustration with the test implementation.³⁸

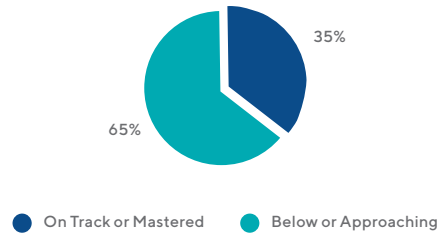
TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Percentage of teachers receiving a 4 or 5 overall rating



THIRD GRADE READING

Percentage of students on track or mastered



Source: Tennessee Department of Education for 3rd Grade reading

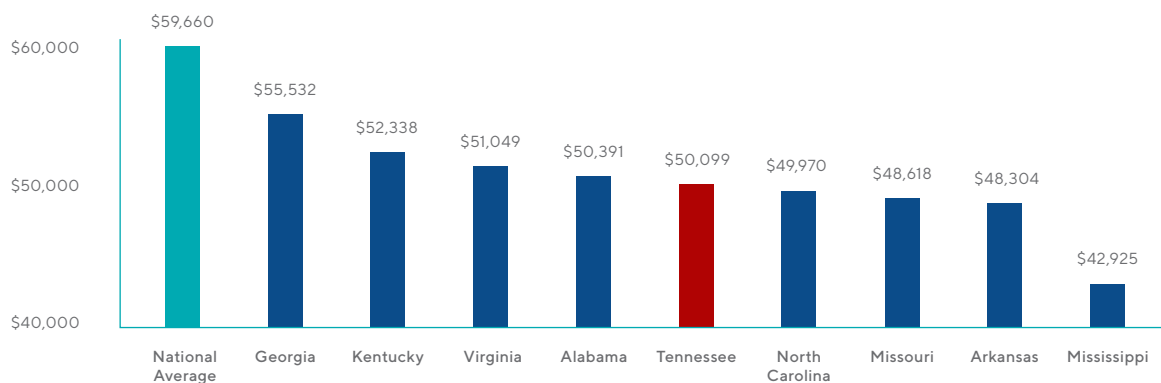
ELEVATING THE TEACHING PROFESSION:

Tennessee invested an additional \$1.5 billion in public education during the Haslam administration, including more than \$500 million in teacher pay raises. Yet, according to the National Education Association, Tennessee remains 36th in the nation for average teacher salary and in the middle of the pack among bordering states.³⁹



TEACHER SALARIES

While all states that border Tennessee trail the national average, Tennessee is in the middle of the pack for average teacher salaries



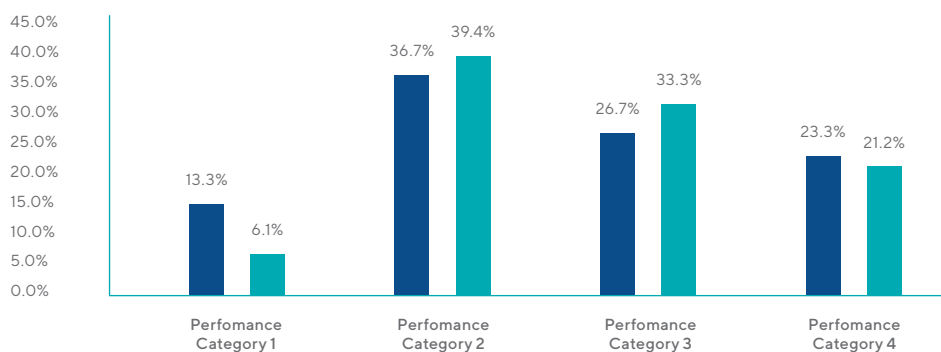
Source: National Education Association

Since 2016, more information has emerged on the quality of Tennessee’s teacher-preparation programs through the state’s public Teacher Prep Report Card. It shows that teacher-preparation programs are improving: 60 percent of the teacher-prep programs with inaugural report card scores in 2016 raised their scores in 2017. Eight of those 30 teacher-prep programs improved their performance by one performance category.⁴⁰

In addition to the annual Report Card, the department directly provides educator preparation programs an in-depth look at their performance through annual reports. These reports support programs in identifying where their graduates are excelling as well as opportunities for improvement. For programs that are not meeting expectations, these reports can lead to interim reviews to determine their ability to continue preparing candidates for classrooms.

EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

The State Board’s Teacher Prep Report Card helps publicly identify progress in improving the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.



Source: Tennessee State Board of Education

In 2017 and 2018, Tennessee took additional steps to support improved teacher preparation. Through legislation supported by SCORE, the state now requires teacher-preparation programs to provide information on their recent graduates who received low scores on their first teacher evaluations and to work with local school districts to support early-career teachers.

BROADENING THE TALENT POOL: Research finds that a teacher workforce that resembles the student population can help improve student achievement for all students, and especially for students of color.⁴¹ When students are exposed to teachers of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, they are more likely to excel academically. Students of color who have teachers of their own background are more likely to be identified for gifted services, have



better rates of college attendance, higher student achievement, and less exclusionary discipline.⁴²

These findings challenge Tennessee, where 37 percent of students are students of color but only 13 percent of teachers are people of color.

In addition, new research on schools in Tennessee and North Carolina shows that students of color have significantly higher graduation and college-enrollment rates if they had teachers of similar background at least once in grades K-3. Researchers call this finding “the role-model effect.”⁴³ Thus, improving diversity in the teacher workforce is key to improving student achievement for all students.

