

# 2016-17 STATE OF EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE



S C  R E  
State Collaborative on Reforming Education





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## **LETTER FROM SENATOR BILL FRIST AND JAMIE WOODSON**

February 7, 2017

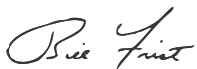
In recent years, Tennessee has dramatically improved student achievement in K-12 education, setting records for academic progress. We at SCORE believe Tennessee's exceptional progress can be credited to educators, policymakers, and community and business leaders who have demonstrated collaboration in focusing on what is best for students, courage in setting bold goals, excellence and innovation in achieving those goals, and optimism in believing that our students can lead the nation in academic improvement.

Tennessee now ranks in the top 20 states in student achievement for fourth-grade science and in the top 25 for both eighth-grade science and fourth-grade math. Students in Tennessee are now taking courses aligned to more rigorous academic standards that better prepare them for success in the next grade and what comes after high school graduation. In addition, more graduates are enrolling in postsecondary programs that will provide them the skills and knowledge they need for productive lives and careers. This improvement is remarkable and should be celebrated.

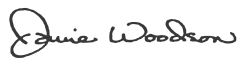
Even with our recent success as a state, many students in Tennessee are still far from realizing the ultimate goal that is set for them—that every Tennessee student graduates from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. The 2016-17 *State of Education in Tennessee* report examines the work that has produced our progress and identifies opportunities for continued growth.

As we begin 2017, it is important to reflect on the progress we have made and focus on what is needed to sustain the momentum. Now, more than ever, we must accelerate our support for educators, drive toward excellence and equity for all students, and stand firm on the policies that have led to our historic gains. Importantly, 2017 also marks the beginning of a critical transition for Tennessee. This year the conversation will begin about who will succeed Governor Bill Haslam as Tennessee's 50th governor and what policies candidates for governor will commit to pursue. Throughout these conversations, we hope that the priorities outlined in this report provide the lens through which Tennessee's leaders consider education policy and practice.

It will take the dedication of all partners in this work for Tennessee to reach success for all students. We remain eager for the work ahead, knowing that the future of Tennessee's students, and of our state, depends on it. We look forward to working together in 2017 and hope you will join us as we seek to meet our state's goals for our students.



**Senator Bill Frist, MD**  
SCORE Founder and Chairman



**Jamie Woodson**  
SCORE Executive Chairman and CEO



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY







**Just 10 years ago, Tennessee was criticized in a national report for misrepresenting student preparedness to public school students and their parents. State data showed that nearly all students were proficient in their courses, while most graduated unprepared for college and work. This defining moment sparked nearly a decade of work in Tennessee to ensure that K-12 education better prepares all students for education beyond high school, productive work, and meaningful involvement in democratic society. The work in both policy and practice has led to nationally recognized academic progress.**

Although there has been great progress, too many Tennessee students—especially those of color, from low-income backgrounds, who have disabilities, or are English learners—are not on track to graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Each year since 2009, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) has published a comprehensive annual report on the state of public education in Tennessee. These reports provide an update on Tennessee's work to improve student achievement, identify challenges that remain, and set education priorities for the coming year. The *2016-17 State of Education in Tennessee* report is informed by focus groups with teachers and school and district leaders; interviews with policymakers, educator preparation program leaders, and other higher education faculty; analysis of a broad set of data input; the members of SCORE's Steering Committee; and feedback from leading state and national education partners.

The first section of this report provides a data-based view of progress and remaining areas of opportunity toward SCORE's strategic goals. After years of ranking near the bottom of all states on the Nation's Report Card, historic gains over the most recent NAEP assessments have moved Tennessee into the top half of states for fourth-graders in math and science, as well as for eighth-graders in science. Tennessee is moving in the right direction in eighth-grade reading, but an urgent focus on early grades literacy is needed to drive improvement toward the top half of states in fourth-grade reading. Tennessee's continued rise will depend on meeting the learning needs of all students, while narrowing student achievement gaps.

State and national assessment data show Tennessee has made some progress in narrowing achievement gaps—particularly for students with disabilities, English learners, and in urban districts. However, stark gaps in proficiency remain across income backgrounds, racial and ethnic populations, geographic locations, and student needs. Ensuring more equitable opportunities for all students, especially underserved students, will drive continued progress statewide. This work should better prepare more students for postsecondary and career success.

Tennessee has committed to expanding postsecondary opportunity, and students have responded by enrolling in larger numbers at our state's colleges and universities. Still, data show far too few Tennessee students meet college-ready benchmarks to have the state on track for the state's goal of 55 percent postsecondary attainment by 2025.

The second section of the report provides an update on the work across three areas that have served as foundations for Tennessee's work to improve student achievement. **We believe that by empowering people, insisting on high expectations, and fostering a culture of innovation, Tennessee can achieve the highest goals for student achievement.**

In the final section of the report, SCORE identifies three priority areas for Tennessee to maintain our state's momentum to improve student achievement statewide in 2017. These priorities are:

- **Accelerate Support for Tennessee's Educators.** Effective teaching is the most important in-school factor in improving student learning. Research also shows that approximately 25 percent of a school's effect on student academic gains can be attributed to effective school leadership.<sup>1</sup> Tennessee's educators have led the way for students to make historic academic gains, and the state should now accelerate support for its educators.
- **Drive toward Excellence and Equity for All Tennessee Students—Especially Underserved Students.** Despite signs of progress, achievement gaps remain in ensuring both excellence and equity for all Tennessee students regardless of income, race, geographic location, or student need. To provide every student an education that prepares him or her for postsecondary education and the workforce, Tennessee must honestly tackle the persistent and urgent challenges faced by underserved students.
- **Stand Firm on Tennessee's Policies That Have Led to Historic Gains, While Seizing Opportunities to Advance Innovation.** As Tennessee works to support educators and drive excellence and equity for all students, our state cannot back away from the foundational policies that have led to increased student achievement. Policymakers and state leaders must recommit to the policies that have led to gains for students, while identifying and accelerating opportunities for new ideas and efforts.





These priorities reflect what research and experience have shown makes the most impact for students. Teachers and school leaders have the greatest impact in schools on student achievement. Tennessee must place intense focus on the urgent needs of historically underserved students to ensure that all students receive the educational opportunities they deserve. Educators need stability to build on the success sparked by policy progress over recent years. We at SCORE remain eager for the work ahead, knowing that the future of Tennessee's students, and of our state, depends on it.



## TENNESSEE EDUCATION: AT A GLANCE



**146**  
school districts

**1,833**  
schools

**64,939**  
teachers

**5,290**  
administrators

**\$9,499**  
average per-pupil spending

	Students
Total	<b>997,893</b>
African American	24%
Asian	2%
Hispanic / Latino	9%
White	64%
Rural	30%
English Learners	5%
Students with Disabilities	14%
Economically Disadvantaged*	35%

\*Percentage differs substantially from 2015-16 figure (58%) because of a change in formula used by the Tennessee Department of Education. For more information, see Tennessee State Report Card website.

**88.5%**  
2016 high school  
graduation rate

**16%**  
Tennessee students who  
have taken four or more  
early postsecondary  
courses

**19.4**  
Average ACT score  
for public high  
school students

**17%**  
Proportion of students  
scoring college-ready  
in all four ACT subject  
areas

**50%**  
Chance a student with  
at least four early  
postsecondary courses  
will score above 21 on  
the ACT

**80%**  
High school graduates  
who say they want to  
pursue postsecondary  
education

**62.5%**  
Percent of high school  
graduates enrolled in a  
postsecondary institution

**\$9,030**  
Average income of high  
school graduates in  
Tennessee who go directly  
into the workforce

**16%**  
Chance those jobs pay  
above minimum wage



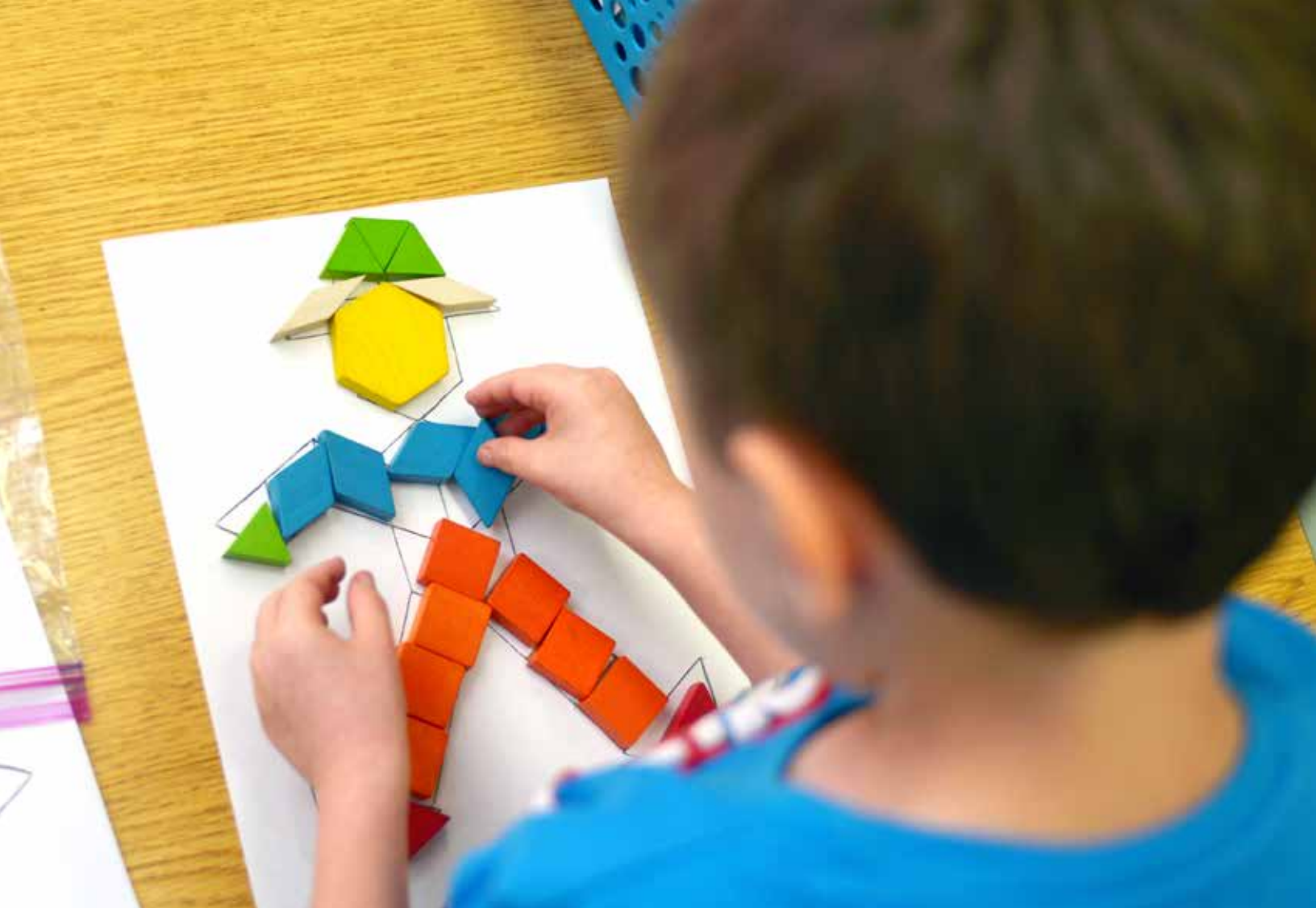
# THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE



## INTRODUCTION

When a Tennessee student receives a high school diploma, that new graduate should have the confidence that he or she is prepared for success in any chosen path forward. Whether Tennessee high school graduates choose to go directly into a postsecondary program, the military, or another career path, the education they received in Tennessee's K-12 public schools should have them ready. Ten years ago, the US Chamber of Commerce rebuked Tennessee in a national report for misleading public school students and their parents. The state claimed nearly all students were proficient in their courses, while most graduated unprepared for college and work.<sup>2</sup> This defining moment sparked nearly a decade of work in Tennessee to ensure that K-12 education is better preparing all students for education beyond high school, productive work, and meaningful involvement in democratic society. The work in both policy and practice has led to nationally recognized academic progress.

Since 2009, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) has published a comprehensive annual report on the state of public education in Tennessee. To inform the 2016-17 *State of Education in Tennessee*, we listened to teachers and school and district leaders in focus groups across the state; interviewed educator preparation program leaders and other higher education faculty; met with legislators and other policymakers; analyzed a broad set of data; and gathered insights from leading state and national partners. The state- and district-level data, coupled with diverse perspectives from the field, enable us to provide an update on progress toward strategic goals for Tennessee students and a consensus set of priorities to stay on the path to student success in 2017.



SCORE, in collaboration with education partners across Tennessee, has set **three bold student achievement goals** with clear indicators of progress for the state:

1. Tennessee continues to be among the fastest improving states in the country and ranks in the top half of all states in student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 2020.
2. Tennessee closes all student achievement gaps – at every grade level and subject area – by income, race, geographic location, and student need. These gaps should be narrowing on both state and national assessments by 2020.
3. Every Tennessee student graduates from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. Postsecondary enrollment and degree attainment rates by 2020 should be supporting achievement of Tennessee’s Drive to 55.

The first section of this report provides a data-based view of progress on these three strategic goals—both areas of improvement and remaining opportunity. The second section provides an update on the work across three areas that have served as foundations for Tennessee’s work to improve student achievement. We believe that by empowering people, insisting on high expectations, and fostering a culture of innovation, Tennessee can achieve these goals. In the final section of the report, we identify three priority areas for Tennessee to maintain our state’s momentum to improve student achievement statewide in 2017. Recognizing that maximum impact is made through collective action, these priorities include roles for partners across the state—not just for SCORE.

The information in this report and the priorities identified for 2017 make the case for sustained commitment by Tennesseans across the Volunteer State to the work of ensuring all students receive the education they need to prepare for success beyond high school graduation.

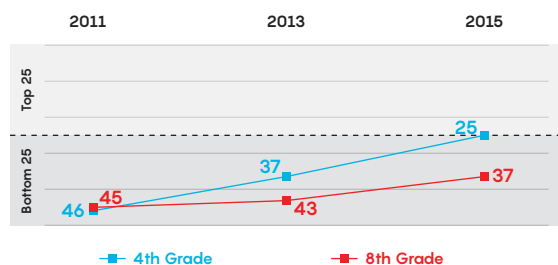
## PROGRESS TOWARD STUDENT GOALS

Tennessee's student achievement goals are ambitious, but we believe they are also achievable. Data from the Nation's Report Card, state assessments like TNReady, and college entrance exams provide indicators of how well students are progressing toward these goals.

**Goal 1:** Tennessee continues to be among the fastest-improving states in the country and ranks in the top half of all states in student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 2020.

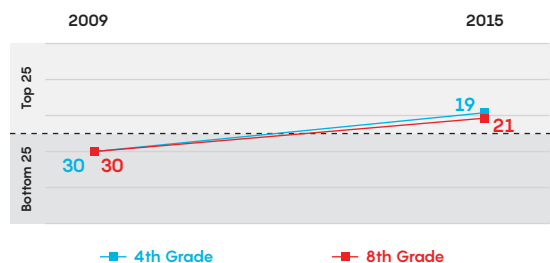
Every two years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card, assesses a random sample of students in each state and the District of Columbia to compare how well they are mastering rigorous course content. As documented in the 2015-16 *State of Education in Tennessee* report, Tennessee was the fastest improving state on NAEP in 2013, and the 2015 results confirm that the 2013 gains were real and lasting. **For the first time, Tennessee students in 2015 ranked in the top half of states in fourth-grade math, rising to 25th in the nation after ranking 46th just four years before.** In math, Tennessee's eighth-grade performance has risen over recent years, but achievement would need to surpass that of peers in 12 states to reach the top half nationwide by 2020.

FIGURE 1. TENNESSEE NAEP RANKINGS IN MATH, 2011-15



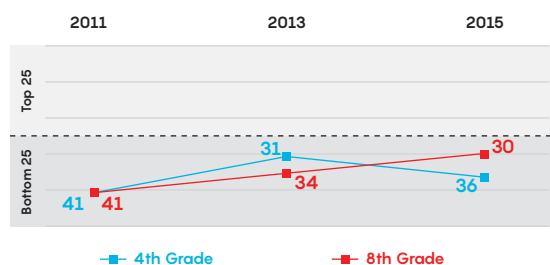
NAEP science results released in October 2016 show that Tennessee students now rank in the top half nationally in fourth- and eighth-grade science. This remarkable improvement now places the state in the top 20 in the nation in fourth-grade science.

