

# SCORE'S EDUCATION PRIMER

## SUMMER 2020

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A Candidate's Guide For Improving Education In Tennessee



### SCORE'S FOCUS ON STUDENTS

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit education policy and advocacy organization based in Nashville. SCORE was founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate majority leader, and works to transform education in Tennessee so all students can achieve success in college, career, and life. SCORE seeks to inform student-centered policymaking at the local and state levels.

***SCORE's Education Primer: A Candidate's Guide For Improving Education In Tennessee*** emphasizes the role of policymakers in setting the stage for continued student success. Policymakers lay the groundwork for K-12 and postsecondary leaders to push forward with a clear focus on student success. We hope the information in this guide spurs greater curiosity about the challenges and deeper consideration of the supports the education system must provide to help students succeed.

Tennessee became the fastest-improving state on the Nation’s Report Card in 2013 and became the first state to cover tuition to attend community college in 2015. The remarkable progress over the past decade can be attributed to the policy foundation that state leaders have established to support students, teachers, and communities.

In 2020, Tennessee faced significant challenges across health, economic, and education policy. Our K-12 and postsecondary systems are adjusting to online instruction while preparing for the next academic year. We hope this primer serves as a starting point to discuss how public education works in Tennessee and the General Assembly’s role in supporting continued momentum in education as the state moves toward a full economic recovery.

Continued growth will keep our students on a trajectory that ensures the rest of the country sees what we’ve always known — Tennessee is a great place to raise a family and live, work, and thrive well into the future. Our state’s economic development, future workforce, and quality of life depend on a high-quality education for all students.

Learn more at [tnscore.org](https://tnscore.org)



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## TENNESSEE EDUCATION HISTORY

Starting more than a decade ago, Tennesseans decided to take bold steps to transform public education to better prepare students for success in life. We must maintain that commitment to innovation and putting student needs first in our decision-making now.

According to state measures in 2007, students across Tennessee school districts appeared to be doing well, but when compared to students in other states, less than a third were on track to be ready for college or the workforce. Tennessee received an “F” from the US Chamber of Commerce for “Truth in Advertising” about student achievement as a result. We had not been honest with students, parents, or Tennessee taxpayers about public education quality. Since then, Tennessee has made remarkable progress. Through a shared sense of urgency and an innovative approach focused on student success, we now have Tennessee-specific K-12 academic standards that better prepare students for education beyond high school and the workforce, a fair multiple-measure evaluation system for K-12 teachers that helps them become the very best in their field, and an accountability system that ensures schools get the targeted support they need to better prepare the state’s most underserved students.

Tennessee policymakers also took bold, innovative action to improve postsecondary outcomes and meet workforce needs beginning with passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (CCTA) that established a funding formula that rewards colleges and universities for retaining and graduating students. In 2013, more than half of Tennessee’s emerging jobs required a postsecondary certificate or degree, but only 37.8 percent of Tennesseans had a postsecondary certificate or degree.<sup>1</sup> Through student-centered state leadership, Tennessee now has the Tennessee Promise scholarship, which allows students to attend community and technical colleges free of tuition. In 2019, Governor Lee and the General Assembly expanded student access to college coursework for students in high school, with an emphasis on earning credentials aligned to workforce demand.



Students in Tennessee deserve a quality, coordinated approach to education — from kindergarten to postsecondary graduation — that equips them for success in college, career, and life. Every policy and program should be measured by the academic growth and achievement of our students. SCORE has four goals for Tennessee centered on students and their success:

- 1. All students receive an excellent public K-12 education.** Success measures include the percentage of students performing at or above grade level on the statewide assessment and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- 2. All students earn a credential or postsecondary degree.** Key success indicators are the college-going rate of high school graduates, retention in postsecondary education, and attainment of postsecondary credentials.
- 3. All students are prepared for a career that enables economic independence.** Success measures include statewide progress in wages and employment.
- 4. Across all goals, all students have equitable opportunities for success.** All metrics will examine student subgroups based on household income, race, ethnicity, geography, and special needs.

Tennessee can — and should — lead the nation. In order to keep moving forward to reach our goals, Tennessee must have a policy landscape and strategy that empowers excellent educators, insists on high expectations, and ensures alignment through K-12, college, and career.