In SCORE’s conversations with school and district administrators, they described difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers of color, highlighting the need to learn more about the barriers in order to address them. Their observations echo new research showing that black teachers in Tennessee, particularly black male teachers, are more likely to leave their schools than white teachers, often to another school in the

same district. Teachers of color are also not exiting the profession more than their peers. Turnover is higher among black teachers in part because they often work in schools where overall teacher turnover is higher, including schools with greater student poverty and lower student achievement. “Turnover among black teachers is especially high when they have... few black teachers as colleagues,” the report added.⁴⁴

The Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance released a study in 2018 based on conversations with Tennessee educators to identify barriers to the recruitment and retention of educators of color – including teacher isolation, support of school leadership, teacher leadership pathways, and recruitment and hiring processes, among others.⁴⁵

Great teaching has been a strong driver of improved student achievement for Tennessee and with fresh attention and investment can continue to do so.

OTHER WORK TO MAKE TENNESSEE THE BEST STATE TO LIVE, WORK, AND GROW AS A TEACHER

- SCORE launched the Teach Today, Change Tomorrow campaign to inspire the next generation of great teachers in Tennessee, which included a coordinated tour by the state education Commissioner in 2018. (May 2017 and February 2018)
 - The TDOE provided Diversity Innovation Grant opportunities to encourage districts to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of educators of color. (September 2017)
 - SCORE and TDOE hosted a Teacher Leader Summit to bring together teacher leaders from across the state for networking, celebrating, and collaborating. This work led to a series of teacher-led professional events called Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching. (2017)
 - The Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance is founded in 2017 to elevate the voices of and provide support for educators of color.
 - TDOE released its first-ever report on educator diversity. (August 2018) It is followed by reports from the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance highlighting opportunities to improve educator diversity and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance on trends influencing retention of teachers of color. (November 2018)
 - Public Chapter 1036: Teacher Preparation Program Partnerships with K-12 Schools. Requires educator-preparation programs to identify the number of graduates in bottom two rankings of teacher evaluation in first year of teaching, determine costs of remediation, and encourage collaboration with K-12 districts to support early career teachers (2018)
 - Public Chapter 552: Alternative growth models. Requires school districts to use at least one appropriate alternative growth model by 2019-20. Also requires TDOE to develop valid and reliable alternative student growth models for grades and subjects that currently don't have models. (2018)
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IMPROVING EARLY LITERACY

Tennessee has put a significant focus on early literacy in recent years, and 2018 TNReady assessment results showed improvement in elementary English language arts (ELA) scores. There is still far to go to reach the statewide goal of 75 percent of third-graders reading on grade level. Research shows many of the state's third-graders are one to two years behind national averages. Only 37 percent of third-graders were on track in ELA on the 2018 TNReady assessment, and some racial and ethnic student groups fare much worse.

Teacher staffing decisions in the early grades show potential for improving literacy performance. Research shows that some of the state's less-effective teachers are moved to first and second grades, which are not included in state testing, indicating a need to improve access to effective teachers, especially for underserved students, in these foundational grades.⁴⁶

SHARPER FOCUS ON EARLY GRADES:

Tennessee has worked to strengthen early literacy skills through a variety of actions. The TDOE's Read to Be Ready initiative provides summer reading camps for struggling students, a network for coaches to improve reading instruction, and stronger collaboration between its CORE offices and

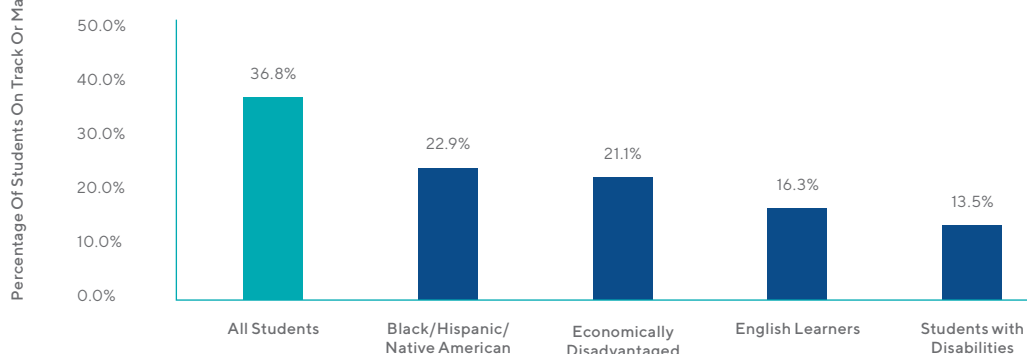
districts. The initiative expanded with Ready with Resources to support the adoption of high-quality instructional materials as the next round of English language arts textbook adoption takes place in 2020. Other efforts include revising educator-preparation literacy standards and convening a new literacy network for educator-preparation programs and school districts to improve teachers' skills in reading instruction.

SUPPORT EVERY
STUDENT TO BECOME
A STRONG READER
AND WRITER

Teachers and administrators welcomed the additional state-level support provided by the Read to Be Ready initiative, saying it demonstrates a clear commitment to early literacy improvement. Middle and high school teachers, though, say they need more support in how to help students who are behind. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Read to Be Ready in raising literacy skills will be judged from future assessment results.

DISPARITIES IN READING PERFORMANCE

Tennessee students with the greatest needs are less likely to be on track or at mastery in third-grade reading, further exacerbating inequities and future opportunity.



Source: Tennessee Department of Education

Teachers say they understand and have confidence in Tennessee's academic standards. In fact, 88 percent of teachers say on the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey that they understand what Tennessee's grade-level standards expect of them. Classroom observations, however, indicate that lessons often are not aligned with the standards. In more than 700 classroom observations of how students learn to read, fewer than 10 percent of observed classroom lessons included questions and tasks that met the state's literacy standards for rigor.⁴⁷

QUALITY IN CLASSROOM MATERIALS:

Tennessee's current ELA and reading textbooks were adopted before the state implemented higher academic standards. As a result, many textbooks now in Tennessee classrooms do not meet the state's more rigorous standards, and teachers have turned to creating their own instructional materials.⁴⁸ The 2017 Tennessee Educator Survey found that K-2 teachers are spending an average of 4½ hours per week sourcing materials just for literacy instruction.