FIGURE 2. TENNESSEE NAEP RANKINGS IN SCIENCE, 2009 & 2015



Tennessee students have made steady gains toward the top half in eighth-grade reading, but elementary readers' ranking declined from 2013 to 2015. This decline, along with state data discussed later in this report, shows the need for urgent action to improve early-grades literacy.

FIGURE 3. TENNESSEE NAEP RANKINGS IN READING, 2011-15



A sample of fourth- and eighth-grade students will take NAEP math and reading assessments in 2017, and results from those exams will provide an updated view of how well Tennessee students are progressing compared to their peers nationally.

After years of ranking near the bottom of all states on the Nation's Report Card, historic gains shown in the most recent NAEP assessments have moved Tennessee into the top half of states for fourth-graders in math and science, as well as



for eighth-graders in science. Tennessee is moving in the right direction in eighth-grade reading, but a concerted effort to improve teaching and learning literacy in early grades is needed to ensure Tennessee students make the necessary gains to be prepared for middle and high school learning.

**Goal 2: Tennessee closes all student achievement gaps—at every grade level and subject area—by income, race, geographic location, and student need. These gaps should be narrowing on both state and national assessments by 2020.**

Tennessee should celebrate significant progress toward the goal of improved rankings among states in math and reading. Challenges persist, however, in the work to narrow achievement gaps among students. These gaps underscore the continued need to provide the highest level of education to all Tennessee students, especially historically underserved students.

Tennessee can measure achievement gaps on both NAEP and the state's TNReady assessment. However, in the 2015-16 school year, Tennessee's testing vendor failed to fully implement TNReady state assessments for grades 3-8. The resulting lack of data has significantly limited educator, parent, student, and policymaker understanding of student performance on these new, more rigorous, state standards-aligned assessments.

## NAEP

Despite the lack of complete state data for 2016, NAEP results show where achievement gaps are narrowing, and where they remain wide. The following data show trends in NAEP achievement by income, race and ethnicity, geographic area, and for students with disabilities and English learners over recent years.

NAEP results show a strong and persisting relationship between income status and student academic performance. This relationship holds true at the state and national levels. **From 2007-15, achievement gaps slightly widened between Tennessee's low-income students and their more-advantaged peers.** Math and reading scores in both fourth and eighth grades reflect this trend. In general, the data show Tennessee's progress, but highlight continuing gaps in achievement related to family income level. Economically disadvantaged (ED) students are improving in academic performance, but their more advantaged peers are improving faster. (Figures 4-7)

In 2013, Tennessee's ED eighth-grade students surpassed the national average score for ED students on the reading assessment. In 2015, Tennessee fourth-grade ED students also surpassed the ED student national average in math. Although national average scores for ED students dipped in 2015, Tennessee's eighth-grade math scores rose. **Overall, Tennessee's non-economically disadvantaged students have improved greatly, catching up to, and sometimes surpassing, their peers' national average scores on math and reading assessments.**

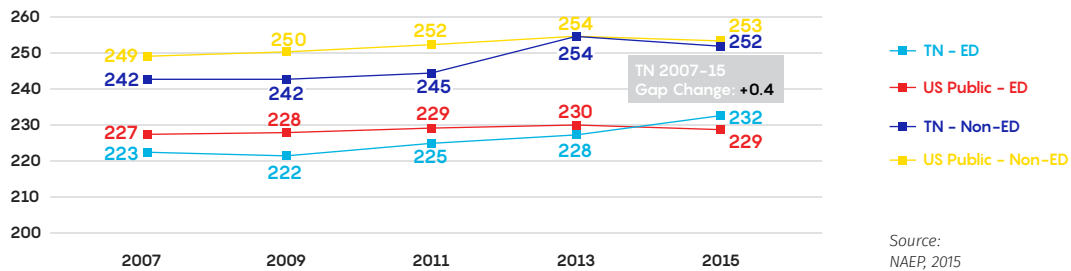
## HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED STUDENTS IN TENNESSEE

The state of Tennessee has identified four student populations as historically underserved by the public education system:

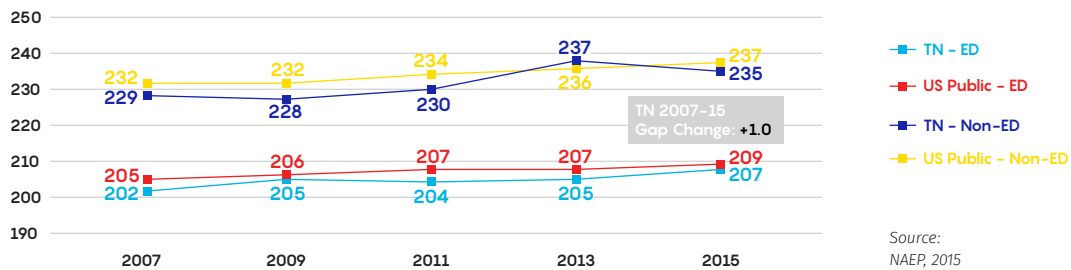
- Black, Hispanic, and Native American students
- Economically disadvantaged students
- Students with disabilities
- English learner students



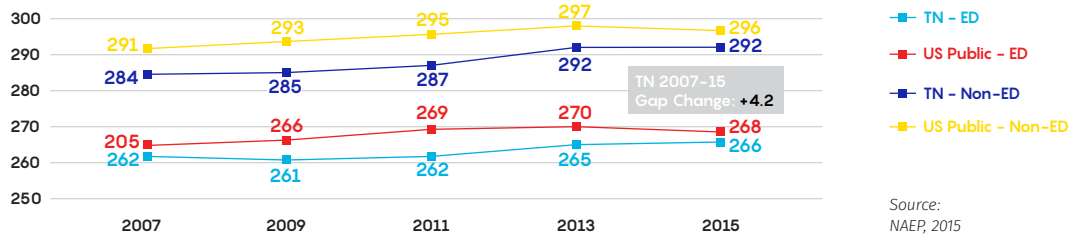
**FIGURE 4. GRADE 4 NAEP MATH SCORES BY ECONOMIC STATUS**



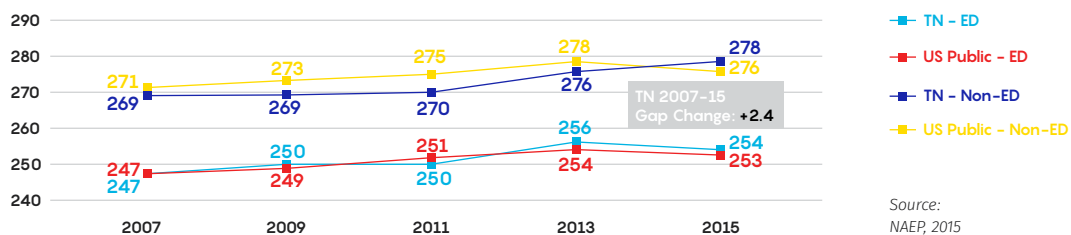
**FIGURE 5. GRADE 4 NAEP READING SCORES BY ECONOMIC STATUS**



**FIGURE 6. GRADE 8 NAEP MATH SCORES BY ECONOMIC STATUS**



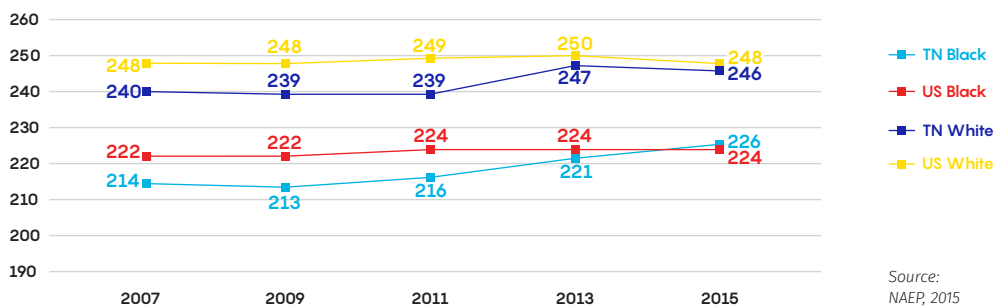
**FIGURE 7. GRADE 8 NAEP READING SCORES BY ECONOMIC STATUS**



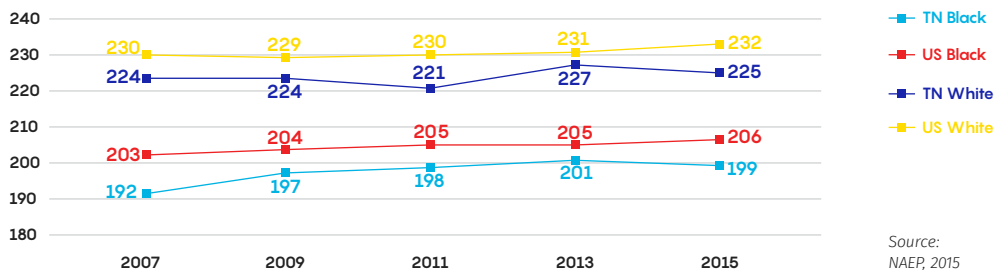
Tennessee ranks fourth nationally in combined fourth- and eighth-grade proficiency rate increases on NAEP math and reading exams. **However, the gap in proficiency between low-income students and their more-advantaged peers has grown 8.6 percentage points.** According to a January 2016 analysis by *Education Week*, this widening gap places Tennessee far behind many states on efforts to narrow achievement gaps associated with math and reading proficiency across income levels.<sup>3</sup>

Student performance results by race and ethnicity show similar trends to those of ED students in Tennessee. Generally, gaps remained static or grew in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade reading and math. However, Tennessee is seeing improvement in fourth-grade math among both African American and white students. **In 2015, African American students in Tennessee outperformed the national average for their African American peers in fourth-grade math for the first time.** In addition, the achievement gap between Tennessee's African American and white students in fourth-grade math is closing faster than the national average.

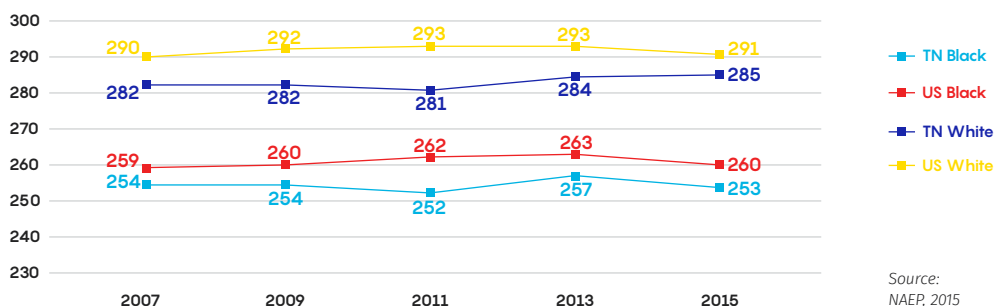
**FIGURE 8. GRADE 4 NAEP MATH SCORES BY RACE**



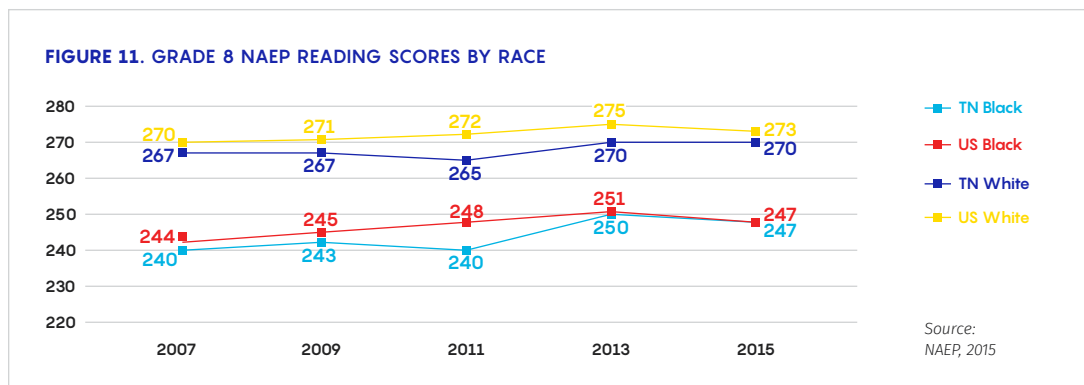
**FIGURE 9. GRADE 4 NAEP READING SCORES BY RACE**



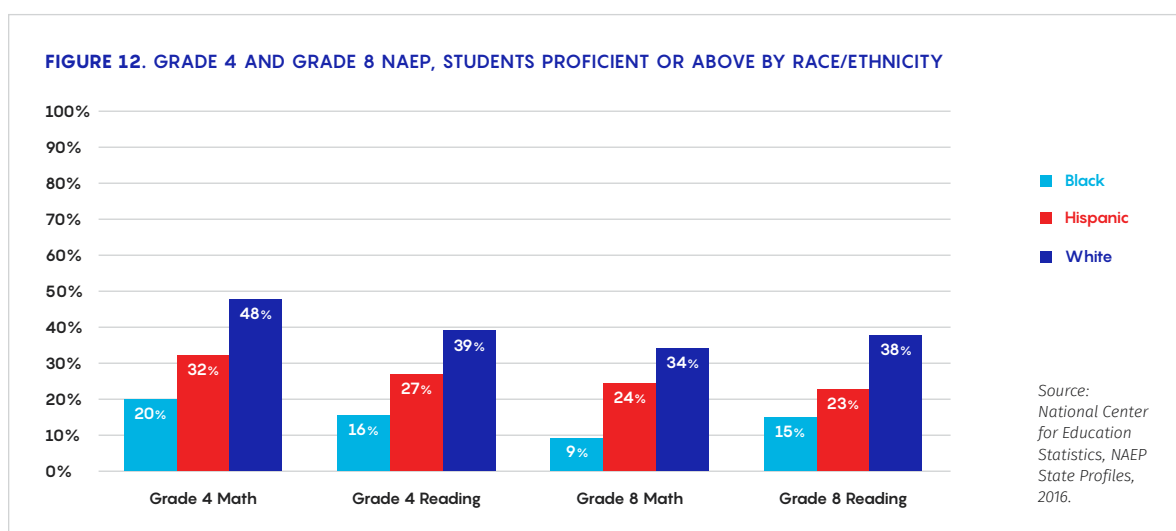
**FIGURE 10. GRADE 8 NAEP MATH SCORES BY RACE**







Students who identified as Hispanic generally scored higher on NAEP assessments than their African American peers in Tennessee but still below white students in fourth and eighth grades.

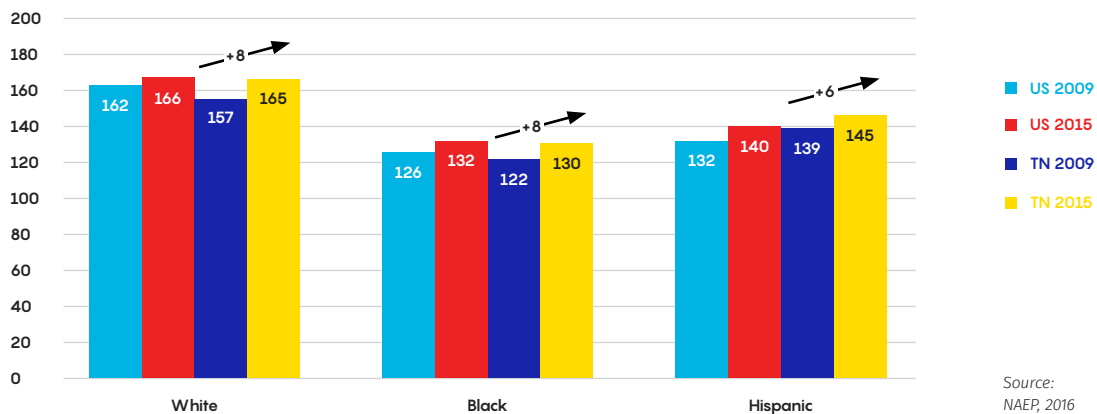




Results released in October 2016 showed Tennessee's widespread growth on the NAEP science assessment, **doubling the average national growth in both fourth and eighth grades. This growth propelled Tennessee into the top half of all states.** Regionally, the growth of all students put

Tennessee ahead of many neighboring states. This rise can be attributed, in large part, to impressive gains posted by historically underserved student groups. The eighth-grade NAEP science results provide an example of this growth.