## TENNESSEE EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

### 973,659 K-12 STUDENTS

- 62.1%** WHITE
- 24.0%** AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 10.9%** HISPANIC
- 4.6%** ENGLISH LEARNERS
- 34.9%** ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
- 13.5%** STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



**147** SCHOOL DISTRICTS



**1,758** SCHOOLS



**69,531** TEACHERS

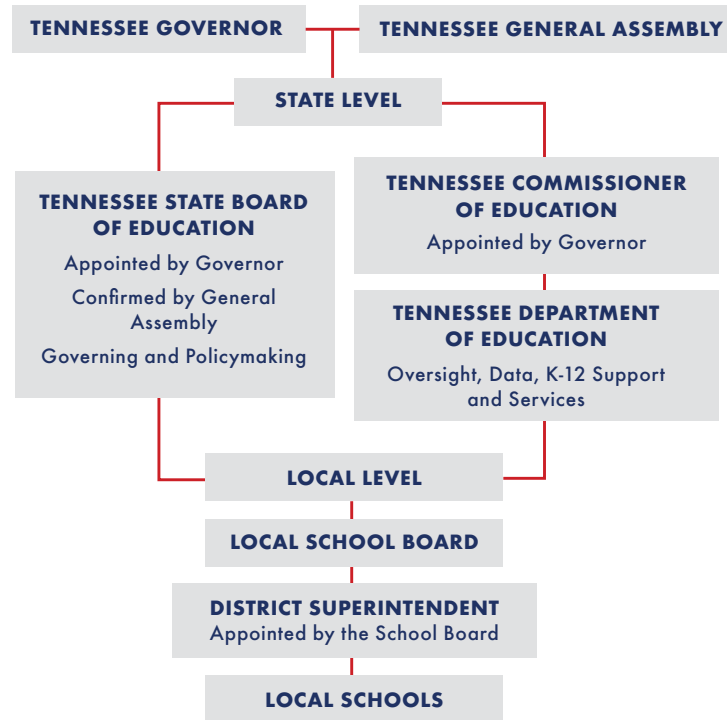
### 228,101 PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

- 58%** FEMALE
- 72.3%** WHITE
- 17.5%** BLACK
- 5.0%** HISPANIC
- 20.7%** ADULT
- 40.3%** LOW-INCOME
- 13** COMMUNITY COLLEGES
- 27** TECHNICAL COLLEGES
- 6** LOCALLY GOVERNED INSTITUTIONS
- 3** UT SYSTEM INSTITUTIONS

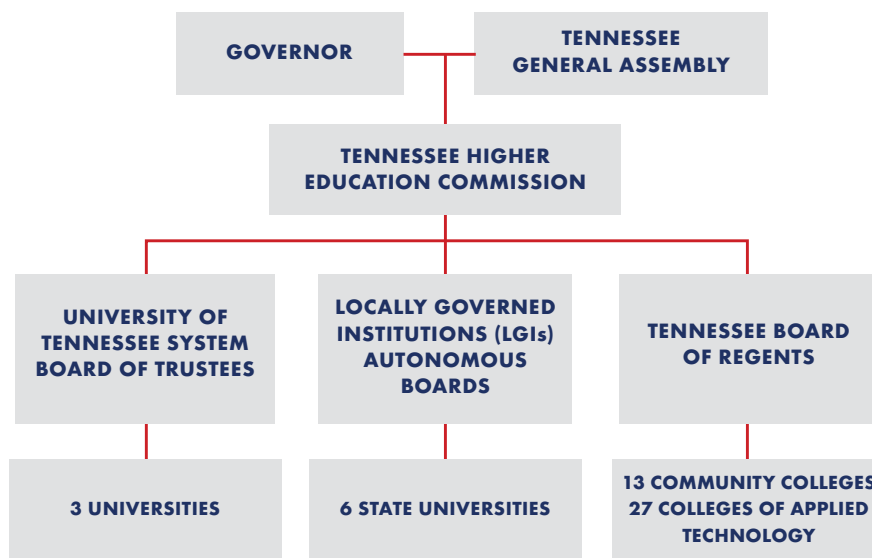
Sources: TDOE, 2019. IPEDS, 2019. THEC, 2020.



## K-12 EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



## HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



## NATIONAL RANKINGS HAVE NEVER BEEN HIGHER

On the Nation’s Report Card, Tennessee has steadily climbed from among the worst-performing states in the nation to at or near the national average.<sup>2</sup>

	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
4th Grade Reading, Rank	39	38	41	31	36	34	<b>31</b>
4th Grade Math, Rank	43	44	46	37	25	34	<b>25</b>
8th Grade Reading, Rank	35	33	41	34	30	38	<b>30</b>
8th Grade Math, Rank	41	42	45	43	37	35	<b>30</b>



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## HOW CAN TENNESSEE CONTINUE TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS?