High-quality instructional materials are proving to be an important lever for literacy improvement, and teachers are calling for more access to high-quality instructional materials and coherent professional learning on using those materials.⁴⁹ Educators also say high-quality instructional materials should be accompanied by the professional learning and support essential to improving classroom practice.

Through the Leading Innovation for Tennessee Education (LIFT) network, SCORE has learned that when teachers have access to high-quality instructional materials aligned to the standards coupled with professional learning tied to those instructional materials, classroom instruction can improve dramatically. LIFT is a group of dedicated district, school, and classroom leaders from across Tennessee who collectively represent more than a third of students, teachers, and principals in our state. Since 2016, LIFT educators have been working on improving literacy in K-5 classrooms by providing teachers with high-quality, aligned instructional materials in ELA classrooms.

In fall 2018, the majority of LIFT classroom

observations showed alignment with state academic standards, compared with fewer than 10 percent of observations showing this alignment in spring 2016.⁵⁰ Furthermore, more than half of tasks in observed LIFT classrooms showed strong or excellent alignment with the expectations defined by grade-level standards, compared with fewer than 10 percent in 2016.

Strategies to increase access to high-quality instructional material and teaching skills in using the material show promise for helping Tennessee address early literacy challenges.

OTHER WORK IN EARLY LITERACY

- TDOE launched Ready with Resources to support adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials ahead of the 2020 ELA adoption. This initiative builds on the work of Read to be Ready. (April 2018)
 - Tennessee's Read to be Ready summer programs served 7,700 students from low-income families in grades one through three not yet proficient in reading and writing. (Summer 2018)
 - TDOE began working with educator preparation programs to implement literacy standards to better prepare new educators to teach students how to read. (2018)
 - LIFT released its Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook to highlight best practices in the adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials, including improving aligned professional learning. (October 2018)
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BOLSTERING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Research shows that school leadership is second only to classroom teachers for improving student achievement.⁵¹ But many principals in Tennessee may not be well-prepared for their first school leadership role and need additional support.

Fewer than half of early-career principals who responded to the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey said they were well prepared by their university-based preparation program to establish a better teaching and learning culture in their school. Only about one in four said they were well prepared to effectively hire and retain teachers. Early-career school leaders say they simply are not prepared in practices that lead to student growth.⁵² Research has also shown that school leaders play an important role in retaining effective teachers.⁵³

DEVELOP SCHOOL
LEADERS READY TO
LEAD PEOPLE AND
LEARNING

Turnover among the ranks of Tennessee principals, especially early-career principals, is striking. About 270 school leader vacancies occur each year in Tennessee. Because many principals leave the profession through retirement or career changes, districts fill two-thirds of the vacancies – about 180 a year – with first-year school leaders. For many of these new leaders, their first assignments are in high-needs schools, which often have histories of less effective school leadership.⁵⁴ About a third of the state's new principals leave their school within three years.

Principals in high-poverty or low-performing schools have job-evaluation ratings about a half-point lower than principals at low-poverty or high-performing schools. About 38 percent of principals working in low-achieving schools have three or fewer years of experience, compared with about a quarter in high-achieving schools. In its recent study of improvements in iZone schools in Tennessee, TERA found that high-performing principals are more likely to leave high-poverty schools, creating a cycle of inexperienced leaders at schools already facing difficulty. This pattern also extends beyond iZone schools, underscoring the importance of school leadership for supporting all schools.

Teachers and school leaders in Tennessee say they value having instructional leaders knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction. Nearly three in four Tennessee principals say they spend more than 10

hours a week observing teachers and providing feedback. Still, only 40 percent of principals say they spend the same amount of time on instructional planning and coaching with teachers.⁵⁵

Principals also tell us they sometimes feel isolated in their jobs and need more opportunities to collaborate, learn and get feedback from their peers and more experienced leaders. In conversations with school leaders, rural principals in particular highlight this isolation.

Racial and ethnic diversity is an issue for school leadership, too. Only one in five school administrators are people of color in Tennessee, yet 37 percent of students are people of color. Research shows that school leaders of color are more likely to recruit teachers of color, which in turn can lead to higher student achievement, especially for students of color.⁵⁶

WHAT THE STATE HAS DONE: In spring 2018, Governor Haslam announced the Transforming School Leadership Initiative.⁵⁷ This public-private partnership—among the state, Scarlett Family Foundation, Ayers Foundation, and SCORE—is investing more than \$4 million to improve school leader preparation programs, reward and retain individuals effectively leading the state’s lowest performing schools, and provide more support for principals in rural communities. In these ways, Tennessee seeks to support existing school leaders and prepare strong future leaders to help address the 270 school-leader openings each year among the state’s more than 1,800 public schools.

In 2019 the State Board of Education will report descriptive information for principal-preparation programs that will coincide with the state’s Teacher Preparation Report Card. More data will be needed to show the levels of success of Tennessee’s principal preparation programs.⁵⁸

The Governor’s Academy for School Leadership, the Ayers Leadership Fellows Program, and the UT-Knoxville Leadership Academy are examples of innovative preparation programs. The AsPIRE rural school leadership initiative is working on supports

for rural principals. The Tennessee Transformational Leadership Alliance has nine programs in 20 districts that have a goal to train and develop 160 aspiring principals. While these programs are a start, nearly 50 percent of principals are in their first three years on the job, and many school leaders need additional training and support, especially in low-resource districts.

SUPPORT FOR RURAL PRINCIPALS: In September 2018, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) selected 52 principals for the inaugural class of the Tennessee Rural Principals Network, part of the Transforming School Leadership Initiative. The TDOE is also providing funding for scholarships to support professional development for up to 200 additional rural principals. The Rural Principals Network is offering ongoing professional learning for principals from state and national experts on evidence-based strategies to improve educator effectiveness and rural student outcomes. The rural network also fosters the exchange of ideas, strategies, resources, and common challenges with peers in a safe, supportive setting; working in a community of practice on a common challenge to identify best practices; and reduce leaders’ isolation.

