

AN EDUCATION ON EDUCATION

A Candidate's Guide to Improving Education in Tennessee



WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE?

In 2007, Tennessee received a harsh wakeup call. According to our state measures, Tennessee children appeared to be doing well, but when compared to kids in other states, less than a third were on track to be ready for college or the workforce. This led Tennessee to receive an “F” from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for “Truth in Advertising” in education. We hadn’t been honest with students, parents, or Tennessee taxpayers.

In the last 10 years, Tennessee has made remarkable progress in education with a shared sense of urgency and an innovative approach focused on student success. We have created Tennessee-specific academic standards that better prepare students for education beyond high school and the workforce, ensured that teachers are fairly evaluated every year to help them become the very best in their field, and put in place an accountability system that sharpens the focus on turning around schools that have chronically underserved kids.

WHAT SHOULD TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION GOALS BE?

Tennessee should measure our success by the academic growth of our students. After all, Tennessee has been a leader among states in measuring academic growth since 1992.

Tennessee should continue working toward:

- First, Tennessee should continue to be among the fastest-improving states in the country and rank in the top half of all states in student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). We are already in the top half of states in fourth-grade math and fourth- and eighth-grade science. We can make this happen in the other grades and subjects.
- Second, Tennessee should work to close all student achievement gaps – at every grade level and subject area — by income, race, geographic location, and student need. These gaps should steadily narrow every year.
- Third, every Tennessee student should graduate from high school prepared for the vocational school, community college, or university of their choosing. At a minimum, kids should be ready to accept the Tennessee Promise scholarship when they graduate from high school.

These goals are necessary for Tennessee to increase the number of students completing a postsecondary education and for today's students to have the opportunities to pursue tomorrow's jobs. Tennessee should – and can – accomplish these goals by 2020.



WHAT MATTERS IN EDUCATION

There are three things that will keep us moving forward to achieve these goals: empowering people, insisting on high expectations, and fostering a culture of innovation.

EMPOWERING PEOPLE:

Every classroom, school, and district must be led by passionate and effective teachers, principals, and superintendents. Tennessee needs to better recruit, develop, and retain high-quality educators. The most important thing Tennessee can do to move students forward is ensure there is an effective teacher in every classroom. How can this be accomplished?

- First, Tennessee must recruit our best and brightest into the teaching profession and ensure that our future teachers are learning necessary content and teaching skills in colleges of education. This includes increasing teacher pay for current and future teachers.
- Next, Tennessee must make sure that we are evaluating our teachers every year and giving them meaningful feedback to help them improve instruction.
 - *How are Teachers Evaluated? Half of the yearly evaluation is made up of classroom observation scores. This means that multiple times a year, a school administrator visits a classroom to see a teacher's lessons and provides feedback. Thirty-five percent of the evaluation is based on the growth of the students in the teacher's classroom, as calculated using the TVAAS formula. During the first years of TNReady, the impact of the new assessment on growth measures is being phased in, starting at 10 percent and over three years growing to 35 percent of the evaluation score. However, teachers can use a single year of TNReady results if that results in a better evaluation score. The remaining 15 percent is calculated using a measure of student achievement. Teachers choose from a long list of achievement measures to determine their best fit.*
 - *What is the TVAAS Formula? The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures the impact schools and teachers have on their students' academic growth rather than whether the student is proficient on the state assessment. This formula was developed in Tennessee by the late Dr. Bill Sanders.*
 - *While local school districts can decide to make personnel decisions based on teachers' evaluation scores, there is nothing in state law that requires a teacher be hired, fired, or be paid more or less, only because of their evaluation. **Personnel decisions are local decisions.***



- Finally, schools and districts need great leaders. Tennessee needs education leaders who can identify the best teachers for classrooms and make tough decisions that help students. To do this, **Tennessee should reject proposals that limit the ability of communities to hire the best school and district leaders from across the state, region, or nation.**

INSISTING ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS:

In most aspects of life, and especially in higher education and the workforce, progress isn't made without high expectations and ambitious goals. All Tennessee students are capable of high levels of achievement, and rigorous academic standards set clear expectations for each grade and subject. A high-quality assessment, like TNReady, measures student progress on mastering the standards.