**FIGURE 13. GRADE 8 NAEP SCIENCE SCORES BY RACE/ETHNICITY \***



\*Maximum NAEP Science Score: 300; national average score: 150.

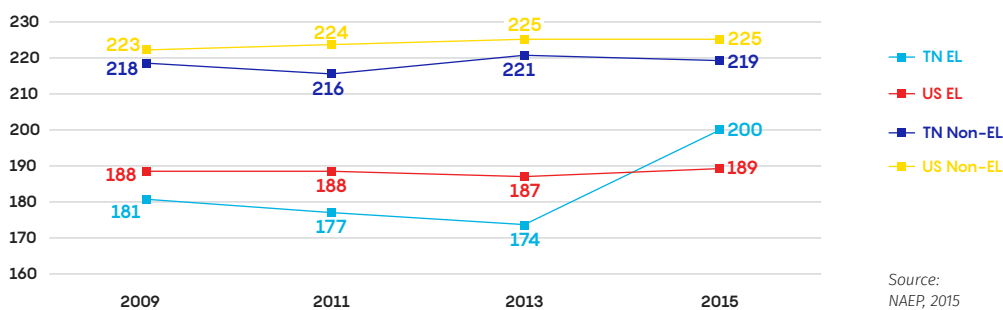
For the first time on the NAEP science exam in Tennessee, the average score for female students surpassed that of their male peers. Although this finding and other gains are encouraging, continued focus on rigorous science education is needed to make progress for all student groups. **Approximately 60 percent of both fourth-grade and eighth-grade students in Tennessee remain below expected proficiency levels.**

Fourteen percent of Tennessee students have an identified disability. **Students with disabilities (SWDs) have made notable gains on fourth- and eighth-grade math exams, as well as eighth-grade reading.** In fourth grade, however, Tennessee SWDs continue to trail their peers nationally. On the 2015 eighth-grade math exam, the average score

gap between Tennessee SWDs and the national average narrowed from 12 points to 5 points. On the eighth-grade reading exam, Tennessee SWDs surpassed the national average of their peers. In math, fourth-graders overcame a 4-point gap to surpass the national average. On the fourth-grade reading exam, however, a previous 8-point gap widened to 10 points.

**English learners (ELs) made great strides on the fourth-grade reading NAEP assessment,** narrowing the score gap with their native English-speaking Tennessee peers by 28 points while surpassing the average national EL student score. ELs made similar gains in fourth-grade math, growing 17 points between 2013 and 2015 to surpass the national EL average by 15 points.

**FIGURE 14. GRADE 4 NAEP READING SCORES: ENGLISH LEARNERS**



## WHO ARE ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS?

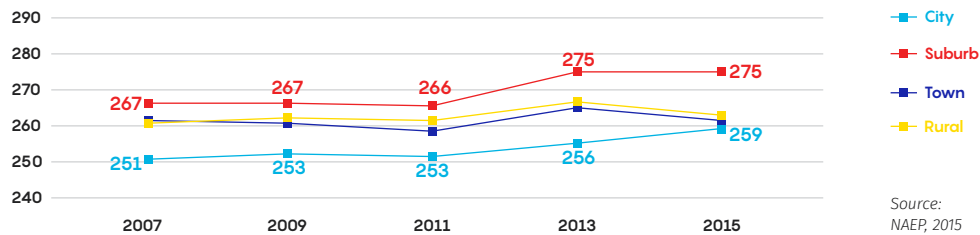
Federal law defines an English learner (EL) student as one “whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards, the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society.”



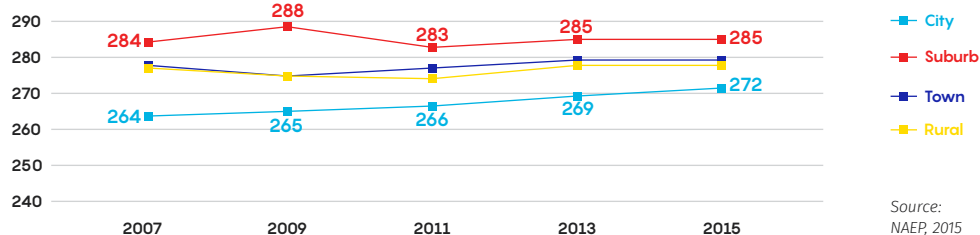
There are approximately 50,000 ELs enrolled in Tennessee schools. Although ELs are located in schools across the state, enrollments are greatest in a few school districts. Together, Shelby County Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools serve half of all ELs in the state, and more than 75 percent are served by 10 school districts.<sup>4</sup> The increased rates of EL proficiency on NAEP are reflected by larger gains among urban Tennessee districts over recent years.

Although urban districts have sustained gains over recent years and suburban districts have either increased student proficiency rates or remained at past levels, town and rural districts have largely remained flat, or even declined.

**FIGURE 15. TENNESSEE GRADE 8 NAEP READING SCORES BY LOCATION**



**FIGURE 16. TENNESSEE GRADE 8 NAEP MATH SCORES BY LOCATION**



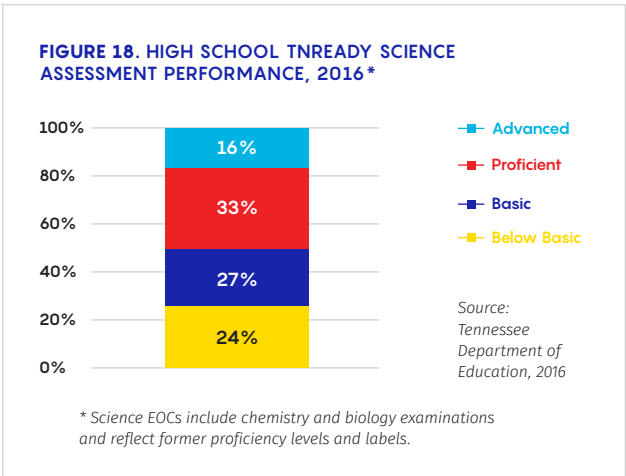
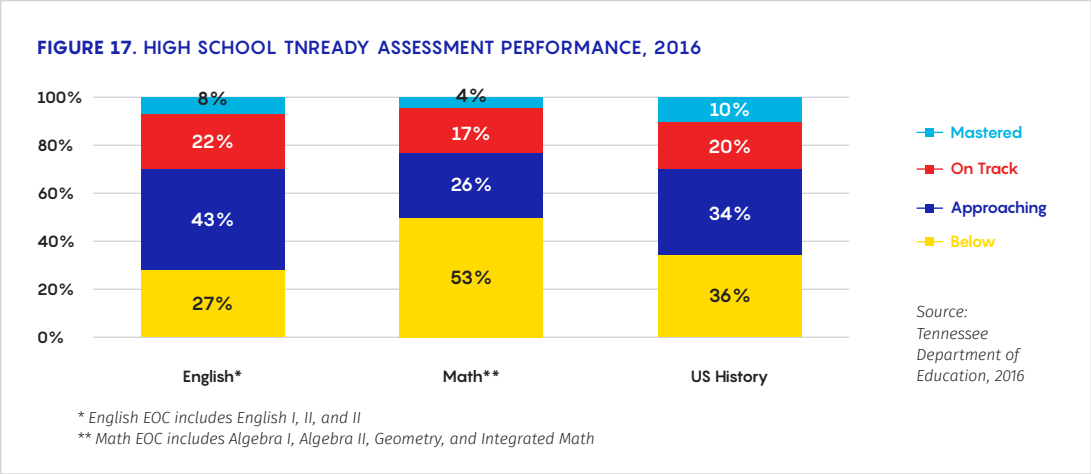
## STATE ASSESSMENTS AND TNREADY

The 2015-16 school year represented a reset for state assessments. Tennessee's new assessments reflect a higher set of expectations for students, and proficiency level cut scores approved in 2016 by the State Board of Education demonstrate the state's commitment to high expectations for all students. Together these changes represent a shift in how Tennessee defines how well students are tracking toward college and career readiness. According to the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), students have the following range of chances to meet ACT college readiness based on proficiency level reached:

- **Below:** 1-10 percent chance
- **Approaching:** 10-30 percent chance
- **On Track:** 60-80 percent chance
- **Mastered:** 85-100 percent chance

Results from the 2015-16 school year provide a more honest view of whether Tennessee students are mastering the skills and knowledge they need to have by graduation day. Substantially fewer students statewide scored at the highest performance levels on end-of-course exams in 2016, and in Tennessee's largest urban districts especially low numbers of students achieved at high levels. For example, in Shelby County Schools—the state's largest district by enrollment—less than 7 percent of students scored at grade-level or above on the Algebra I exam, compared to a statewide average of 21 percent. In English, Shelby County Schools' passage rate trailed the state's average by 11 percentage points. However, students in Shelby County Schools demonstrated very high levels of literacy growth.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, results from Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) included high levels of growth in literacy across the district, while overall achievement of students fell below comparison districts and state averages. For both math and reading, MNPS students trailed the state average for On-Track and Mastered by approximately 13 percentage points.<sup>6</sup> Like Shelby County Schools, MNPS had Level 1 growth in numeracy, according to data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). As in other areas of the state, more students from suburban districts neighboring Shelby County Schools and MNPS achieved at On-Track or Mastered levels compared to their urban district peers. Across Tennessee, zip codes continue to be a strong indicator of the likelihood students will achieve mastery of course content that prepares them for success after high school.



TNReady results from high schools showed significant percentages of students are performing below the grade-level expectations.

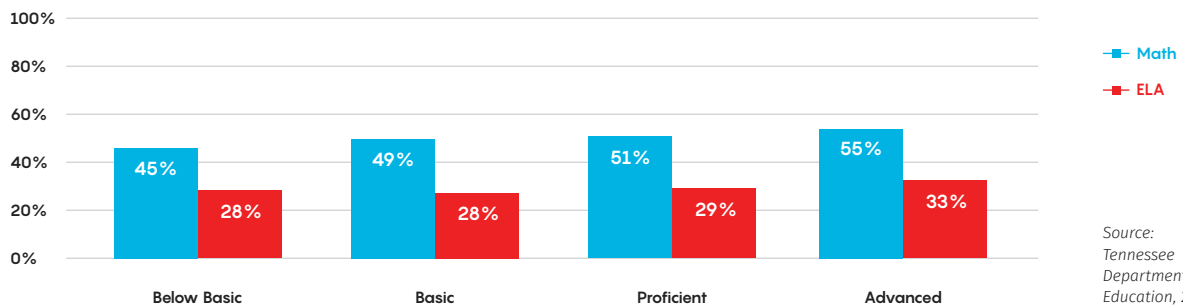
Consistent, annual assessments across schools and districts statewide make it possible to identify where gaps in achievement between student populations are narrowing or persisting. Results from those assessments are necessary

to target supports that are needed to better and more equitably meet the needs of all Tennessee students. The 2016-17 school year is a critical one to fully implement TNReady and increase proficiency rates for all students, with particular focus on underserved students and under-resourced schools.

### ACCESS TO HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Increasing the number of highly effective teachers and, in turn, assigning students in most need of support to highly effective teachers can help narrow achievement gaps. In March 2016, TDOE released a report including data that showed **the distribution of highly effective teachers in Tennessee favors the highest-achieving, rather than the lowest-achieving students.**<sup>7</sup> TDOE defines a highly effective teacher as earning a TVAAS Level 4 or 5. TDOE data indicate significant differences in historically underserved students’ access to effective teaching both across districts and within schools. Some of these differences reflect the supply of effective teachers available in a given school or district, and some result from how these teachers are assigned to schools, grades, subjects, and students.

**FIGURE 19. ACCESS TO HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHING BY STUDENT PROFICIENCY LEVEL**



Source:  
Tennessee  
Department of  
Education, 2016

Data also indicate that historically underserved students are disproportionately concentrated in harder-to-staff schools where high teacher turnover and more early-career teachers mean fewer of these students receive instruction from highly effective classroom teachers. Improving the skills and performance of incoming teachers could greatly benefit students in these settings. Similarly, some districts struggle to adequately staff English learner and special education teaching positions, making it even more difficult to provide these students with high-quality instruction.

The proportion of students at each performance level assigned to a highly effective teacher the following year shows that higher-performing students have greater access to higher quality instruction.

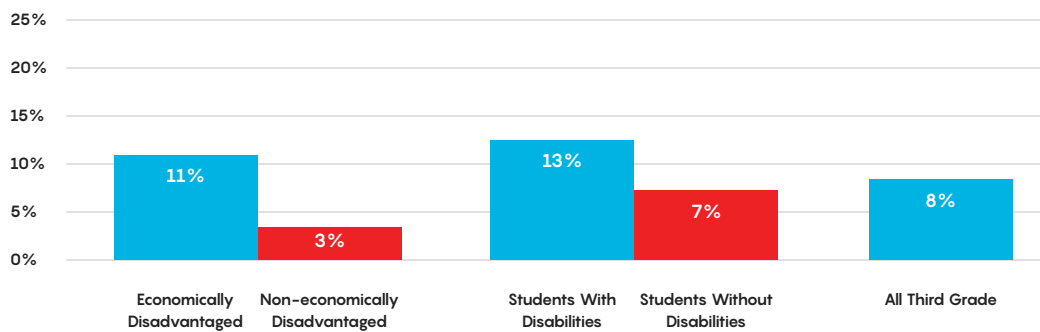


## ACCESS TO CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Efforts to better prepare students for success beyond high school depend on them being in class to receive instruction and experience all opportunities available at their schools. Data on chronic absenteeism and discipline, however, show too many students miss too much time in school. Students who are absent 10 percent of school days

(18 days) or more miss valuable instructional time and often struggle to stay on pace in their learning. This chronic absenteeism contributes to achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their peers from higher-income backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> Economically disadvantaged students are three times as likely to be chronically absent, with their reduced opportunity to learn compounding other challenges in raising their achievement.

**FIGURE 20. PERCENTAGE OF THIRD-GRADERS CHRONICALLY ABSENT IN 2014-15**



Source:  
Tennessee  
Department of  
Education, 2016



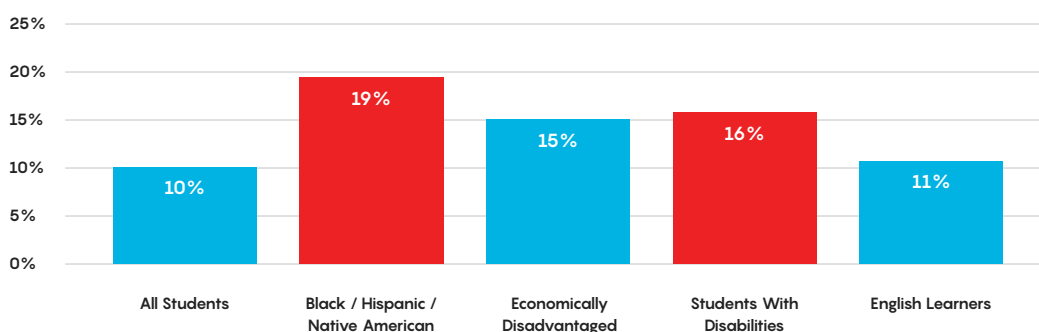


**Chronically absent students are less likely to read on grade level at the end of third grade.<sup>9</sup>** Chronic absenteeism in high school grades can also pull students off track toward graduation and postsecondary success. According to TDOE data, **16 percent of Tennessee ninth-graders were chronically absent in 2015-16.**

Some of Tennessee's chronic absenteeism rates may be tied

to exclusionary disciplinary practices that remove students from class through suspensions and expulsions. **One in five ninth-graders experiences a suspension or expulsion, and one in ten misses at least a week of school because of a disciplinary action.** Although expulsions have declined 80 percent over the past four years, more than 63,000 students missed school time in 2015 because of disciplinary infractions.<sup>10</sup>

**FIGURE 21. PERCENTAGE OF TENNESSEE STUDENTS RECEIVING SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS, 2015-16**



Source:  
Tennessee  
Department of  
Education, 2016

**In 2015-16, 24 percent of Tennessee students identified as African American. Statewide, 60 percent of all suspensions and 64 percent of all expulsions were experienced by African American students.**

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, 2015-16 State Report Card.

The reduction in exclusionary discipline has not been uniform, either across all schools or between all student groups. **Just 150 of the state's more than 1,800 schools accounted for half of all disciplinary exclusions.** These schools tend to be composed of students who are economically disadvantaged, low-achieving, or African American. African American ninth-graders are subject to exclusionary discipline at a rate over six times higher than the rest of ninth-grade students.