The need to fill 10 percent of Tennessee’s principalships with first-year school leaders presents a challenge but also an opportunity to reshape principal preparation to ensure leaders from diverse backgrounds are ready to step in and succeed.



OTHER WORK ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- Through the Transforming School Leadership initiative, Tennessee invests more than \$4 million (\$3.5 million in state funds and \$600,000 from philanthropic sources) in improving school leadership. Efforts included funding fellowship positions for district and leader preparation programs, incentivizing school leaders to work in Tennessee's lowest-performing schools, and a development program for 50 rural principals. (March 2018)
 - The Tennessee Transformational Leadership Alliance serves as a statewide incubator for school leadership, supporting the design, implementation, and evaluation of school leader pipeline programs.
 - A SCORE Institute on School Leadership brought together Tennesseans to identify areas for improving school leadership, including preparation, induction, and retention; principal placement; and school leader diversity.
 - The Institute included the release of a research brief titled, "Why Principals Matter: Exploring the Research on School Leadership" (May 2018).
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MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS

Many of the opportunities to improve education identified by Tennessee educators and state leaders require reliable results from annual, rigorous statewide assessment. If we do not measure how students are doing, how will we know when they improve or need more support?

Educators say TNReady is valuable because it helps them set higher goals for students' learning. Yet, difficulties in the administration of the TNReady state assessments over the past few years, including in spring 2018, have limited the state's ability to use results for the maximum benefit of students. In conversations with nearly 30 superintendents and dozens of other educators, **SCORE consistently heard that pausing the test would be a step backward for our state and that effective implementation of TNReady needs to be one of the highest and most urgent priorities for the state.**

The public agrees. A SCORE poll of likely voters in August 2018 showed that parents want to fix TNReady rather than start from scratch. Sixty-one percent said the test should be fixed, while 27 percent said it cannot become a good measure of student progress.⁵⁹

Since 2012, voters consistently have favored an annual statewide assessment to measure whether

students meet Tennessee's academic standards. In 2018, nearly nine of 10 likely voters agreed the annual testing was important, with 54 percent calling it *very important*.

Under state law, TNReady informs school and district accountability, teacher evaluations, and more. Many educators and advocates for improving schools also point to the importance of annual assessment data to indicate areas of success and those in need of improvement. Achievement results provide parents and communities with information through school report cards, guide state decisions on which schools need greater support, and help the state monitor the growth of historically underserved students.

TAKING ACTION: The state has taken steps to improve delivery of TNReady for the 2018-19 school year and beyond. Showing education leadership late in his final term, Governor Haslam held a TNReady Listening Tour to hear suggestions from educators about improving the exam. In roundtable discussions and online responses, educators expressed concerns about the test's public credibility, the slow return of test results, students' lack of access to technology to take the exam, and inadequate instructional materials aligned with state standards and the test. Many educators favored keeping TNReady for the sake of consistency but clearly wanted improved delivery of the test.⁶⁰



In response, Governor Haslam and Education Commissioner McQueen announced in October changes for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. Before the fall testing window, Tennessee participated in a large-scale test of the TNReady platform. Test administration processes have been streamlined to eliminate confusion. Longer term, the state will make digital devices more affordable for schools, administer some TNReady tests only on paper, and give schools quicker access to results, among other changes.

Also, the state announced in November 2017 the reconvening of a special Tennessee Task Force on Student Testing and Assessment to develop further recommendations for improving state tests. Previous task force recommendations also have led to improvements, including a reduction in state testing overall, the shortening of some exams, and improved pre-testing materials and better reports on students' results for teachers and families. Additional recommendations to eliminate high school end-of-course exams in English III and chemistry were approved and will take effect during the 2018-19 school year.⁶¹

In December 2018, a performance audit from the Tennessee comptroller examined the events since 2014, when the General Assembly required the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to switch assessment vendors after three years of preparation.⁶² The audit revealed shortcomings in the TDOE management of the assessment vendor and assessment process, including vague contract language and insufficient monitoring of vendor activities. The audit findings highlight the critical need for deep and experienced assessment implementation capacity at the TDOE.

The state expects to complete by spring 2019 its process for securing the vendor to run the exam beginning in 2019-20. Also, a team of educators were chosen as TNReady Ambassadors to share information about improvements to the test and gather feedback moving forward.

Tennessee's plan to improve student achievement hinges on annual results from a rigorous, reliable statewide assessment, making successful test administration a top priority for the state.

2019

EDUCATION PRIORITIES FOR TENNESSEE

When Tennessee was bold and innovative in policymaking and practice, student achievement significantly improved. The state's historic gains since 2011 are proof of the wisdom of that approach and a testament to the work of students, educators, and countless other stakeholders. However, the innovations of the last 10 years can only get us so far. Tennessee still ranks in the bottom half of states. Too many students face opportunity gaps along their K-12 and post-high school experiences. **If we want Tennessee's students to be the best in the nation, we need to be bold yet again.**

With new leaders in Tennessee, embracing a spirit of innovation once more will ensure that our actions match our highest aspirations. These priorities for education in Tennessee will, with collaborative action, provide a launchpad to continued innovation and improvement on behalf of students everywhere in Tennessee.

REIMAGINE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Help Every Tennessee Student Discover Successful Routes To College, Career, And Opportunity

Tennessee became a national leader in education because for the past 10 years we have been bold and innovative for students, raising expectations, improving teaching, and expanding access to higher education. Despite strides in building a strong K-12 to postsecondary academic and work continuum, Tennessee has yet to fully connect that work to economic development and job creation efforts at the state and local levels.