Tennessee has been on the rise in our national K-12 rankings, college access, and economic development. Making sure that every Tennessee student gets a world-class education requires us to maintain a strong commitment to the policies that propelled us forward and to continue looking ahead to innovative solutions to the challenges we still face. For Tennessee to continue to prosper, every child must have the opportunity to pursue the career of their dreams. SCORE believes three things are essential to achieving Tennessee’s student achievement goals:

- 1. Prepare, recruit, support, and retain excellent teachers and leaders.** Ensure teachers are well prepared to teach and well supported to continue to develop their skills. Make sure teachers are graduating from their teacher preparation programs ready for day one in the classroom, are getting the right support (such as yearly evaluations and feedback that factor in student performance), and receiving compensation that acknowledges their expertise and effectiveness. The state plays an important oversight role to ensure higher education is preparing and supporting our future teachers.
- 2. Ensure all schools and systems meet high expectations.** Stay on track with the rigorous academic standards that emphasize real-world skills needed for college and workforce expectations. Gauge student progress on these standards through annual statewide assessments. And, ultimately, make it easily transparent to communities and families whether we are meeting these expectations for every child. The state sets the standard for academic rigor by ensuring strong academic standards are being used in every classroom statewide.
- 3. Align K-12 and college with career and life success.** Look for new ways to promote new approaches and expand programs that center on preparing students for the best workforce opportunities in a changing economy. Remove obstacles to postsecondary and help students persist and complete academic programs that equip them to earn a sustaining wage. The state plays a crucial role in driving forward new ideas on how Tennessee can better align education and the workforce.





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## EXCELLENT EDUCATORS:

Research demonstrates that teachers have a greater impact on student academic growth than any other in-school factor.<sup>3</sup> The second most important factor at school for raising student achievement is a great principal.<sup>4</sup> State policy that supports high-quality teaching and leadership plays a critical role in helping students achieve.

### Improve Instruction With Multiple-Measure Teacher Evaluations

Tennessee has been at the forefront of efforts to improve the quality of teaching and highlight the most effective teachers. The Tennessee Educator Assessment Model (TEAM) is an evaluation system that provides a comprehensive picture of teacher quality through multiple measures.

Half of a teacher's evaluation is made up of classroom observation scores assigned by a school administrator who visits a teacher's classroom multiple times a year to see the lessons and provide feedback. The other half of a teacher's evaluation is composed of data about the impact of teaching on student academic performance. The achievement measures look at whether students are performing on grade-level, and the growth measures show whether students are improving, as measured by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). Through these evaluations, teachers receive in-depth feedback about their students' performance and actionable next steps to continually improve their practice.

Tennessee's educator evaluation system has been continually refined, and more than 76 percent of teachers in Tennessee say that the current evaluation system has led to improvements in their teaching.<sup>5</sup>

### Retain Great Teachers With Strategic Compensation

The General Assembly has made historic investments in funding for teacher compensation, which honors the hard work of educators and supports recruitment and retention efforts. Although the state has invested more than \$500 million in the last decade, less than half of Tennessee school districts incorporate performance into the teacher salary schedule. Wider adoption of differentiated pay by more local school systems would support efforts to recruit and retain the best teachers, particularly in high-need schools. Compensation, like any other personnel decision, is a decision made by the local school district.



### **Prepare Teachers For Day One**

Every classroom, school, and district must be led by passionate and effective educators. The state plays an important role in ensuring that teachers, principals, and directors are prepared and supported to best serve their students.

The State Board of Education approves all educator preparation programs and produces an annual report card that covers every educator preparation provider in the state. The State Board revised the expectations for educator preparation in 2019 by raising standards and creating a more rigorous program approval process. This ensures that future teachers are learning necessary content and teaching skills to be successful as leaders in their classrooms.

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## **HIGH EXPECTATIONS:**

Progress is rarely made without high expectations and ambitious goals. Tennessee has enacted education reforms based on a widespread belief that all Tennessee students are capable of high levels of achievement. Rigorous academic standards set clear expectations for each grade and subject, a high-quality assessment measures student progress on mastering the academic standards, and a strong accountability system ensures public transparency about school quality.

### **Provide A Foundation Of Rigorous Academic Standards**

Academic standards in Tennessee spell out what each student should know in each grade and each subject in order to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. The ultimate aim of a public education system is to ensure that all students are prepared to successfully pursue their own career goals, and Tennessee sets intermittent goals along the way to check in on whether students are on track for each subject area and at each grade level completed. While the standards are approved by the State Board of Education, the review process includes teachers and public input. Local school districts decide which textbooks and other instructional materials to use.



### **Measure Student Learning**

Standardized tests are something we encounter throughout life — from driving to earning a professional license — and in K-12 they are a part of the instruction and learning cycle. In 1988, Tennessee became an early adopter of annual statewide assessments, called the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), to measure student progress on academic standards. The statewide assessment also provides state policymakers, district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and students valuable information about academic achievement and growth.