State and national assessment data show Tennessee has made some progress in narrowing achievement gaps—particularly for students with disabilities, English learners, and in urban districts. However, stark gaps in proficiency remain across income levels, racial and ethnic populations, geographic location, and student needs. Ensuring more equitable opportunities for all students, particularly underserved students, will drive continued progress toward more equitable outcomes. This work should better prepare more students for postsecondary and career success.



**Goal 3:** Every Tennessee student graduates from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. Postsecondary enrollment and degree attainment rates by 2020 should be supporting achievement of Tennessee's Drive to 55.

Tennessee is in the midst of a bold effort toward the goal of 55 percent of Tennesseans holding a postsecondary credential by the year 2025. By that time, more than half of the jobs in Tennessee will require such a credential. Currently, **just under 39 percent of Tennesseans hold a postsecondary credential.**<sup>11</sup> To encourage more students to consider college, Tennessee has sought to lower financial barriers to access. Through the Tennessee Promise program, students meeting eligibility criteria now have the opportunity to earn a one- or two-year credential at a Tennessee Center of Applied Technology (TCAT) or community college at no tuition cost to them. Additional aid is available to make four-year colleges and universities statewide more affordable for more students.



## COLLEGE COMPLETION CHALLENGES IN TENNESSEE

- 75 percent of Tennessee community college students do not complete a degree.
- 50 percent of public university students and a third of University of Tennessee students do not graduate within six years.
- Over 50 percent of Tennessee's postsecondary students require remediation.

Source: Complete Tennessee, 2016. *Room to Grow: The State of Higher Education in Tennessee.*

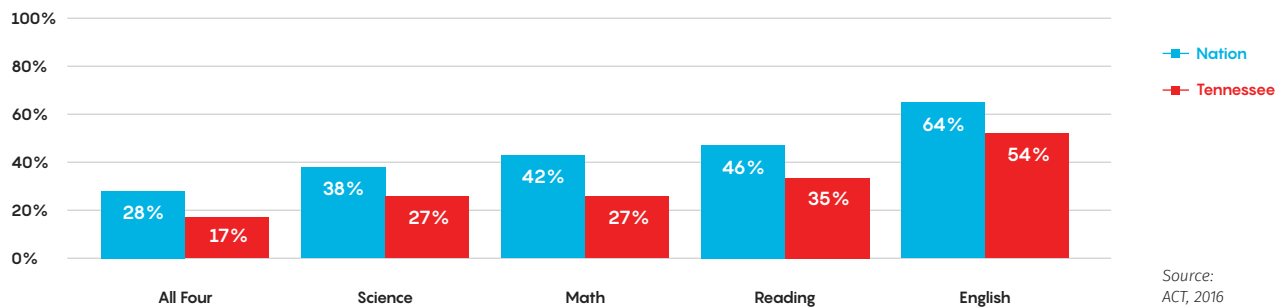
Improving readiness of all high school graduates will enable growing numbers to make the most of programs like Tennessee Promise, opening doors to a wide range of postsecondary opportunities. Students are already responding, with **public college and university enrollment in Tennessee increasing by 10 percent between fall 2014 and fall 2015.**<sup>12</sup> Students are eager to pursue education beyond high school, and they need the skills and knowledge postsecondary success requires.

Although more students have access to postsecondary options, many students are still not graduating high school prepared for their future. The ACT college entrance exam serves as one important indicator of college and career readiness. Tennessee requires all high school juniors to take the exam, and results are now part of the state's accountability framework for districts. Results from the ACT indicate whether a test-taker is ready to succeed in college-level courses across four subject areas: reading, English, mathematics, and science.

On a 36-point scale, Tennessee's 2016 public high school graduates scored an average of 19.4, trailing the national average of 20.8—an average that includes students attending both public and private schools. Only 17 percent of public school test-takers in Tennessee—compared to a national average of 26 percent—scored at or above college-ready benchmarks in all four ACT subject areas in 2016. Sixty-three percent of the state's first-year college students in 2016 needed remedial or developmental coursework. Initiatives to reduce the need for these non-credit-bearing courses include the **Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program** developed at Chattanooga State Community College in 2012.

Since its first year of implementation between one high school and one community college, SAILS has expanded to over 250 high schools across the state and will have reached over 50,000 students by the end of 2016-17 school year. SAILS initially focused on catching students up to postsecondary learning expectations in math. In 2015-16, however, SAILS expanded to include English remediation. The evidence of success is encouraging. **Since 2012, the number of students entering community college in need of math remediation has decreased by 15.6 percent.**<sup>13</sup> Innovations like SAILS are helping more students succeed in postsecondary coursework and attain desired credentials.

**FIGURE 22. STUDENTS MEETING COLLEGE READY BENCHMARKS BY ACT SUBJECT AREA (2016)**



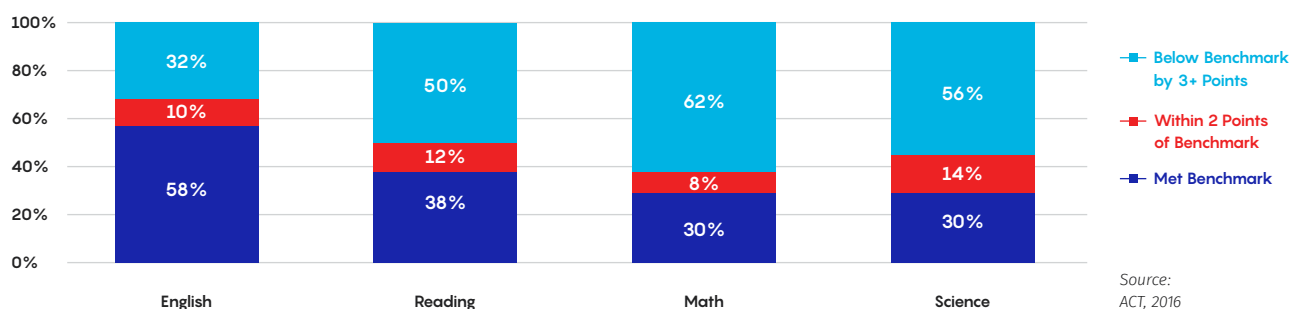
ACT results in 2016 showed signs of student progress. Mirroring a national increase in the number of test-takers, 3,000 more Tennessee students took the ACT in 2016 than in 2015. Although the national average score declined as a result of this broadened participation, Tennessee's average score held steady. In addition, compared to 2015, **nearly 1,300 more students scored 21 or above**, qualifying them for HOPE scholarship aid. The HOPE scholarship provides college students with financial support every semester to help meet the costs of tuition and housing associated with postsecondary enrollment. In total, 42 percent of Tennessee ACT test-takers in the high school class of 2016 scored 21 or higher.<sup>14</sup>

Although too few students now meet college-ready benchmarks, ACT data indicate the potential for continued gains in the coming years. Thousands of Tennessee students in the high school class of 2016 scored within two points of meeting subject area college-ready benchmarks this year (Figure 23). As a result of legislation passed by the

General Assembly in 2016, **Tennessee is the first state to provide students an opportunity to re-take the ACT at no cost.** In the past, students who have taken the ACT an additional time have increased their scores by an average of 1 to 3 points.<sup>15</sup> This opportunity will give more students the chance to surpass college-ready benchmarks, potentially qualifying them for financial aid programs that enhance the affordability of postsecondary options.

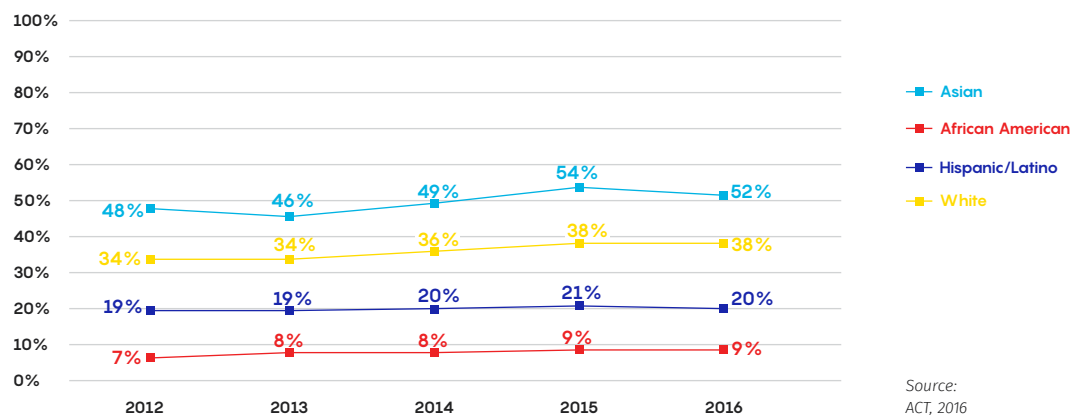
Student achievement gaps in early grades, as seen earlier in this report, result in stark gaps in college readiness across racial and ethnic populations. **Tennessee cannot meet the Drive to 55 goal if gains in achievement are not made by all students—particularly underserved students.** Less than 10 percent of African American students met at least three college-ready ACT benchmarks in 2016, just as in the years prior. That rate compares to 20 percent of those students' peers who identify as Hispanic or Latino, 38 percent who identify as white, and 52 percent who identify as Asian American (Figure 24).

**FIGURE 23. TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES BY COLLEGE READY BENCHMARK (2016)**





**FIGURE 24. TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES MEETING THREE OR MORE COLLEGE READY BENCHMARKS BY RACE/ETHNICITY**



Continued progress toward our goals for students in Tennessee depends on work by educators, policymakers, and business and community leaders. Efforts by these stakeholders in 2016 helped sustain progress on multiple fronts.





## UPDATE ON THE WORK: 2016

Over recent years, improvements in policy and practice have driven continued gains in student achievement in Tennessee. The core components of Tennessee's work to advance student learning fall into three major areas:

- **EMPOWERING PEOPLE.** Every classroom, school, and district must be led by passionate and effective teachers, principals, and superintendents. This requires Tennessee to better recruit, develop, and retain high-quality talent. These great people, in turn, need to feel equipped and empowered to engage with their communities to advocate for what they need to drive student success.
- **INSISTING ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS.** Rigorous standards aligned to quality assessments set the clear expectation that all Tennessee students are capable of learning at high levels of achievement. High expectations set the foundation for all the progress we can make as a state.
- **FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION.** A culture of innovation must extend from the system level through each school and classroom. The policies and resources that govern schools must create an environment where innovation can thrive. Educators must seek new ideas and embrace successful models wherever they are found.

This section highlights key work that has happened in each of these three areas over the past year, setting a foundation for the priorities Tennessee must focus on in the year ahead.

## EMPOWERING PEOPLE

Teachers have a larger impact on student learning than any other in-school factor. In addition, effective school leadership has been shown to comprise a quarter of factors contributing to student success.<sup>16</sup> Tennessee's educators must be committed to the work at hand and effective in meeting the learning needs of all their students. This commitment requires better recruitment, support, and retention of high-performing educators. When provided the tools and opportunity, educators advocate in their schools and communities for what is needed to drive student success.

Before they enter the teaching profession, pre-service teachers need to prepare for the diverse learners they will teach. Strong systems of teacher evaluation and support promote continuous improvement in instruction. Opening leadership and individual professional development opportunities for teachers empowers them to make even greater impact on their students, as well as those in other classrooms and schools. Educators who seek to pursue school leadership positions need rigorous preparation to serve as instructional leaders for their school staff and students. When stepping into the role, new school leaders require ongoing professional support to help set positive cultures for achievement that attract, grow, and retain highly effective teachers.

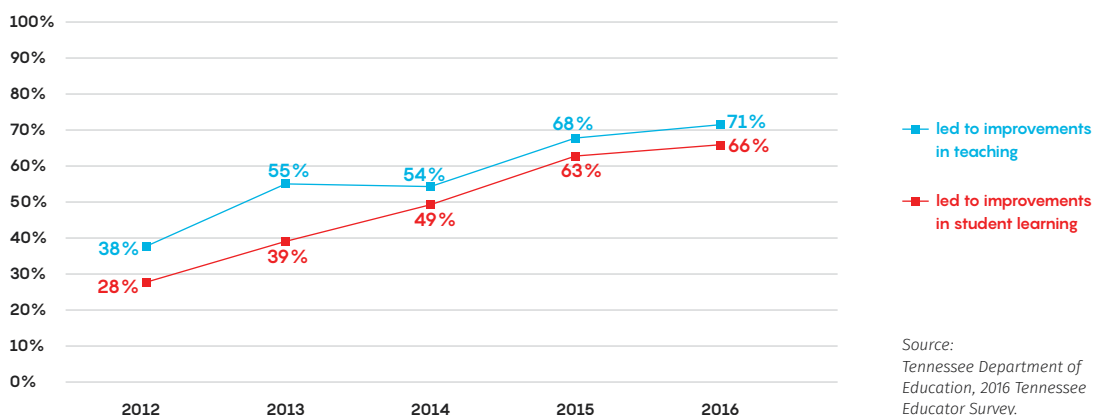
**TEACHER EVALUATION.** One of the most significant education policy changes made in Tennessee in the last decade has been the state's shift to a more rigorous, multi-measure teacher evaluation system. Under this system, evaluation scores represent a composite of in-class observations, student achievement on assessments, and additional measures of student achievement selected by

teachers and their principals. In 2016, more than 70 percent of teachers reported Tennessee's evaluation system has led to improvements in their teaching—an increase from the 54 percent who responded favorably in 2014 and 38 percent in 2012. Further, 66 percent of teachers believe the evaluation process has led to improved student learning—an increase from 49 percent in 2014 and 28 percent in 2012.<sup>17</sup>

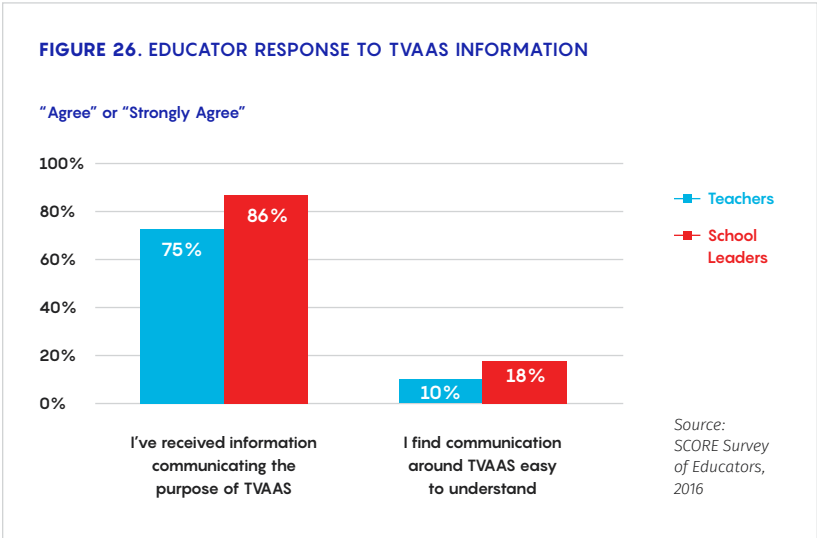
Because of TNReady implementation challenges in the 2015-16 school year, student achievement and growth data was not available for grades 3-8, impacting teacher evaluation. After its passage through the General Assembly, Governor Bill Haslam signed SB 2508/HB 1419, which provided flexibility to teachers regarding results from the first year of TNReady test administration. According to the legislation, if the 2015-16 TNReady assessment results helped a teacher receive a higher evaluation score, available data would be calculated into their evaluation score. If the results did not positively affect a teacher's score, the data would not be used in that calculation. The governor said at the time, "given recent, unexpected changes in the administration of the new assessment, we want to provide teachers with additional flexibility for this first year's data."<sup>18</sup>

Research in 2016 identified opportunities to improve educators' understanding and use of student growth data provided by TVAAS, which represents an important component of the state's multi-measure approach to teacher support and accountability. In the winter and spring of 2016, SCORE asked teachers, principals, and district leaders about their understanding, use, and perceptions of TVAAS. Through a statewide survey and two dozen focus groups and interviews, SCORE worked to elevate educator voice in a report that included findings and recommendations to improve educator understanding and use of TVAAS.