The 21st century workforce is rapidly changing, and Tennessee students deserve a bright future with the opportunity to pursue a high-quality career that

leads to economic prosperity. It is time for Tennessee to be the innovative and bold leader again in this space specifically. Without a coordinated approach linking classrooms to careers, students will not be prepared for success as adults. This challenge is not just to educate individuals so they earn a credential or a degree, but to build a cohesive system that ensures all Tennesseans have the skills and knowledge they need to be full participants in our economy, our communities, and our democracy. This is Tennessee's next frontier.

First, Tennessee should **align the focus of K-12 education, postsecondary education, and economic development** on preparing all students for civic engagement and success in their chosen careers. A top priority for Tennessee's new leadership should be developing a clear, well-coordinated workforce development strategy that emphasizes **strong coordination, goal alignment, accountability for progress, innovation, and better governance – at both the state and local levels.**

Strong local intermediaries are critical to developing and maintaining relationships and programs between educational institutions and employers.



Schools, postsecondary institutions, employers, philanthropies, and communities should commit to providing learning experiences – including career awareness, exploration and preparation, and work-based learning – that can connect students to meaningful career pathways. Tennessee should accelerate efforts to require every student to complete a workforce and skills-based experience before graduating. These experiences can include project-based, work-based, or community-service based requirements as determined by local needs. Tennessee must extend learning beyond school walls to give students – particularly students who have historically lacked access to a wide range of pathways – real routes to opportunity.

Second, Tennessee must **reimagine the high school experience** and ensure that students are ready for 21st century workforce opportunities. Tennessee should accelerate efforts to require every student to complete a relevant workforce and skills-based experience before graduating. However, in a recent tour of Tennessee high schools, SCORE saw a need for wider and deeper career and college preparation opportunities for students. While many high schools offer some type of college and career preparation,

students need more than what is available now. A one-size-fits all comprehensive high school may no longer be the solution. Tennessee should revisit what high school looks like to ensure every student has a path through school that leads to success as adults.

This work can begin by **redesigning high school** to ensure postsecondary success and completion. Innovative efforts that meet the needs of diverse students, early and middle college high schools, personalized learning, themed-based learning communities, and high-quality career and technical education are a few approaches that can allow every student to thrive. Tennessee should explore what accountability and policy barriers stand in the way of thoughtful innovation, including seat-time requirements, course access, and work-based learning structures. In tandem, Tennessee should create an environment for innovation that leverages state, local, and private resources to explore and adapt innovations found around the world.

RETHINKING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

D-B Excel offers an alternative for **Kingsport City Schools** students who seek a nontraditional setting by offering a flexible schedule and an intense focus on blended, personalized learning. Students can learn at their own pace to accommodate work or extracurricular schedules. D-B Excel engages students in rigorous, standards-aligned instruction with a focus on project-based learning, allowing students to demonstrate content mastery through products, performances, or presentations.

Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools is rethinking school structures across the district to support college and career preparation. Seven career academies have been launched in traditional high schools with more planned, while dual enrollment and online course offerings have expanded. The district also is continuously refining CTE offerings based on student interest data and projected career openings in the state.

Tennessee should empower every community to offer **high-quality career and technical education programs** aligned to current and future local and regional industry needs. CTE courses and career pathways should seamlessly link to courses of study in Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) and community colleges so students can earn a credential or degree with labor market value.

SCORE's conversations with educators and business leaders revealed that hiring highly skilled CTE teachers remains a challenge. Tennessee should reduce financial barriers associated with teacher

licensure and encourage partnerships between employers, TCATs, community colleges, and school systems to support high-quality CTE courses that require substantial equipment investments.

Successful college and career preparation is built on a foundation of successful learning in K-12. Every student must receive strong instruction in the core subjects to have the greatest opportunities regarding college and career. Without that foundation, current gaps in college and career opportunities for historically underserved students will not close and indeed may widen. Strong learning in core subjects—



particularly in high school, when many pathway choices will be made – provides students the long-term critical thinking and learning skills they need to navigate the changing landscape of work.

Finally, Tennessee should **support students on their pathway to college and career through personalized advising.** High-quality advising is needed to help students navigate between choices, make strong plans, explore fields of interest that lead to good paying jobs, and make thoughtful corrections on their chosen pathways. This work should begin with improving the student-to-counselor ratios, providing more training on successful and individualized counseling for college and career pathways, and empowering practitioners with better data.

The state should provide greater technical assistance and resources to school districts and school leaders to strategically develop counseling and advising programs that better serve all students, beginning with exploration programs in elementary school that get more targeted through a student's path. In addition to the college and career advising work, current counselors provide support for students to develop the soft skills essential to workplace success. The new counseling standards adopted in 2018 are an important improvement to advising, but more support from the state coupled with reduced ratios can help support educators to successfully prioritize advising while continuing these important services.

Tennessee must continue to better use its data systems to inform the development of regionally relevant career pathways and student support services. These systems should yield highly accessible insights that empowers students, parents, and community leaders. In Chattanooga, the Public Education Foundation has collected and shared data on postsecondary outcomes with each school in its community for more than 15 years. This information can also help identify and remove barriers to opportunity, particularly for low-income students and students of color who have historically lagged in postsecondary attainment. High school and postsecondary attainment are steps toward

the state's ultimate goal: to ensure children grow into adults ready to take advantage of a full range of opportunity, from postsecondary education, to civic engagement, careers, and prosperity.

LOCAL FEEDBACK LOOPS THAT HELP IMPROVE COLLEGE AND CAREER OUTCOMES

The Ayers Foundation's college advising work focuses on providing persistent support of students from their high school through postsecondary experiences. Because of this continued relationship beyond high school, the foundation's college advisers receive important information about student preparedness for life after high school. Students can clearly describe what did – or, more importantly, did not – prepare them for postsecondary success. As Tennessee builds the data and personnel systems to connect K-12, postsecondary, and workforce outcomes, schools and communities can benefit from hearing the lived experiences of their community's recent high school graduates.