What's Been Accomplished:

Standards: The Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE) worked hard over the last two years to develop Tennessee-specific academic standards in English language arts and math that emphasize the real-world skills needed for postsecondary education and the workforce. These standards were created with feedback from parents, teachers, and education experts.

Tests: Tests are something we encounter throughout life, and in K-12 they are a part of the instruction and learning cycle. Tennessee began annual statewide assessments in 1988 in order to give state policymakers, district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and students valuable information about academic progress. Better information leads to better decisions for students. Tennessee public school students in grades 3-11 take annual statewide tests in four subjects – math, English, science, and social studies. Many school districts choose to administer benchmark tests selected locally to measure the progress of kids throughout the year. In addition, all 11th-grade students in Tennessee take the ACT to measure their preparedness for postsecondary education and the workforce.

What's Next:

Standards: The new Tennessee standards in math and English language arts are being used in classrooms in the 2017-18 school year. New standards for science courses will be implemented in 2018-19. The state's social studies standards also are being updated and on track to be introduced in classroom in 2019-20.



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: in quality traditional public schools, public charter schools, district-led Innovation Zone (iZone) schools, and Achievement School District schools.

- The majority of schools in Tennessee are the traditional zoned schools maintained by state and local dollars. Many traditional public schools have worked to create innovative programs. For instance, Tennessee high schools and employers are creating public-private partnerships that allow students to apply classroom learning in real-world settings while gaining valuable workforce skills and certifications in high school.
- Public charter schools are publicly funded schools that families can choose for their children. Charter schools have more autonomy, fewer regulations, and greater flexibility to innovate for better academic results. Charter innovations include extended instructional time, school-based budgeting, and flexible hiring practices. Charter schools are accountable for the promises made in their agreements with school districts or the state, and they may be closed if they fall below certain academic benchmarks.
- iZone schools are district-led turnaround schools in Chattanooga, Memphis, and Nashville. These struggling schools receive additional funding to implement new operational and academic approaches to improve student achievement. Shelby County, in particular, has seen success in its iZone schools, which have innovated to ensure the schools are staffed with teachers able to significantly raise student achievement.
- The Achievement School District (ASD) is a state school district that currently runs schools in Memphis and Nashville. The ASD was created to raise the bottom 5 percent of schools in Tennessee into the top 25 percent in the state. The district is unique in that it is both an accountability mechanism, ensuring that districts provide kids with adequate schools, and a place of innovation where school leaders experiment with new strategies to transform previously struggling schools into places of excellence.



3 KEYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS:

Making sure that every Tennessee student gets a world-class education requires us to push ahead, not turn back. Tennessee’s education improvements are producing real success as seen in higher ACT scores and unprecedented growth on the Nation’s Report Card. Every Tennessee child deserves great teachers, an engaging academic experience, and the most effective and up-to-date avenues to learn. Tennessee must do three things to build this future:

1. **Provide all students with great teachers.** Ensure teachers are well prepared to teach and well supported to continue to develop their skills. Making sure teachers are graduating from their teacher preparation programs ready for day one in the classroom, are getting the right support – yearly evaluations and feedback that factor in student test scores as well as effective school and district leaders – and improving teacher pay remain key priorities.
2. **Hold all students to high expectations and measure their progress.** Stay on track with the new English and math academic standards, which emphasize the real-world skills needed for college and workforce expectations. Gauge student progress on these standards through TNReady, Tennessee’s statewide annual assessment. And, ultimately, share the belief that every child has the ability to learn and achieve.
3. **Embrace successful innovation in academic achievement.** Look for promising practices everywhere—including traditional, public charter, iZone, and Achievement School District schools. Remove obstacles to successful innovation strategies and create programs that foster new ideas.



April 2017