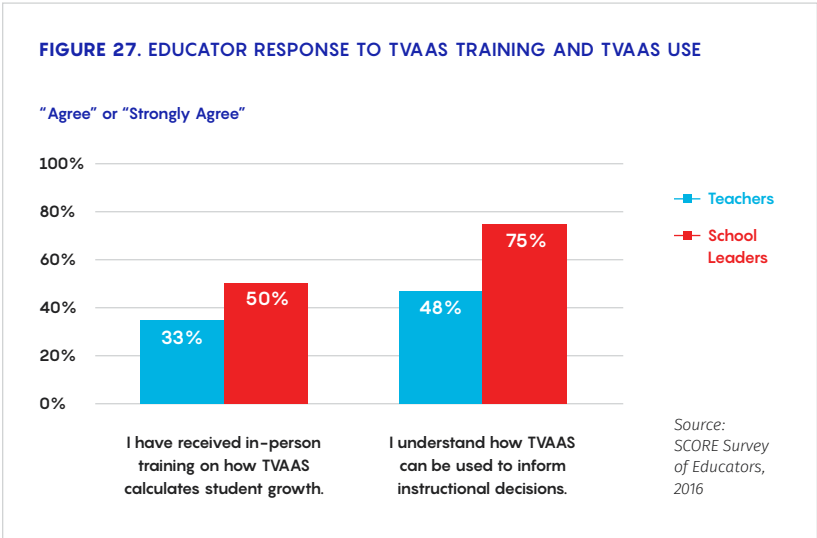
**FIGURE 25. TENNESSEE EDUCATOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THE TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM HAS LED TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPROVEMENTS**



According to SCORE’s findings, although educators receive information about TVAAS, most do not find that information easy to understand. SCORE encouraged TDOE and state partners to deliver clear, accessible, and differentiated information on TVAAS to meet educators at their level of understanding.



The report also identified supports that help educators use student growth data to inform their teaching craft as a key area of opportunity. SCORE called for TDOE to provide improved resources and training to districts and school leaders so they can guide productive conversations with educators about student growth data.



Findings from the research included the need for clearer resources for teacher and principal preparation programs to better prepare educators in the field to use student-growth data to inform practice. As a result of this work, TDOE and other state partners are working to improve resources and educator supports to improve instruction.

**TEACHER PREPARATION.** Each year, thousands of new teachers step into classrooms across Tennessee and begin teaching students. The way Tennessee prepares teachers for working with all students has important consequences for how these students perform in the classroom.<sup>19</sup> Research has shown that students of color and low-income students are more likely to be served by an early-career teacher. Teachers, especially those in their first years of teaching, need adequate preparation to work with diverse groups of students.<sup>20</sup> For these reasons and others, efforts to improve teacher preparation received broad attention in Tennessee during 2016.

To get an initial license to teach in Tennessee, a candidate must hold a bachelor’s degree, demonstrate content knowledge for the subject area he or she would teach, demonstrate the pedagogical knowledge to deliver content in an effective way, and be recommended by his or her preparation program. In 2016, the State Board of Education established an Educator Preparation and Licensure Subcommittee to focus on teacher preparation policy and make periodic reports to the full board for consideration. In 2016, the state board raised the cut scores for Praxis licensure examinations in 10 subject areas and required all teacher candidates to demonstrate pedagogical knowledge through edTPA, a portfolio-based performance assessment already used by eight educator preparation programs (EPPs) in Tennessee. All teacher candidates will be required to pass edTPA to earn a license beginning in January 2019.



## PREPARED FOR DAY ONE: SCORE'S TEACHER PREPARATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the licensure assessment system
2. Increase staff capacity within the Tennessee Department of Education
3. Enhance the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching population
4. Strengthen classroom-based experiences for teacher candidates
5. Increase collaboration between EPPs and school districts
6. Develop clear process for reviewing and approving EPPs
7. Increase access to and transparency of data on EPPs
8. Improve the quality of the student admissions process for EPPs

TDOE, which is responsible for implementing the state board's 2014 Education Preparation Policy, has focused on strengthening the way teacher preparation programs are reviewed and approved. In February 2016, the department created a specific role within the educator licensure division to strengthen collaboration between EPPs and districts across the state. This Director of Networks and Partnerships launched an inaugural Network for Educator Preparation Partnerships. The pilot program with five EPPs and their partner districts aims to create or strengthen partnerships between educator preparation providers and school districts in support of improved teaching effectiveness.

In October, SCORE released a comprehensive report on the state of teacher preparation in Tennessee, *Prepared for Day One: Improving the Effectiveness of Early-Career Teaching*.<sup>21</sup> The report included promising practices in teacher preparation, especially about student-teaching experiences and teacher diversity, and offered recommendations to improve teacher preparation in Tennessee. An extensive review of relevant research, interviews with half of the teacher preparation programs in the state—as well as conversations with state and national experts, superintendents, and classroom teachers—all informed the report.

In December, the State Board of Education released a redesigned report card on the effectiveness of the state's teacher preparation programs. The new report includes data on placement and retention rates, along with performance of EPP graduates once they enter the classroom. Tennessee is one of only 11 states to link effectiveness of EPPs with how their graduates perform in the classroom.<sup>22</sup>



**EDUCATOR SUPPORT.** Much work was done in 2016 to invest in and support educator success. In January, Governor Haslam proposed a \$35 billion state budget for 2016-17.<sup>23</sup> This proposed budget (SB 2565/HB 2574) passed, providing Tennessee's largest investment in public education without a tax increase. The budget included increased funds for teacher salaries, as well as a commitment to pay for all 12 months of teachers' health insurance. Previously, the state funded only 11 months.

Support for educator success in 2016 also included expanded work in professional learning. Tennessee's peer learning program, called the Instructional Partnership Initiative (IPI), uses teacher evaluation data from observations to pair teachers with one another, providing principals with tools and resources to create collaborative teacher relationships focused on specific areas of instructional need. Launched in 2013-14 as a pilot, IPI started with 16 schools in Jackson-Madison County. In 2014-15, the pilot expanded to 93 schools across the state, randomly assigned to compare outcomes of teachers participating in the program to those of teachers who did not participate. TDOE researchers found IPI had significant effects on student scores in reading and math, and teachers participating in the program improved their TVAAS scores by one level, on average. IPI also increased positive morale among participants.<sup>24</sup> As of the 2016-17 school year, over 1,550 teachers in 114 schools in 48 districts were participating in IPI. Instructional coaches across eight TDOE Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) offices are working to inform school leaders and teachers about the program and how it can help meet the specific needs of their teachers. As more educators learn about IPI, more schools are implementing this professional learning strategy. In participating schools, TDOE continues to monitor program implementation and impact on both teaching and learning. IPI is an example of how Tennessee is using evidence-based strategies to empower teachers to learn from one another and improve in their craft.

**RTI<sup>2</sup>.** Teachers work closely with their peers to identify strategies to support struggling students. Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) provides a framework for educators to approach targeted supports

for students. In place since 2014-15 in elementary schools and since 2015-16 in middle schools, most teachers reported their schools were at full implementation in many important areas of RTI<sup>2</sup> practice, including providing daily time for intervention or enrichment and having a data team within their schools focused on RTI<sup>2</sup>.<sup>25</sup> Teachers are also seeing the benefits of implementation, with 65 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing that their students will benefit from the RTI<sup>2</sup> framework.<sup>26</sup> In 2016-17, high schools began implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup>.

In September 2016, TDOE released a report analyzing schools with a majority of teachers reporting full implementation in five key RTI<sup>2</sup> readiness areas. TDOE researchers identified four areas where schools are excelling.<sup>27</sup> They also found that schools with students making the greatest gains in RTI<sup>2</sup> reported using multiple data sources to make decisions about students, including screening and progress monitoring for RTI<sup>2</sup>. These schools also built strong RTI<sup>2</sup>-focused teams, used their time and space strategically to provide intervention opportunities, and had principals who emphasized RTI<sup>2</sup> as a collective goal.<sup>28</sup> These successful strategies are important points of guidance for best practices.

**TEACHER LEADERSHIP.** Momentum grew in 2016 to empower teachers as leaders in their schools, districts, and communities. Research shows teacher leadership supports strategies and behaviors with strong links to increased student achievement.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, research has shown that schools using a "collective leadership" model—with leadership distributed across staff at a school, instead of concentrated on the principal alone—demonstrate stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership approaches.<sup>30</sup>

## GOALS OF THE TENNESSEE TEACHER LEADERSHIP COLLABORATIVE

- Ensure teacher leadership efforts are coordinated and have impact
- Expand the role of teacher leadership in attracting, retaining, and supporting highly effective educators
- Amplify educator voice and support empowered educators
- Identify and expand access to teacher leadership opportunities in Tennessee
- Prioritize teacher leadership as a sustainable statewide strategy

In addition, schools and districts have observed the role teacher leadership can play in attracting, retaining, and supporting effective teachers.

Tennessee boasts a growing number of diverse teacher leadership opportunities at both the state and the district level. In 2016, SCORE partnered with TDOE to launch the Tennessee Teacher Leadership Collaborative (TTLC), a network of organizations and individuals committed to ensuring that every Tennessee teacher has knowledge of and access to multiple sustainable teacher leadership pathways. TTLC supports the development of exemplary and innovative teacher leader networks, acting as an information hub for teacher leadership opportunities and effective practices, and promoting collaboration.

Teachers are accessing leadership opportunities, influencing both policy and practice. In 2016, Governor Haslam continued to receive direct input from the 17-member Governor's Teacher Cabinet. This cabinet elevates the voice of a diverse array of teachers across the state on education topics including teacher preparation and support, assessment, academic standards development, and implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup>.

In its third year, SCORE's Tennessee Educator Fellowship expanded to 48 teacher fellows from 26 fellows in 2015-16. During the one-year fellowship, this diverse group of educators learn about, reflect upon, and inform the policies, practices, and systems that affect students' achievement and educator effectiveness. They also serve as liaisons between their colleagues, their communities, policymakers, and advocates as Tennessee continues the work of improving educational outcomes for all students.

The Tennessee Teacher Leader Network, created by TDOE in the fall of 2013 to develop adaptable teacher leadership models for implementation in districts across the state, continues to expand in reach. Between 2013 and 2016, 29 districts have created teacher-leader models tailored to district strategic plans and educators' professional learning.<sup>31</sup>

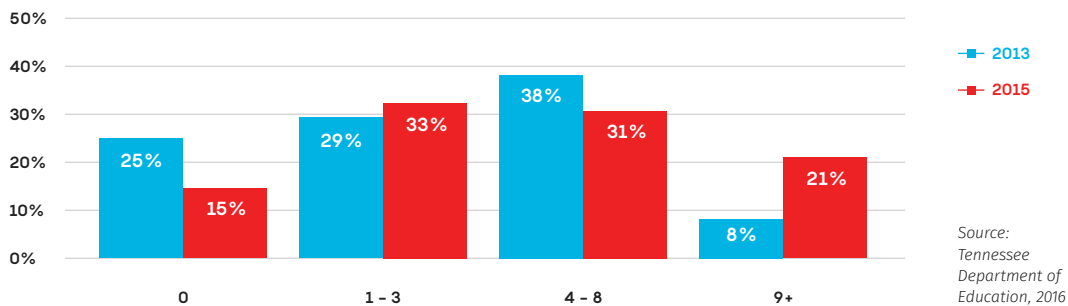
These programs, along with others across the state, empower teachers to influence issues beyond their schools and classrooms to benefit students at a broader scale.

**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP.** Effective school leaders set the vision and promote the culture of a school and work to hire, support, and manage effective teachers to achieve high levels of student learning. Research has shown that principal leadership can account for up to a quarter of in-school factors that influence student performance and that principals are second only to teachers in terms of in-school impact on student academic outcomes.<sup>32</sup> Still, many districts face challenges in finding the right leaders for schools. Results from a survey conducted by the nonprofit advocacy group TennesseeCAN indicated that 60 percent of responding superintendents did not believe they have resources and support from the state to attract and retain quality school leaders.<sup>33</sup>

Every year, 25 percent of schools in the United States experience principal turnover, and 50 percent of new principals leave their schools within three years. Principal turnover—which typically has a negative effect on school performance and teacher retention—can undermine even the best teaching and learning efforts in the classroom. As a new generation assumes principalships across Tennessee, the importance of building pathways for instructional leaders to take on these roles remains critically important.



**FIGURE 28. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE FOR TENNESSEE PRINCIPALS**



As a reflection of Tennessee's commitment to developing strong school leaders, in October 2015 Commissioner of Education Candice McQueen announced the creation of the Transformational Leadership Advisory Council (TLAC). This advisory council, composed of state and district leaders as well as representatives from the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, pursued three goals.<sup>35</sup> Those goals included identifying common elements of successful preparation programs, supporting the development and expansion of regional providers that focus on innovative school leadership models, and supporting the design or refinement, implementation, and evaluation of pipeline programs.

TLAC produced a report in August 2016 that outlined eight components of effective principal pipelines, called for program models based on cost-sharing among partners, and recommended a model leadership program designation to recognize exemplary programs. To act on these recommendations, the advisory council created the Tennessee Transformational Leadership Alliance (TTLA). TTLA will be comprised of a design team and TTLA partners. Members of the design team will focus on stakeholder engagement and communication, development of support tools for program partners, and membership, monitoring and evaluation of programs. TTLA partners will represent foundations, businesses, institutions of higher education, and school districts willing to implement a shared-cost partnership model to develop new or refine existing transformational leadership pipeline programs.

The efforts of TLAC and TTLA represent the culmination of years of conversations among state, district, and local partners across Tennessee to advance the quality and commitment of school leadership. With TTLA, Tennessee is poised, through an organized, collaborative effort, to address many existing challenges to school leader success.

## GOVERNOR'S ACADEMY FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The Governor's Academy for School Leadership is a partnership between TDOE, the Governor's Office, Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, and local school districts. The academy aims to cultivate transformational school leaders. The program pairs assistant principals with experienced principal mentors. Participants attend monthly training sessions and a summer institute at Vanderbilt, and they receive individual coaching sessions. After completing their year with the academy, participants are expected to pursue placement as a school principal in their district or region.







## INSISTING ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Academic standards set the foundation for what students are expected to learn. Tennessee's rigorous standards set the clear expectation that all Tennessee students are capable of a high level of achievement, and we now have an assessment aligned to those standards.

**STUDENT ASSESSMENT.** During the 2015-16 school year, Tennessee began implementing a new set of assessments that reflected the state's commitments to both high expectations and alignment to state academic standards. These new TNReady assessments, however, had a difficult first year in large part because of failures by the state's former testing vendor, Measurement, Inc. Although the test was initially scheduled to be administered online, technology problems at Measurement, Inc. on the first full day of administration led TDOE to move the test to paper and pencil. The vendor's inability to print and deliver all paper exams led TDOE to cancel the second portion of the two-part exams in grades 3-8. High school students completed exams in English, math, social studies, and science (results are provided earlier in this report). TNReady results represented a reset for how student achievement is measured in the state. Results showed large numbers of students were not on track based on the state's new performance levels. Because the percentages of students on track to graduate ready for postsecondary options matched performance on national measures like ACT, TNReady is showing early promise of being a reliable measure of college and career readiness. TNReady also brings unique value as a set of assessments aligned to Tennessee's academic standards.



In July 2016, TDOE announced the selection of a new testing vendor, Questar, to implement TNReady exams beginning in the 2016-17 school year. Commissioner McQueen cited Questar's "recent experience developing a large-scale test thoughtfully and urgently" in TDOE's announcement.<sup>36</sup>

Compared to the previous TNReady test design, TDOE announced substantial reductions to the amount of time students will spend testing and in the number of test items in the 2016-17 school year. Overall, testing time for state exams will be reduced by 30 percent, or 200-210 minutes for grades 3-8 and 40 to 120 minutes for high school. Although a pilot of online testing for high schools is expected for some districts, most students will take 2016-17 state assessments by pencil and paper. The state has a plan to phase in online administration of assessments in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Prior to the implementation of TNReady, the 2015 Assessment Task Force, convened by Commissioner McQueen, produced a set of recommendations for ensuring high-quality assessment in Tennessee. Several recommendations required legislative action. During 2016, the General Assembly passed SB 2540/HB 1537, the Data Accessibility, Transparency and Accountability Act, which provided for additional test transparency, the elimination of unnecessary tests, and an additional opportunity for students to take the ACT college entrance exam. Governor Haslam signed the bill into law in April.