TENNESSEE'S FOUNDATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Champion And Maintain The Student-Focused Policies And Practices That Have Driven Unprecedented Progress In Student Achievement, With Greater Emphasis On Ensuring Equity For All Tennesseans

Tennessee made unprecedented progress in student achievement over the last decade when we embraced innovations and raised expectations by adopting rigorous college and career ready standards for student learning, a high-quality assessment aligned to those standards, and a multiple-measure accountability system to provide feedback to educators. What were innovations a few years ago have now become the bedrock for Tennessee's current and future success. Now more than ever, we must maintain commitment to these student-focused policies that have led to Tennessee's historic student achievement growth.

We must **demand the best assessment delivery in 2019 and beyond.** In order to do this, we must first implement best practices in assessment delivery in the 2018-19 school year. Going forward, we must identify a high quality assessment provider who can ensure successful assessment delivery. Most critical is fully implementing the findings of the statewide TNReady Listening Tour, including improving student access to computers, providing teachers more practice questions, streamlining assessment processes, building responsive technical support systems, and developing strong guidance for school districts on assessment processes.

However, fixing some of the assessment delivery issues does not guarantee implementation success. The Tennessee Department of Education must ensure a flawless administration through the deep involvement of technical, communications, and leadership expertise. Individuals with previous successful experience in statewide assessment implementation in other states should be involved in Tennessee's assessment implementation going forward.

Beyond the 2019 TNReady administration, state leaders must secure the future of high-quality annual assessments aligned to Tennessee's standards by selecting a high-quality vendor with past success in large-scale assessment implementation. Educators across the state say TNReady matches the content and expectations of Tennessee's academic standards, and that the key challenge remains assessment implementation. Furthermore, now that Tennessee has closed the honesty gap between the state assessment and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, we know that TNReady is more accurately measuring student learning. Securing a vendor with a track record of success will ensure that Tennessee is able to evaluate student progress reliably in the coming years.

Additionally, we must rebuild confidence among educators, students, and parents in the value of a rigorous, standards-aligned annual statewide assessment. Due to assessment implementation challenges of the last few years, confidence in annual assessment has dropped. The most important confidence-building step is successfully implementing TNReady in 2019. Educators and students deserve a top-quality administration that gives them confidence that their hard work was an accurate reflection of student learning.

Along with a reliable assessment, parents and educators deserve to receive information about how students perform in a timely, accessible, and useful format. The Tennessee Department of Education must develop a strong communications strategy with districts for quickly sharing results with students, educators, and parents. SCORE also heard from educators and parents that they wanted easier and more direct access to student results, preferring direct, online access when those results become available.

Each cycle of successful implementation and communication ensures Tennessee student progress is being measured and used to inform instruction. Only this success can rebuild the state's momentum toward reaching the top half of states in student achievement.

Finally, all of this work can only continue when our systems of continuous improvement are maintained, particularly at a moment of transition.

Tennessee must continue the multiple-measure accountability systems – and particularly the educator evaluation system – that underlie the unprecedented progress in student achievement.

Research shows that Tennessee’s teachers have improved at a faster rate than teachers in other states—a significant finding that upends years of conventional wisdom about teacher growth—and that the growth was more rapid during the implementation of multiple-measure teacher evaluation (2013 to 2015) than before (2008 to 2010). Through the Tennessee Educator Survey, we know that teachers have increasingly seen the evaluation system as a tool to support improved student learning. By combining student growth and observed classroom practice, teachers get a fuller picture of their impact on student learning. To better target educator support and growth opportunities,

Tennessee must continue its multiple-measure teacher evaluation system and build off its successes.

Tennessee’s ability to identify, cultivate, and evaluate student-focused education practices rests on the wealth of information we have on those practices. Through the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA), these data have allowed Tennessee to rigorously study our statewide initiatives to improve student learning and to build systems of continuous improvement. Not only do teachers get feedback through the evaluation system, but our entire public education system benefits from understanding patterns across Tennessee schools and classrooms. The Tennessee Department of Education’s InformTN project—a redesigned planning tool for district leaders that provides highly accessible education data – will help translate that information into insight as leaders seek to better serve students. By building upon our current accountability systems, Tennessee is poised to continue leading in education improvement.





TEACHERS, TEACHING, AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Commit To Excellent Teaching, Learning Opportunities, And Leadership In All Tennessee Schools

Elevating and supporting great teaching in classrooms across Tennessee – from increasing the quality and frequency of feedback to thinking more expansively about the quality of the educator pipeline -- has enabled better student outcomes. Teachers and school leaders are the first and second most important factors inside our schools for student achievement. Continued progress requires deeper investments in educators.

First, Tennessee’s rigorous academic standards require the state to **provide teachers with the high-quality instructional materials and support for using those resources for strong instruction**. Research shows the benefits of high-quality instructional materials, which include extending student learning growth, being a cost-effective way to improve instructional quality, and expanding equitable access to rigorous and engaging learning opportunities.

Each year in SCORE’s progress monitoring conversations, educators have called out the enormous amount of time they spend finding

instructional resources and asked for materials that better reflect the expectations of Tennessee’s academic standards. In the Tennessee Educator Survey, teachers who reported they received professional learning aligned to their instructional materials were more likely to feel that their materials were well-suited to teaching the standards.

When research and practice offer such compelling evidence for student success, we must act accordingly. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), the State Board of Education (SBE), and school districts should develop the capacity of district and school leaders to adopt high quality instructional materials, beginning with the 2020 English Language Arts adoption. Philanthropy and school districts should build momentum and knowledge of the crucial role instructional materials and aligned professional learning can play in ensuring every student has access to rigorous and engaging instruction. Empowering educators to be deeply involved in the selection, adoption, and use of high-quality instruction materials ensures the success of this work. According to research, high-quality curriculum selection alone is not enough, and must be coupled with deep knowledge building of the curriculum for educators through job-embedded and focused training.