Tennessee public school students take a statewide test once a year in up to four subjects - math, English, science, and social studies. These assessments for grades 3-11 make up less than 1 percent of the instructional hours of a school year. Many school districts choose to administer additional benchmark tests to measure progress throughout the school year. In addition, all 11th-grade students in Tennessee take the ACT as one measure of their preparedness for postsecondary education and the workforce.

### **Require Transparency About School Quality**

The state’s accountability model provides all Tennesseans valuable information about the impact districts and schools make on students’ academic growth and performance, particularly what is going well and opportunities for improvement. The most important aspect of assessment is the information it provides to educators about how to improve instruction. The assessment also provides valuable information to students and families about whether students are on track to graduate ready for college and career and how to improve learning in the next grade. Assessment also provides information to district leaders, parents, community members, and policymakers about how to strategically support educators and students.

The accountability model allows the public to better understand how effectively their schools are working and provides policymakers with the information they need to support continuous improvement for all Tennessee schools. With TCAP implementation, the public has access to more transparent and accurate measures of student learning, as demonstrated by similar gains on the gold standard of educational assessment, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



### **Encourage Public School Innovation**

All children should have access to a great education, and there are several innovations that can expand access to high-quality options. Open enrollment policies, academic magnets, and charter schools provide choices to parents seeking the best public option for their child.

Tennessee charter schools are public schools operated by independent, nonprofit governing bodies that receive state and local funding similar to other public schools. Currently, charter schools may be authorized by local school boards, the Achievement School District, or the State Board of Education. Charter school accountability includes the same mandatory percentages of student growth, student achievement, and observations as other public schools. The first charter school in Tennessee opened in 2003, and since then charter schools have expanded to serve approximately 40,000 students in the state’s four largest counties.

According to a 2013 study by Stanford University, students in Tennessee’s charter schools achieve 70 or more days of academic progress on average than matched students in regular public schools.<sup>6</sup> Also a greater percentage of charter public schools met or exceeded expectations for student growth scores compared to their traditional public school counterparts within their respective district.<sup>7</sup>



### **K-12 TO CAREER ALIGNMENT:**

Every Tennessean who earns a high school diploma should be equipped with the ability to pursue a career or college education. Students must graduate high school having demonstrated the knowledge and skills needed for entry-level work and college freshman coursework and success.<sup>8</sup> While nearly nine out of ten high school freshmen will go on to graduate high school, only six out of ten will enter college and only about four out of ten will earn a postsecondary degree. In addition to reforms in Tennessee K-12 education over the last decade, student access and success in higher education have become central to the education landscape.



### **Fund Institutions For Outcomes**

The CCTA established goals for improving student success at all levels of public higher education, including implementation of one of the nation’s first outcomes-based funding formulas. Under the outcomes-based funding formula, public institutions of higher education receive public money based on certificate and degree completion rates rather than just enrollment. This approach is a game-changer because it shifts the incentive structure to make sure college systems are focused on what matters for students — attaining a credential.

### **Boost Economic Development By Preparing Students For Workforce Opportunities**

As Tennessee’s workforce needs shift to meet the demands of the 21st century economy, it is critical for both K-12 and higher education to continually adapt to ensure all Tennesseans are ready to take on the emerging challenge. Recognizing the economic demands for a more skilled workforce, Tennessee set a goal of at least 55 percent of adult Tennesseans holding a degree or industry certificate by 2025 and created the Drive to 55 alliance. Nationally, it is estimated that 65 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary degree or credential, which includes two- and four-year degrees, by 2020.<sup>9</sup>

As Tennessee improved financial access to college, enrollment increased but certificate and degree completion rates have remained stagnant.<sup>10</sup> The Drive to 55 initiative was created to improve the number of credentialed citizens in the state and encompasses five main tenets: get students ready, get students in, get students through, reconnect adults, and partner with industry.

In 2019, Governor Lee sharpened the focus on career and technical education, so that the state would invest in students earning credentials that align to workforce opportunities. Tennessee has made great strides to increase access to postsecondary education, but more must be done to ensure students successfully complete their postsecondary training.



## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> THEC Master Plan, 2015.
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- <sup>3</sup> Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement. RAND Corporation (September 2012).
- <sup>4</sup> Leithwood, Kenneth, Louis, K.S., Anderson, Stephen, and Wahlstrom, Kyla. How Leadership Influences Student Learning: Review of Research. The Wallace Foundation. (2004).
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- <sup>6</sup> [https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ncss\\_2013\\_final\\_draft.pdf](https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/ncss_2013_final_draft.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> SCORE analysis of TVAAS data from 2017-18 school year
- <sup>8</sup> TDOE and THEC, 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> [https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/StateProjections\\_6.1.15\\_agc\\_v2.pdf](https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/StateProjections_6.1.15_agc_v2.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup> THEC, 2019.



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