During the spring and summer of 2016, the Assessment Task Force 2.0 discussed how assessments in Tennessee can align with revised, high-quality standards, better capture student performance, reduce unnecessary testing, and provide school and classroom leaders the information necessary to deliver the instruction students need. The group also provided feedback on TDOE's developing plans for assessment, accountability, and school improvement under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).



**ESSA AND ACCOUNTABILITY.** The Every Student Succeeds Act became law in December 2015, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replacing the former federal education law, No Child Left Behind. Under ESSA, states have more authority in setting education policy. The majority of Tennessee's existing policies are in line with the new law, but implementation provides opportunities for Tennessee to strengthen existing systems and structures, particularly regarding assessment, accountability, school improvement, and education for English learners. TDOE's five-year strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*, has guided state planning for taking advantage of opportunities for improvement presented by ESSA.

Reflecting Tennessee's commitment to accountability, in 2016 the General Assembly passed a law requiring A-F letter grades for all Tennessee public schools. The grading system is designed to provide more transparency about school performance to parents and community members. Planning the measures for A-F grades informs the state's accountability framework. TDOE is developing a plan to integrate the school grading system with the ESSA accountability requirements for implementation in the 2017-18 school year. The draft ESSA plan adds school-level accountability and includes three major changes to the state's accountability framework: a new Ready Graduate indicator measuring high school students' readiness for postsecondary opportunities and the workforce, an Opportunity to Learn indicator measuring an additional indicator of school quality or student success, and measurement of English learners' progress towards language proficiency.

To inform the state's ESSA plan and A-F accountability system, TDOE held town halls across the state, assembled working groups focused on specific areas of the draft plan, and opened an online portal for public feedback. TDOE released a draft ESSA implementation plan in December 2016 and plans to submit the final implementation plan in April 2017 to the US Department of Education for approval.

**RIGOROUS ACADEMIC STANDARDS.** As the state plans for a new accountability system, high academic standards remain the foundation of Tennessee's policies and practices. In April 2016, the State Board of Education approved English language arts (ELA) and math standards, setting grade- and subject-specific goals to drive increased student learning through higher expectations for students. Thousands of Tennesseans provided input on draft standards through an online portal opened by the state board. More than 200 others participated in state board roundtables across the state. Beginning in January 2017, TDOE will provide district leaders training to implement new ELA and math standards. School leaders and teachers will engage in training in the spring and summer of 2017.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to math and ELA, the state initiated reviews in 2016 of standards for science and social studies.<sup>39</sup> The state board approved new science standards during its fall 2016 meeting, while social studies standards are set to be reviewed and finalized in 2017. These standards were strengthened through a robust public review process similar to that followed in the ELA and math reviews. Educators, parents, community members, and policymakers provided feedback for the State Board's consideration (Figure 30).

**FIGURE 29. TIMELINE FOR TENNESSEE'S ESSA PLAN**





**FIGURE 30. PUBLIC REVIEW OF TENNESSEE ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

	Public Website (Estimated Count of Reviews)	Roundtables (Number of Participants)
Math / English Language Arts	169,000	223
Science	39,000	89
Social Studies	118,000	192

Source: Tennessee State Board of Education, 2016

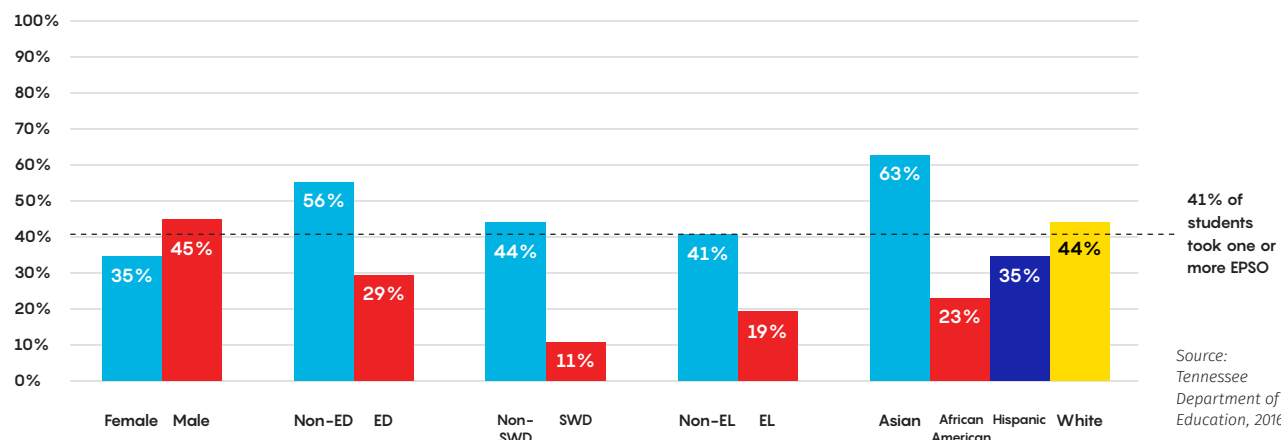
**EARLY POSTSECONDARY COURSEWORK.** Research shows that students who participate in rigorous early postsecondary courses or take advantage of dual enrollment at both their high school and a postsecondary institution are more likely to meet college-ready benchmarks, less likely to require remedial English and math, have higher four- and six-year college completion rates, and achieve higher earnings.<sup>40 41</sup> Early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) refer to courses and experiences available to high school students that can lead to earning credits toward a postsecondary credential or industry certification before graduation. Increasing student access to, and completion of, EPSOs is crucial to meeting Tennessee's Drive to 55.

EPSOs include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International Examinations, and dual-enrollment or dual-credit courses intended to improve college attainment, as well as career-technical internships, externships, and industry certifications. Compared to 2014, Tennessee students earned 7,500 more postsecondary credits in 2016. Nearly 28,000 students took at least one AP exam, an 8.8 percent increase compared to 2015.<sup>42</sup>

EPSOs hold potential to raise overall postsecondary attainment and close gaps related to students' income background. Economically disadvantaged students with EPSO credits currently enroll in four-year universities at the same rate as non-disadvantaged students without such credits. Wide gaps in EPSO enrollment among student subgroups show the need for urgent efforts to increase access (Figure 31).

Tennessee is pursuing policies and programs to expand early postsecondary and career opportunities for students and working with businesses and higher education institutions to make sure these opportunities are in line with demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Addressing gaps in access to EPSOs remains an area for enhanced equity of opportunity.

**FIGURE 31. EPSO ENROLLMENT BY STUDENT SUBGROUP: PERCENTAGES OF 2015 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES**



**TENNESSEE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY COALITION.** The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition formed in March 2016 to unite the collective influence and voices of a diverse group of more than 100 civil rights and education advocacy organizations and to build momentum for more equitable opportunities for students statewide. The coalition’s goal is to build a shared advocacy agenda that will address the long-standing disparities in achievement and opportunities for students of color across Tennessee. Three priorities guide work toward this goal:

- Excellent teachers and leaders for every child
- Strong accountability systems
- Appropriate and equitable resources

In 2016, the Equity Coalition placed focused attention on informing the state’s accountability plan to take advantage of the opportunities presented by ESSA to ensure more equitable outcomes for historically underserved students, including students of color and English learners.

## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

The policies and resources that govern schools must create environments in which innovations thrive. Educators must be able to seek new ideas and embrace successful models wherever they are found. Efforts to improve early-literacy rates, expand access to high-performing schools in urban and rural districts, and enhance the career readiness of graduates are among the many promising areas of innovation in Tennessee public education.

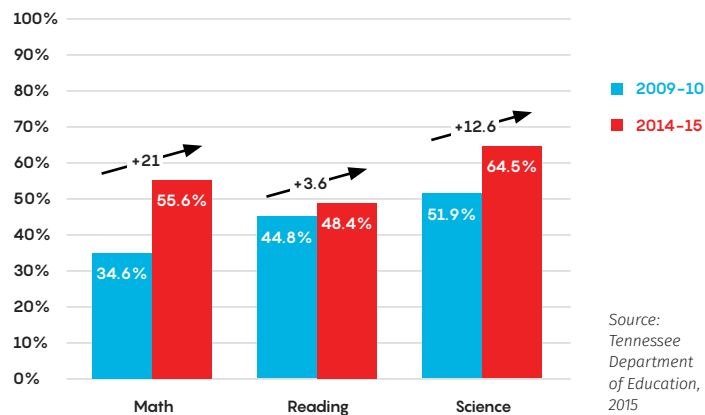
**EARLY LITERACY.** Early literacy is a key predictor of postsecondary and career readiness. Children who read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to graduate high school by age 19 than their peers who do not.<sup>43</sup> Among 6,000 Tennessee students rated below basic in third-grade English language arts, fewer than 3 percent reached proficiency by fifth grade.<sup>44</sup>

To improve early literacy, Tennessee is revisiting its approach to teaching and learning, curriculum and resources, and building partnerships to improve student readiness. In every classroom, the goal is for students to engage with rich, complex texts that they can analyze and understand. This work requires innovation, and Governor Haslam’s 2016 budget included \$9 million to launch a statewide early-literacy initiative to encourage action on reading intervention. In February 2016, the Tennessee Department of Education launched the Read to be Ready campaign to increase the third-grade reading proficiency rate statewide from 43 percent to 75 percent by 2025.<sup>45</sup>

With additional funding from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation and the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, TDOE awarded 20 grants to spark innovative literacy intervention through summer 2016 reading programs across the state in 2016. Funded programs served a total of 574 students, engaged 598 family members, and sent 11,785 books home with students. In addition, 140 educators received training focused on strategies that accelerate first-, second-, and third-graders’ literacy development, including enrichment activities and family engagement. Lessons from these efforts are intended to inform strategies used in schools and districts across the state to dramatically raise student literacy.<sup>46</sup>



**FIGURE 32. GRADES 3–8 STUDENTS PROFICIENT/ADVANCED ON TCAP**



Progress on grades 3–8 TCAP reading since 2009–10 has not kept pace with gains in math and science.

In November 2016, teacher leaders from across the state attended the Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching in Tennessee (ECET<sup>2</sup>TN) conference. This convening focused on teacher leadership and early literacy, showcasing innovative practices developed in districts and schools across Tennessee. Teachers traded approaches to curriculum development, evidence-based strategies to support student language formation, selections of complex texts for student reading, and ways to promote literacy across subjects.

**LEADING INNOVATION FOR TENNESSEE EDUCATION (LIFT).** District leaders across Tennessee are collaborating to innovate and address the most pressing needs of students. SCORE serves as convener for LIFT, a network of district superintendents working to solve common problems of practice. Among the issues addressed by the group, LIFT superintendents selected early literacy as the network’s focal point in 2016. Twelve participating superintendents from across the state, in partnership with TNTP (founded as The New Teacher Project), engaged key district leaders, principals, and teacher leaders to inform and improve teaching practices and organizational structures.

Six LIFT districts initiated a pilot in 2016 to align instructional materials to Tennessee’s academic standards to ensure teachers have the resources needed to be successful. Four more LIFT districts will pilot resources in 2017. While these pilots are in early stages, results to date have shown

that classroom practices are beginning to change, with more lessons reflecting the shifts required by the Tennessee standards, increased student time spent interacting with texts, and increased complexity of texts used in classrooms.

Just as teachers are benefiting from close professional learning with their peers, LIFT superintendents are able to enhance their leadership and practices through collaboration with fellow district leaders—and inform state education policies in the process.

**PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS.** Innovative school and classroom practices thrive in Tennessee’s high-performing charter schools, which use flexibility to tackle new approaches to schooling, from longer school days to curriculum tailored to the student population served. Charter schools are free public schools held to high student academic standards and accountable to their authorizing agencies. With the exception of state-run schools established by the ASD, the majority of Tennessee’s charter schools are operated by independent organizations instead of local school districts. In 2016–17, approximately 29,000 students in Tennessee attend a public charter school in Shelby County, Metro Nashville, Knox County, or Hamilton County.<sup>47</sup>

Compared to other public schools, these schools generally serve larger proportions of low-income students and students of color—populations historically underserved in Tennessee. Although 81 percent of students enrolled in public charter schools are economically disadvantaged, many of

those students achieved higher proficiency rates than ED peers in traditional public schools. Of the 13 charters that received the 2015 Reward School designation for ranking in the top 5 percent of all schools in the state on academic achievement and growth, all served student populations at least 70 percent ED.<sup>48</sup> These data show that different approaches to schooling can produce positive results—especially among students with the greatest needs.

Underscoring Tennessee’s leadership in fostering innovative approaches to schooling, the state received in 2016 one of eight US Department of Education state grants to expand high-performing charter schools. This \$20 million will support starting new charter schools, helping high-quality operators share their best practices with other schools, and training school systems in authorizing practices for public charters.<sup>49</sup>

Much of Tennessee’s success lies in its system of charter authorizing and governing. Charter school authorizers and governing boards play a key role in setting high expectations and holding schools accountable for those expectations.<sup>50</sup> In March 2014, state lawmakers approved a measure that allows the State Board of Education to review and authorize charter schools previously denied by local school boards within counties with the highest number of failing schools in

the state.<sup>51</sup> To support the board’s oversight role, the General Assembly passed and the governor signed legislation in 2016 allowing the board to collect an authorizer fee of up to 4 percent from the charter schools they have authorized.<sup>52</sup>

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT.** Tennessee’s approach to improving persistently low-performing schools is centered on enabling districts and schools to design strategies based on the unique needs of their students. This focus on local empowerment is reinforced by ESSA, which provides states and districts greater flexibility to identify and implement school improvement strategies. As part of the ESSA draft implementation plan, which was released in December 2016, TDOE will continue two primary interventions to support Priority Schools: the Achievement School District (ASD) and the district-led Innovation Zones (iZones). However, the pathways to and supports for those interventions are being refined. The state’s draft ESSA plan includes a new school improvement continuum that would allow custom interventions for Priority Schools based on factors including length of time in their current intervention models. Districts are also creating custom interventions to meet the needs of their students. For example, in April 2016, Shelby County Schools announced the launch of a pilot Empowerment Zone. This pilot zone includes schools in the district that are at risk of making the state’s Priority Schools list in 2017-18.<sup>53</sup>





### CAREER FORWARD TASK FORCE'S DEFINITION OF A CAREER-READY STUDENT

"In Tennessee, career-ready students are those who graduate K-12 education with the knowledge, abilities, and habits to enter and complete postsecondary education without remediation and to seamlessly move into a career that affords them the opportunity to live, work, and sustain a living wage."

**CAREER READINESS.** While Tennessee students' academic performance is improving, significant innovation holds promise to change the current state of postsecondary and career readiness. Tennessee's high school graduation rate has climbed to a new high, but less than 60 percent of Tennessee's graduates go on to enroll in a postsecondary institution.<sup>54</sup> Three out of four students who enroll in community college in Tennessee do not complete a degree. Although the number of students needing remediation has declined by 16 percentage points in recent years, over half of Tennessee community college students still require remediation.<sup>55</sup>

In spring 2016, Commissioner McQueen assembled a task force bringing together state business, education, and community leaders to explore ways to better engage students in their academic preparation, personal and social development, and workplace readiness.<sup>56</sup> In December 2016, the Career Forward Task Force released its definition of a career-ready student and key recommendations for graduation requirements, early postsecondary opportunities, career exposure and experience, school counseling, and accountability. These recommendations will inform the work going forward to provide stronger early postsecondary and career opportunities, and align these opportunities to students' future career aspirations.

Pathways Tennessee sparks community-based, innovative strategies between the public and private sectors to improve student readiness. Across six regions, Pathways engages government, chambers of commerce, industry partners, middle and high schools, and postsecondary institutions to:

- Promote active business and industry involvement in student exploration and on-the-job learning
- Integrate student supports, interventions, and counseling
- Use early warning indicators and remediation strategies
- Promote EPSOs
- Improve transfer of EPSO credits between high school and postsecondary

## STEP-UP CHATTANOOGA: A CASE STUDY IN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Located in Chattanooga, the Public Education Foundation (PEF) has worked with the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce, Benwood Foundation, and the Hamilton County Department of Education to address the findings of a local economic scan highlighting the current disconnect between the labor supply and needs of Hamilton County business and industry. PEF launched STEP-UP Chattanooga, a work-based learning program that connects economically disadvantaged students with businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. Modeled on the STEP-UP Achieve program in Minneapolis, Minnesota, STEP-UP Chattanooga helped 76 students attain internships at 43 top Chattanooga companies in 2016. Students gain on-the-job experience and professional skill-building, meet professionals who can help support their career and postsecondary goals, and are compensated for their work. This model demonstrates the leadership from Tennessee communities and businesses critical to increasing student success beyond high school.