Second, **Tennessee must continue to support teachers as professionals by advancing the**

current teacher evaluation system, refining the professional learning systems that support educators, and providing teacher leadership opportunities to grow.

The current evaluation system combining multiple classroom observations and annual information on student achievement and growth provides teachers with regular feedback that helps improve student learning. Increasingly over time, teachers reported on the Tennessee Educator Survey that feedback from the evaluation improves their instruction, reaching 72 percent in 2018. We must build off the successes of our current system.

Tennessee's teacher observation processes and tools need improvement. Our students are not meeting expectations – for example, 35 percent of Tennessee students are reading on grade level – yet, more than 80 percent of teachers are rated above expectations. With teacher observations accounting for 50 percent or more of the evaluation, specific and actionable feedback is essential for giving teachers the guidance needed improve instruction. Offering professional learning experiences that empower teachers to address areas for improvement identified during evaluation also is crucial.

The TDOE should continue to refine and enhance the teacher evaluation process to provide every teacher with acknowledgement of areas of strength as well as accurate and actionable feedback that improves instruction. In addition, the TDOE should strengthen training, support, and resources for evaluators to improve the quality of the feedback teachers receive. The combination of accurate feedback and targeted professional learning linked to observation of teacher practice creates the environment for teachers to thrive and student learning to improve.

Finally, **Tennessee must support the recruitment and retention of effective educators—and particularly teachers and school leaders of color—through effective preparation and improving teacher pay.** Collaboration between the SBE, TDOE, and educator preparation programs through the report card and annual report processes has clearly yielded improvements that will, over time, increase the supply of effective teachers. Building

on this success, Tennessee should enhance the capacity of the SBE and TDOE to support further improvement at educator preparation programs, including fostering collaboration between districts and preparation programs and building the systems to hold principal preparation programs accountable.

Tennessee also must strengthen the principal pipeline from preparation programs to district-level talent management to ensure all school leaders—and more school leaders of color—are prepared for and supported in the first years of their leadership roles. There are significant opportunities to innovate with educator preparation programs. We should work to ensure that every teacher and leader preparation program is high quality – including expanding access to those getting results and shutting down low-quality programs. Districts should also evaluate and improve induction, mentoring, and professional learning processes for school leaders. Pilot programs should be created to explore ways to help current principals improve their skills. Tennessee is poised to lead the nation by embracing these preparation opportunities.

Beyond preparation, there is more we can do to support our current educators. Tennessee's recent history of investment **in teacher compensation should continue as a priority as Tennessee is currently 36th in the nation in teacher pay.** We also have more to learn about how to ensure state investments in teacher compensation make their way to teachers. As annual assessment implementation improves, Tennessee can better support thoughtful strategic compensation efforts that prioritize access to effective teaching for students and schools that most need our best teachers.

Tennessee has opportunities to better recruit and retain educators of color. A growing body of research links the unique contributions of educators of color to positive student learning outcomes. As the population of students of color increases in Tennessee, we should identify and expand state and local efforts that can improve teacher diversity – including enhanced recruitment of students of color to teaching, professional networks for teachers of color, and creation of school cultures that support teachers of color.

INNOVATE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Foster Innovation To Accelerate Student Achievement And Address Long-Standing Disparities

Ensuring great college and career readiness routes for students, protecting Tennessee's foundations for student success, and supporting great teaching, learning, and leadership are crucial priorities for Tennessee in the next year, but these priorities alone will not lead Tennessee to be best in the nation. Tennessee must recommit to fostering a culture of innovation, learning from what we have done in the past, examining promising practices across the country and globe, and innovating for what comes next. This is not a moment to be complacent.

To innovate for improvement, Tennessee must learn from and expand high-quality, innovative schools. Tennessee should **expand access to high-quality public school options, particularly public charter schools, that support innovation and drive school improvement.**

From Tennessee's experience, students benefit when we embrace innovations that put students at the center and successfully addresses unmet education needs. High-quality public charter schools are one way Tennessee provides students options for an excellent education. They can also provide innovative approaches to better serve more students and add capacity for innovation in school districts.

To encourage these innovations, we must create the environment where high-quality public charter schools can thrive. First, the state must provide a long-term solution to public charter schools facility funding, removing a distraction from the schools' primary focus of educating students. Second, Tennessee must continuously improve which and how public charter schools are authorized to enable effective public charter schools to serve students and limit the reach of ineffective schools. This can include strengthening the relationship between school district authorizers and the public charter schools they are responsible for, as well as exploring the establishment of a statewide authorizer. Finally, we

must explore opportunities to support collaboration between traditional public and public charter schools. Both public charter schools and traditional public schools are innovating to improve student learning and can benefit from collaboratively solving common problems of practice. Focusing the conversation on student needs will redirect the discussion on the policies and practices that lead to student learning gains.

While expanding access to high-quality schools is important, Tennessee must also improve the state's lowest-performing schools. This work is incomplete until all students are learning on grade level. Tennessee should continuously improve its turnaround efforts, supporting highly focused district-led efforts and maintaining a strong state role in school improvement. Tennessee must analyze lessons learned from its current turnaround experiences in the Achievement School District, iZone, and Partnership Zone schools.

The results of the last several years in Tennessee suggest that the work of iZones, the Achievement School District, and other school improvement efforts are connected. Maintaining the role of the Achievement School District as a state-level mechanism to drive school improvement is an important cornerstone of this strategy that state leaders should not turn away from.

In addition to expanding high-quality schools and supporting our lowest-performing schools, Tennessee must be innovative in how it thinks about providing resources to schools and districts. **Tennessee should identify opportunities for innovation in school funding, with a focus on ensuring an equitable allocation of resources for students with the greatest needs.** Under the Tennessee Succeeds plan, the state will begin sharing per pupil funding information at the school level in 2019. This moment should spur additional efforts to increase transparency for education funding and spending to identify opportunities for streamlining, expanding, and improving school finance. Better school finance practices will build Tennessee's capacity to seize future opportunities to improve teacher pay and provide more support for students facing opportunity gaps.

INNOVATION AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

1. The **Centers for Applied Science and Technology (CAST)** schools in San Antonio were created in partnership with district leaders, industry executives, and local institutions of higher education. Using a computer based learning system to enable its economically diverse student body to pursue areas of interest, academic standards are interwoven with career and technical education. College coursework is embedded into the program, and students can graduate with an associate's degree as well as industry certifications.
 2. At **Valor Collegiate Academies**, a personalized development program called Compass helps students thrive individually and in the whole school environment. Through various strategies such as morning meetings with an advisor and badges that demonstrate competency, Valor students learn to reflect on their personal experiences and use that to drive their growth both as students as well as people. This approach has been integral to their success, with Valor schools having been in the top 5 percent of Tennessee schools on growth and achievement since its founding in 2014.
-

One innovative education funding strategy showing promise across the country is student-based budgeting, which weights the school funding formula according to individual student needs regardless of what public school they attend. Tennessee should study and elevate the work of school districts within Tennessee and nationally that implement student-based budgeting to better serve students with the greatest needs. Some of this work is already underway in Nashville and Memphis, yielding important insights on how the state can pursue innovations. To implement this well, school leaders must be equipped to navigate these issues as they make school-level decisions to better support students. The Tennessee Department of Education, nonprofits, and philanthropy should consider how they can better equip school leaders to understand best practices with school finance.

A successful transition in leadership depends on never losing sight of what matters most. Tennessee's economic prosperity and civic health are inextricably linked to providing students a high-quality education that prepares them for postsecondary

education, military service, and careers. As we have seen over the past two administrations, Tennessee advances faster when we put the needs of students first and focus on what is best for their futures. The priorities in this report lay out a path Tennessee can follow in 2019 to ensure another year of progress for students.



ABOUT SCORE

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) works collaboratively with state, local, and national partners to advance policies and practices for greater student success across Tennessee. SCORE is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan advocacy and research institution, founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate Majority Leader. SCORE measures success by the academic growth and achievement of Tennessee's students.

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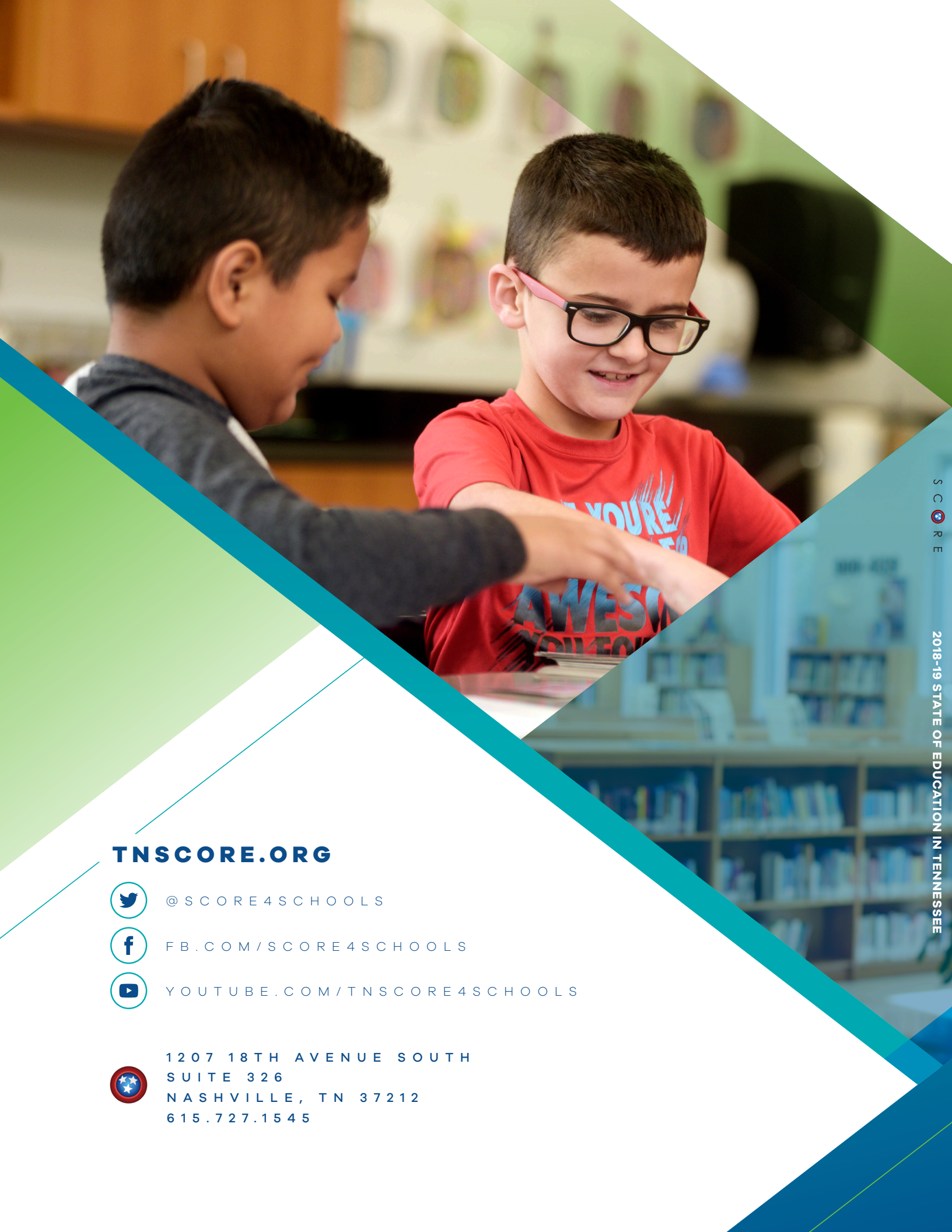
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