In 2016, Tennessee secured a \$100,000 New Skills for Youth grant. Part of a five-year initiative developed by JPMorgan Chase, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Advance CTE, New Skills for Youth aims to increase economic opportunity for young people by strengthening career-focused education, starting in high school.<sup>57</sup> These funds enabled Pathways Tennessee to analyze the strengths and needs of regions across Tennessee to inform the development of partnerships at the local level and intentionally direct resources. Pathways regions use these data to create unified plans to narrow persistent gaps between skills students acquire in school and skills they will need to be competitive in the workforce.

Two key barriers challenge collaborative student readiness efforts: limited employer awareness of opportunities to engage and weak community buy-in to expand strategies that get results. Work-based learning (WBL), for example, helps bridge the gap between high school and high-demand, high-skill careers, but these programs still only serve a fraction of Tennessee students.<sup>58</sup> Common misperceptions among business leaders, educators, students, and families about the purpose of WBL, its potential impact on student learning, and ease of employer participation are major challenges to program expansion. In 2016, the Tennessee Business Roundtable and TDOE, along with other agencies, business, and nonprofit groups, convened to discuss strategies to overcome barriers to expand WBL. During Tennessee's first Work-Based Learning Summit, business and education stakeholders gained a better understanding of how WBL can alter life courses for students, particularly historically underserved students, and the benefits of business partnerships for both talent development and community building.







To expand programs like WBL, Tennessee has provided incentives for collaborative student readiness efforts. The Tennessee Labor and Education Alignment Program (LEAP) is a competitive grant program empowering regional stakeholders to engage in partnerships to align educational training and postsecondary credentials with the needs of industry partners. Grant recipients work with community partners to enhance early postsecondary and career opportunities and expand work-based learning opportunities. In LEAP's first year, Tennesseans from 51 counties participated in over 15,000 training and workforce development opportunities created by the LEAP grants. Other results from the grants included:

- 13,363 middle school, high school, and college students have participated in LEAP-funded extracurricular programming, including career readiness initiatives, work-based learning experiences, academic clubs, and career exploration programs
- 1,591 high school students have enrolled in courses that have been initiated or expanded by LEAP programs as of December 2015.
- 630 students have enrolled in community college and TCAT programs supported by LEAP-funded equipment and instructors.

The LEAP program helps advance Tennessee students' postsecondary and career readiness. It also builds on and expands the work of Pathways Tennessee.

**RURAL SCHOOLS.** Large numbers of students in rural areas of Tennessee face significant challenges to accessing opportunities that benefit their peers in urban areas. Seizing innovation to deliver expanded opportunity in rural areas is crucial to rural communities' success. In 2016, Governor Haslam assembled the Rural Task Force, a team of cross-agency stakeholders, to consider how to advance rural economies. As part of this task force, local elected officials and leaders across sectors ranging from education to industry and law enforcement developed innovative ideas for improving rural businesses, schools, and communities. The task force recommended a rural teacher initiative be developed to recruit, support, and retain teachers in the poorest rural counties in the state. Members also called for a rural education network to encourage improved professional learning practices, effectively closing geographic distances between teachers. Consideration of and action on task force recommendations will continue through 2017, including during the legislative session.

**The work over the past year has led to continued progress for Tennessee students. To reach the ambitious goals that guide efforts to improve student achievement statewide, Tennessee must continue to support educators, ensure all students are held to high expectations, and maintain commitment to the policies that have led to our success while seizing opportunities to advance innovation.**



## THE PRIORITIES FOR 2017



Each year since 2009, SCORE has worked with education stakeholders in Tennessee to identify a collective set of annual priorities for all those working to improve student achievement in the state. This year, however, the imperative for a common vision for success is even more pressing.

2017 is a critical transition year for Tennessee. A new student assessment that will set a higher baseline for student proficiency will be fully implemented.

The Nation's Report Card will gauge once again how Tennessee students compare to students in other states in fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading. A new state accountability system will go into place. And, importantly, the conversation will begin about who will succeed Governor Haslam as Tennessee's 50th governor and which policies the candidates for governor will commit to pursue. Throughout these conversations, the priorities outlined here should provide the lens through which Tennessee's leaders consider education policy and practice.

As this report has detailed, Tennessee students have made historic improvements over the last half-decade. Yet many students in Tennessee are still far from realizing the ultimate goal that is set for them—graduating from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.

The three priority areas identified in the 2016-17 *State of Education in Tennessee* reflect the consensus of Tennesseans across the state. Policymakers and practitioners, teachers and superintendents, local community and business leaders, and many other partners informed these priorities. Together, they provide an answer to a profound question for the year ahead: "What must be achieved by the end of 2017 in Tennessee K-12 education to continue on the path to student success?"

Every Tennessean involved in preparing students for a successful future has a role in advancing these priorities, and SCORE will remain committed to tracking progress on them throughout 2017.

## 2017 TENNESSEE EDUCATION PRIORITIES

- **Accelerate Support for Tennessee's Educators**
- **Drive toward Excellence and Equity for All Tennessee Students—Especially Underserved Students**
- **Stand Firm on Tennessee's Policies That Have Led to Historic Gains, While Seizing Opportunities to Advance Innovation**

### ACCELERATE SUPPORT FOR TENNESSEE'S EDUCATORS

As noted earlier in this report, effective teaching is the most important in-school factor in improving student learning. Research also shows that approximately 25 percent of a school's effect on student academic gains can be attributed to effective leadership.<sup>59</sup> Tennessee's educators have led the way for Tennessee students to make historic academic gains. To reach even higher, Tennessee must accelerate support for the state's educators in the following ways:

First, **Tennessee should be one of the nation's leaders in improving teacher preparation.** In 2016, a SCORE report laid out recommendations for ensuring that Tennessee educators are prepared to teach on day one of their careers. In 2017, more work and urgency is needed, at both the state and local levels.

This work should begin in local communities, where educator preparation providers and school districts must increase collaboration to ensure teaching candidates receive high-quality classroom-based and field experiences that match what they will face when entering the classroom. Preparation programs should make it a priority to thoughtfully use the State Board of Education's new Teacher Preparation Report Card in identifying specific strategies to improve efforts within their programs. And programs should work together with school districts and the state to outline clear goals for racial and ethnic diversity within the teaching population to increase the number of diverse teaching candidates.



### ACCELERATE EDUCATOR SUPPORT:

- Improve teacher preparation
- Continue commitment to multi-measure teacher evaluation system
- Improve teacher compensation
- Empower teachers through stronger professional learning and expanded teacher leadership opportunities
- Build strong school leadership pipelines



State-level work is needed as well to support future teachers. More staff capacity is needed at the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to successfully implement educator preparation policies and build stronger relationships with preparation programs. This capacity, as well as the work of the new Director of Networks and Partnerships, should be directed at highlighting promising practices that could improve collaboration between preparation programs and school districts. Finally, the State Board of Education has a critical role to play by creating a rigorous policy for interim reviews of preparation programs, increasing access to and transparency of data on preparation programs, improving the rigor of content assessments, and improving the transparency of admissions processes by requiring programs to report more detailed data about how students are admitted. TDOE must also provide clear guidelines for identifying which EPPs will be subject to interim reviews.

Second, **Tennessee must continue its commitment to the state's multi-measure teacher evaluation system.** This commitment takes two forms. One is to resist efforts to remove measures of student growth from evaluations or to prevent school and district leaders from using the evaluation system in important decision-making. The other is to continue working to improve and strengthen the evaluation system so it becomes a better means for improving instruction. TVAAS remains an area where significant need exists to broaden and deepen understanding of the growth measure and to ensure that more teachers have an individual growth score or a more tailored, school-wide measure that aligns to their teaching responsibilities. To accomplish these goals, TDOE, the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents, and SCORE should work to deliver clear, accessible, and differentiated information on TVAAS to districts, school leaders, and teachers. Further, all teachers should receive substantive feedback based on their evaluations to inform and improve their teaching practice. Only 58 percent of teachers responding to the 2016 Tennessee Educator Survey reported receiving this feedback, while more than 90 percent of administrators believed teachers received feedback.

Third, **improving teacher compensation must remain a top priority.** As noted earlier in this report, Governor Haslam and the Tennessee General Assembly should be applauded for their commitment to funding increases in teacher compensation, while providing school districts with the flexibility needed to distribute those funding increases appropriately. Governor Haslam and Tennessee's legislators must continue this commitment by once again increasing funding toward teacher compensation during the 2017 legislative session. Ultimately, Tennessee should strive to become the state where teachers aspire to work, and advancing teacher salaries is an important factor toward realizing that goal.

Fourth, **Tennessee must better empower teachers through stronger professional learning and expanded teacher leadership opportunities.** All educators need targeted, content-specific, ongoing professional learning opportunities to help them hone their teaching practice. Teachers often find they learn best from other teachers. That is why TDOE, partnering with the Tennessee Educational Research Alliance (TERA) and school districts, should continue to expand and evaluate peer-to-peer professional learning, with a particular focus on successfully implementing the instructional shifts required for the state's revised math and English language arts standards. The design of these opportunities must ensure early-career teachers receive coaching and support from highly effective peers and that state-led coaching efforts on early literacy are strengthened.

Nongovernmental partners have a role in this work, as well. SCORE, the Tennessee Teacher Leadership Collaborative, the state's educator organizations, and other philanthropic and community partners should expand opportunities for teachers to lead in both practice and policy while in the classroom. To succeed in this work, TDOE and TERA should collaborate to deepen research on promising practices in teacher leadership, with a specific focus on how leadership programs affect teacher morale, retention, and student academic performance.

Finally, **ensuring effective school leadership in every Tennessee school must be a higher priority for Tennessee's state leaders.** As we have noted every year we have published this report, strong school leaders are essential for increasing student achievement and fostering school cultures that attract, support, and retain highly effective teachers. The Governor's Academy for School Leadership and the Tennessee Transformational Leadership Alliance (TTLA) are, together, an important start. TTLA is a state-level incubator started in 2016 for school leadership that will support the design, refinement, implementation, and evaluation of pipeline programs in regional partnerships. The TTLA Principal Pipeline Program application will be released by the department in early 2017. Districts and partners should collaborate to design and implement a shared-cost leader pipeline model based on local and regional needs to secure TTLA support. Tennessee must also use its plan to take advantage of opportunities under the Every Student Succeeds Act to sharpen the state's school improvement plan by providing better supports to school leaders in the lowest-performing schools.

## DRIVE TOWARD EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY FOR ALL TENNESSEE STUDENTS—ESPECIALLY UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

Although Tennessee has made progress in closing some achievement gaps, the state has far to go to ensure both excellence and equity for all Tennessee students regardless of income, race, geographic location, or student need. To provide every student an education that prepares him or her for postsecondary education and the workforce, Tennessee must honestly tackle the persistent and urgent challenges faced by underserved students—students of color, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities or who are English learners.

**This work begins with expanding access to highly effective and diverse teachers.** As noted earlier in this report, historically underserved students in Tennessee tend to be placed with less-effective teachers, when these students have the greatest need for strong instruction. To address this inequity, school districts should make use of human capital data reports for developing compensation strategies, including differentiated pay plans that help recruit and retain highly effective teachers in high-needs schools. Stronger collaboration between educator preparation providers and school districts should include explicit plans focused on ensuring that preparation programs are training enough teaching candidates who are prepared to teach hard-to-staff subjects and in high-needs schools.

A more racially and ethnically diverse population in the state's teaching pipeline will be an essential component of this work. Tennessee, led by TDOE and supported by the state's educator preparation programs, should set a specific and bold goal in 2017 to increase the percentage of teachers of color in the state. This work should be coupled with additional supports in preparation programs for teaching candidates of color, as well as supports in schools and districts for early-career teachers of color.

Next, **Tennessee must capitalize on opportunities in ESSA to develop and deliver an accountability system that serves all students' needs.** Tennessee's new accountability system should build on the strengths of the current district-focused accountability system, extending its impact to the school level. This step means measuring school performance by both student proficiency and growth, focusing on closing achievement gaps between student subgroups—including English learners—and having meaningful,

### DRIVE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY:

- Expand access to highly effective and diverse teachers
- Capitalize on opportunities in ESSA to serve all students
- Ensure all students have access to rigorous early postsecondary and career opportunities
- Increase employer participation in student career readiness





evidence-based interventions for schools that are not improving.

ESSA provides an important opportunity to implement a new school improvement model that provides districts and schools with the support they need to turn around the state's lowest-performing schools. To support this work, TDOE, working with TERA, should ensure interventions in high-priority schools—including comprehensive turnaround efforts—use evidence-based practices, with focus on core competencies of effective leaders. This work will involve TDOE to ensure that the state's School Improvement Office can adequately support the needs of priority schools and connect these schools with resources that will aid their success. Tennessee should ensure the interventions provided through the state's new school improvement model extend beyond schools in the lowest 5 percent and result in clear, actionable change. Students cannot afford years of incremental change in our highest-needs schools.

Third, **Tennessee should ensure all students have the opportunity to take advantage of rigorous early postsecondary and career opportunities.** Every high school in Tennessee should provide and promote early postsecondary and career opportunities and ensure students take advantage of these opportunities to prepare for further postsecondary study or a job. School leaders, teachers, and counselors will need to pay special attention

to including historically underserved students in this effort, with targeted support. ESSA also provides an opportunity for Tennessee to elevate early postsecondary and career opportunities in Tennessee's accountability system. At the same time, district and state leaders must maintain focus on course rigor to ensure students are engaging in coursework that will result in postsecondary success or job readiness.

Finally, **employers have an expanded role to play in students' career readiness.** Tennessee should explore policies that incentivize and reward employers who offer work-based learning in partnership with schools and districts. Local and state tax credits, as well as policies that protect students and employers in the workplace, should be considered by policymakers. Pathways Tennessee, the Tennessee Business Roundtable, and the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development should engage Tennessee business leaders through local chambers of commerce and other business groups to identify policies to broaden employer participation in work-based learning. Policymakers should then be engaged to enact these policies.



## STAND FIRM ON TENNESSEE'S POLICIES THAT HAVE LED TO HISTORIC GAINS, WHILE SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE INNOVATION

As Tennessee works to support educators and drive excellence and equity for all students, as a state we must not lose sight of the foundational policies that have put Tennessee in the national education spotlight. Policymakers and state leaders must recommit to the policies that have led to gains for students, while identifying and accelerating opportunities for new ideas and efforts.

Most importantly, **Tennessee policymakers should provide stability for the state's educators by not retreating on assessment, accountability, or academic standards.** First, Tennessee must get implementation right on this year's TNReady assessment, and policymakers should resist any efforts to either change directions on the state's assessment or to allow districts to administer assessments in place of TNReady. In turn, TDOE, school districts, SCORE, and other partners should provide educators and parents with detailed information about TNReady results that will help them better support students.

Second, as noted earlier, Tennessee must continue its commitment to the state's multi-measure teacher evaluation system. This commitment means resisting efforts to remove measures of student growth or no

longer using the evaluation system for important decision-making within a school and school district.

Third, **Tennessee must continue its current process of reviewing the state's academic standards, setting a high bar and ensuring that expectations for students continue to rise.** This priority is consistent with the perspective of a large majority of Tennessee voters. In a December 2016 statewide public opinion survey commissioned by SCORE, 81 percent of surveyed registered voters supported the state's standards review process.

Looking ahead, **Tennessee should identify and take advantage of the opportunities for innovation that will spur additional improvements in student achievement.** This commitment includes opportunities within ESSA to develop and deliver an accountability system that serves Tennessee students' needs, allowing districts to be catalysts for change. It also means being innovative about the ways professional learning opportunities are designed and supported, such as micro-credentialing and peer-to-peer coaching and mentoring. There is no one-size-fits-all model of professional learning; teachers today engage in multiple opportunities for professional learning and inquiry that meet their individual needs.

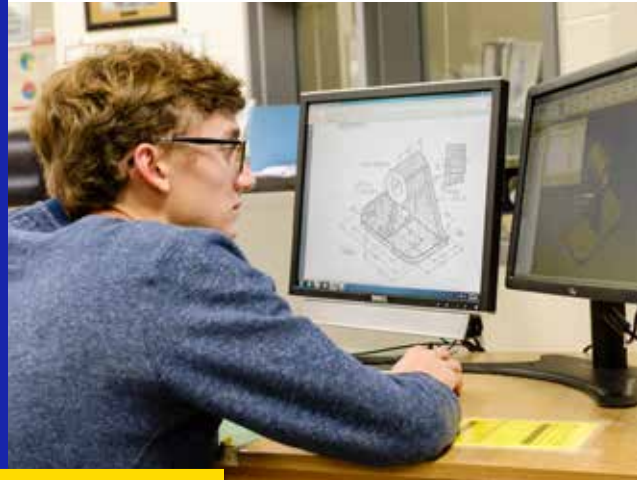
Finally, better, more transparent and integrated data systems across state agencies should directly inform new innovations in early postsecondary opportunities, teacher preparation, and school improvement.





## STAND FIRM WHILE ADVANCING INNOVATION:

- Provide stability for educators on assessment, accountability, and academic standards
- Maintain strong academic standards
- Take advantage of opportunities to innovate



# ABOUT SCORE



The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) drives collaboration on policy and practice to ensure student success across Tennessee. We are an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan advocacy and research institution, founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate Majority Leader.

SCORE works collaboratively to support K-12 education throughout Tennessee, and we measure our success by the academic growth of Tennessee's students.



## OUR WORK

To help Tennessee achieve academic success for all students, SCORE:

- Advocates for critical policies that advance student success
- Convenes and supports state and local partners to advance a shared agenda
- Promotes the implementation of promising practices that work
- Fosters and supports strong networks of education leaders



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# GLOSSARY







**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:** Academic standards provide a common set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade and in each subject. Academic standards differ from curriculum, which is developed locally in Tennessee. Curriculum provides the instructional programming students need to meet the goals established in academic standards.

**ACHIEVEMENT GAP:** Achievement gap refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The term is often used to refer to the performance gaps

between white students and students of color or students from higher-income and lower-income backgrounds. Other subgroups for which achievement gaps may be shown include male and female students, English language learners and native English speakers, and students without identified disabilities and students with disabilities.

**ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (ASD):** Tennessee's First to the Top Act created the ASD as one of four interventions that the Commissioner of Education may require to turn around the state's lowest-performing schools. An organizational unit of the Tennessee Department of Education, the ASD provides oversight for the operation of schools assigned to it or schools the ASD itself authorizes. Priority Schools—schools with student achievement levels that place them in the bottom 5 percent in the state—are eligible for placement in the ASD. Schools remain with the ASD for a minimum of five years before returning back to the original district.

**ACT:** The ACT is a standardized assessment frequently required of high school students for admission into college. The test has sections in English, mathematics, reading, science reasoning and an optional written essay. Scored on a scale from 1 to 36, the test is intended to be an indicator of college readiness. The rigor of ACT test questions generally align with college introductory course content. All 11th graders in Tennessee are required to take this exam.

**BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM (BEP):** The state of Tennessee determines how to allocate funds to its K-12 schools with the BEP formula. This formula calculates the cost of providing a basic education. The BEP includes three major categories of expenditures: instructional, classroom, and non-classroom components. Within the BEP formula, the primary basis for funding is student enrollment, or average daily membership (ADM). The majority of the BEP's 45 components are based on a school's or district's ADM. Examples include students per teacher, assistant principals per school, and dollars per student for textbooks. Systems are free to raise additional money to support their schools as well.

**CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE):** Career and technical education refers to courses and programs designed to prepare students to enter the workforce. Usually in a secondary or postsecondary setting, CTE courses focus on academic and vocational knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. CTE seeks to prepare students for jobs in fields such as agriculture, engineering, and health care, and can result in the attainment of an industry certification.

**CAREER READINESS:** In Tennessee, career-ready students are those who graduate K-12 education with the knowledge, abilities, and habits to enter and complete postsecondary education without remediation and to seamlessly move into

a career that affords them the opportunity to live, work, and sustain a living wage.

**CENTER OF REGIONAL EXCELLENCE (CORE):** CORE offices, located in eight designated regions across the state, provide differentiated professional development, create regional collaborative partnerships, and promote evidence-based best practice sharing to help districts meet student achievement goals. Staff and support at each office include an executive director and support staff that includes academic specialists and fiscal and consolidated planning consultants.

**CHARTER SCHOOL:** Public charter schools are independently run schools that are publicly funded and approved by local school boards, the ASD, or State Board of Education. These schools have the flexibility to make personnel, financial, and instructional decisions at the school, rather than the district level, but are still held to the same accountability standards as traditional public schools.

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM:** A student is chronically absent if she or he misses at least 10 percent of the school year.

**CURRICULUM:** Curriculum is instructional programming designed to help students reach learning outcomes set out in academic standards. Each local school district uses the academic standards approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education as the basis for developing curriculum. Educators work to develop and tailor curriculum to promote learning that is personalized to their students and differentiated according to overall class need.

**CUT SCORES:** Cut scores are selected points on the score scale of a test. The points are used to determine whether a particular test score is sufficient for some purpose. For example, student performance on a test may be classified into one of several categories such as basic, proficient, or advanced on the basis of cut scores.

**DIFFERENTIATED PAY PLANS:** Differentiated pay plans, also known as pay for performance, base a teacher's compensation on professional learning, student achievement, leadership roles, a willingness to teach in high-need subjects or areas, and other measures. Differentiated pay plans differ from traditional salary schedules, which uniformly increase teachers' compensation based on number of years teaching and level of degree completion. Differentiated pay plans come in many forms such as permanent increases to base salary or as a one-time bonus.

**DRIVE TO 55:** Drive to 55 is a statewide initiative, begun in 2013, to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential to 55 percent by 2025.

Approximately 39.3 percent of Tennesseans aged 25-64 had a postsecondary credential in 2014, according to the US Census Bureau. Under this initiative, are several programs designed to improve access to postsecondary education and increase degree completion, such as the Tennessee Promise, and Tennessee Reconnect.

**ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS (ED):** Beginning in 2015-16, the Tennessee Department of Education defines economically disadvantaged students for accountability and funding purposes as those children who are directly identified as receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (or food stamps), those whose families participate in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, students who experience homelessness and are on the local school district liaison's list of homeless students, Head Start participants, migrant youth, runaways, foster children, and others who may be certified by state or local officials. This group of students is commonly referred to as "directly certified." Previously, ED students were categorized by their eligibility for the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program.

**END OF COURSE (EOC):** End of Course (EOC) exams are associated with a specific academic course and are typically given at the high school level. Beginning in 2015-16, EOCs were required for Algebra I and II, Biology, Chemistry, English I, II, and III, Geometry, Integrated Math I, II, and III, and US History. EOCs count as a portion of a student's final grade average, but are not required for graduation from high school.

**ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS (EL):** According to federal law, an English learner student is one "whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards, the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society." There are a variety of terms used to refer to these students, including, but not limited to, English Learners (EL), English Language Learners (ELL), Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, or English as a Second Language (ESL) students. In Tennessee, students are screened for English proficiency using the WIDA ACCESS assessment, a nationally recognized tool. Students who are not proficient in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English receive tailored supports and interventions, and yearly retake the ACCESS test. Upon reaching proficiency, students are exited from the program.

**EQUITY:** In education, the term equity refers to the principle of fairness. Often used interchangeably with equality, equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models,

programs, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. Educational inequities occur when policies, programs, practices, or environments contribute to a lack of equality in academic and behavioral outcomes.

**EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA):** The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law December 2015, is the most recent version of the national Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. ESSA replaces the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the previous version of the 1965 education law, and takes effect for the 2017-18 school year. Under ESSA, states are still required to test students in reading and math each year in grades 3-8 and once in high school. States must also continue reporting performance for students as a whole and for specific subgroups of students (e.g., economically disadvantaged children and English language learners, among others). In addition, states must maintain or revise their academic standards and systems to measure academic progress. One important change, however, is that while states must continue to identify their lowest-performing schools, they are given more freedom to determine evidence-based practices for turning those schools around.

**EXPULSION:** Tennessee state law and State Board of Education rule define expulsion as, “removal from attendance for more than ten (10) consecutive days or more than fifteen (15) days in a month of school attendance. Multiple suspensions that occur consecutively shall constitute expulsion. The school district shall not be eligible to receive funding for an expelled student.”

**GROWTH:** Growth refers to academic progress made over a period of time, as measured from the beginning to the end of the defined period. Academic growth can be tracked and determined for individual students, schools, states, or countries, and a wide variety of variables and methodologies may be used to determine whether “growth” is being achieved. In Tennessee, measures of growth are most often associated with student data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and portfolio models of student growth.

**INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (IPI):** IPI is a school-level teacher improvement strategy that uses data collected through the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (the state’s teacher observation rubric) to inform teacher partnerships focused on professional learning. The Tennessee Department of Education provides school leaders with suggested teacher partnerships based on specific observation indicators, which serve as a focus for collaboration. Once paired, teachers collaboratively engage in personalized professional learning, such as peer observations and feedback, to improve their craft. A

2014-15 pilot study of the IPI program found that students in IPI-participating schools scored significantly higher on Tennessee’s state assessment than students in non-IPI participating schools. Additionally, teachers improved their TVAAS scores, felt more supported by school leadership, and were more likely to perceive the evaluation process as fair and focused on improving their practice. As of the 2016-17 school year, over 1,550 teachers in 114 schools in 48 districts were participating in IPI.

**IZONE:** Tennessee’s Innovation Zones, or iZones, were created by the First to the Top Act of 2010 as a means to turn around chronically failing schools. iZones schools remain part of local districts, but are provided extra autonomy to hire and fire staff, overhaul curriculum, give teachers bonuses, and add time to the school day.

**LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA):** A local education agency (LEA), or school district, is the administrative agency for county or city school systems in Tennessee. An LEA has several distinct responsibilities such as curriculum selection, the offering of district-level professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders, and the administration of teacher and principal evaluations.

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP):** Also known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” NAEP is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and US history. Exams are administered every two years to representative samples of students in grades 4, 8, and 12, and results provide common metrics to indicate levels of student proficiency across states and selected urban districts.

**PRINCIPAL PIPELINE:** The principal pipeline refers to the recruitment, training, inducting, supervising, developing, and evaluating of school leaders.

**PROFICIENCY:** Proficiency levels indicate the degree to which students have mastered course material and are often used in the context of student academic achievement, separate and distinct from growth. In Tennessee, student proficiency levels are Below, Approaching, On-Track, and Mastered. Proficiency levels are set by determining cut scores (i.e. selected points on the score scale of a test).

**REMEDIATION:** Remediation, also known as developmental education or learning support, generally refers to academic requirements for students assessed as underprepared for postsecondary education. Remediation is designed to address students’ weak reading, writing, and/or math skills so that students are more successful in entry-level college courses.

**RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND INSTRUCTION (RTI<sup>2</sup>):**

RTI<sup>2</sup> focuses on high-quality instruction and interventions that are tailored to individual student needs and where instructional decisions are made based on student outcome data on high-quality assessments. It is a three-tiered model with progressively more intense interventions provided to students who are not showing growth in general instruction or in response to initial interventions. Student progress is monitored regularly through research-based assessments, ensuring that instructional decisions and decisions to intervene are made based on student data.

**RURAL SCHOOLS:** The US Census Bureau defines rural by what it is not: it is neither a city with a population of 50,000 or more, nor a cluster of towns and cities with 2,500 to 50,000 people each. The National Center for Educational Statistics builds on this definition, adding three geographic categories within the rural definition:

- **Fringe.** Less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.
- **Distant.** More than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
- **Remote.** More than 25 miles from an urbanized area and also more than 10 miles from an urbanized cluster.

**SEAMLESS ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATED LEARNING SUPPORT (SAILS):**

The Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program targets students that have not achieved college readiness benchmarks by introducing the college developmental curriculum into the high school senior year. Developed by K-12 teachers and higher education faculty at Chattanooga State Community College, SAILS embeds the Tennessee Board of Regents Learning Support competencies into the high school senior year math and English courses using a blended learning model. SAILS is a key aspect of the Governor's Drive to 55 in removing barriers to college success by allowing students to begin a higher education career prepared for credit-bearing coursework.

**STATE SALARY SCHEDULE:** Tennessee's State Salary Schedule for teachers is a minimum salary amount determined by years of experience teaching and professional degrees earned.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SWD):** According to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (Sec. 300.8), "Children with disabilities" or "students with disabilities" means children or students who require special education

because of: autism; communication disorders; deafness; emotional disturbances; hearing impairments, including deafness; intellectual disability; orthopedic impairments; other health impairments; specific learning disabilities; traumatic brain injuries; or visual impairments, including blindness; or multiple disabilities.

**SUSPENSION:** Tennessee state law and State Board of Education rules define student suspension as, "...dismissed from attendance at school for any reason for not more than ten (10) consecutive days. The student on suspension shall be included in ADM (Average Daily Membership) and will continue to be counted for funding purposes. Multiple suspensions shall not run consecutively, nor shall multiple suspensions be applied to avoid expulsion from school."

**TEACHER LEADERSHIP:** Teacher leadership refers to a teacher who maintains K-12 classroom-based teaching while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom. Teacher leadership focuses on roles beyond the classroom, supporting the professional learning of peers, influencing policy/decision making, and ultimately targeting student learning.<sup>60</sup>

**TEACHER PREPARATION:** Teacher preparation refers to an aspiring teacher's training, which has traditionally consisted of college-level coursework and student teaching experiences offered through postsecondary institutions. As of 2016, 40 traditional teacher preparation programs exist in Tennessee. All providers of teacher preparation programs that lead to licensure must be approved by the State Board of Education.

**TEACHER PREPARATION REPORT CARD:** State law requires that all approved teacher preparation programs in Tennessee be evaluated annually based on the placement and retention rates, Praxis II scores, and teacher effect data of their graduates. In December 2016, the State Board of Education released an updated version of the report card that programs, program applicants, and districts and schools hiring new teachers may use for key data reference points.

**TENNESSEE EDUCATOR ACCELERATION MODEL (TEAM):**

TEAM is the state-developed teacher evaluation system implemented in the 2011-12 school year. TEAM combines quantitative and qualitative components, and the model focuses on 23 specific indicators developed from research-based standards. TEAM incorporates frequent observation, constructive feedback, student learning measures, and aligned development opportunities. TEAM is being used by 121 districts, covering approximately 80 percent of teachers statewide.



**TENNESSEE PROMISE:** As part of the state's Drive to 55 initiative, the Tennessee Promise is a scholarship and mentoring program that provides a last-dollar scholarship for high school graduates seeking a degree or certificate at a community college, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), or other eligible institution. The maximum scholarship amount is the average cost of tuition and mandatory fees at a Tennessee public community college. The scholarship for each student will vary based on their remaining financial need after all other grant aid is applied. In order to maintain eligibility, participating students must meet with their mentor, complete eight hours of community service per term enrolled, and maintain satisfactory academic progress (2.0 GPA) at their institution. Students who graduated from high school in 2015 were the first class eligible for the program.

**TENNESSEE VALUE-ADDED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM (TVAAS):** TVAAS aims to measure the impact a district, school, or teacher has on the academic growth of individual students and groups of students from one school year to the next. TVAAS scores are based on student performance on Tennessee's achievement tests. To calculate annual growth for students, TVAAS incorporates a student's past testing data and estimates his or her growth based on the average growth of students statewide. A student's performance on an assessment is compared to the average score of his or her student peers in similar grades and subjects. The difference between how a student would be expected to perform and his or her actual performance results in an annual measure of educator contribution to growth. Because this measure is calculated each year in relationship to each student's performance, assessment data can provide a basis for determining growth, as all students in the state take the same state-required tests.

**TNREADY:** TNReady is Tennessee's statewide annual assessment for English language arts, math, science, and social studies and is taken by students in grades 3-11. TNReady, first administered in 2015-16, is part of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). The assessment is aligned with Tennessee academic standards and includes a mix of item types to better measure student understanding, including essay and short-answer questions, multi-step math problems, and multiple-choice and multiple-answer questions.

**WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL):** Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational approach providing students an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education and future careers. WBL combines academic, technical, and social skills through collaborative activities in a professional setting to allow students to explore possible career options. Introductory WBL activities in the elementary and middle school years may include school-directed experiences that expose students to a broad range of industries and career opportunities such as field trips and tours, career fairs, and guest speakers from various career and industry fields. More advanced activities in high school may include a more comprehensive experience both inside and outside of the classroom through job shadowing, service learning projects, internships, apprenticeships, and practicum experiences for credit.





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