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Tennessee has taken significant strides to support students at the beginning of 2021, with state leadership presenting and passing key education initiatives during the special session. After an extraordinary year, Tennessee K-12 schools entered 2021 still grappling with the challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. SCORE's annual [State of Education in Tennessee report](#) identified COVID-19 recovery and the early literacy crisis as top priorities for the state to respond to the compounding challenges facing our students. SCORE commends state leaders for acting quickly to enact initiatives that target and increase support for learning.

Now the focus must shift to successful implementation at the state and local level. As with all policy change, the promise of these policies will only be realized for students through strong and effective implementation. To ensure students reap the benefits from these new education laws in the months and years ahead, SCORE has outlined several priorities for successful implementation of Tennessee's literacy initiative and for the learning loss remediation and student acceleration program. To be sure, we believe that successful implementation will require a heavy and focused lift from all partners – from the TDOE, to the SBOE, to school districts.

For the **Tennessee Literacy Success Act**, we have four priorities in implementation:

- **The selected Tennessee-specific screener should be high-quality in measuring skills and monitoring student progress.** The screener should also include tools to help educators analyze student data and communicate results with parents. Some districts are already effectively using screeners that could inform the selection process. We believe TDOE should solicit input from these districts to adopt and adapt successful features of existing screeners. Additionally, districts and schools should receive guidance on appropriate administration and security protocols to follow in order to use screener results for PreK-2nd grade educator evaluations.
- **The professional development for K-5 teachers must be high-quality and grounded in foundational literacy skills.** Teachers need immediate guidance about the timing and scope of the course so they can complete the professional development over the summer. Also, the TDOE should quickly inform districts if the PreK-4 Foundational Reading Skills Educator Training, available to teachers in early April, also fulfills the Literacy bill's requirement for K-5 teachers to complete a professional development course and/or the requirement for districts to offer professional development in their literacy plans.
- **Tennessee's revised educator preparation provider (EPP) literacy standards should be strongly aligned to the research-supported theory and practice of teaching reading.** TDOE's Early Literacy content experts and Preparation and Licensure

team should collaborate with the State Board this spring to build on the current EPP literacy standards. The [IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards](#) would be a helpful model for ensuring Tennessee's EPP literacy standards are rooted in the science of how students learn to read and the practical applications of explicit, systematic reading instruction.

- **The state-specific reading instruction test that Tennessee selects must provide prospective K-3 teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate foundational literacy skills.** Through the development or selection of this educator licensure exam, TDOE should ensure the exam assesses a candidate's knowledge of how to apply systematic reading instruction to students. The [K-PEERI](#) exam and Massachusetts's [Foundations of Reading](#) exam would be helpful models to consider in selecting a Tennessee assessment.

The **Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act** has three implementation priorities:

1. **It is critical for TDOE and districts to prioritize three student-specific supports for students under the new, tighter state retention policy to ensure the policy aligns with best practice in other states that have implemented this type of retention policy:**
 1. Student-specific plans rooted in evidence-based interventions for students not meeting grade level expectations should be required prior to third-grade. Current first graders, many of whom have missed instructional time during their kindergarten and first grade experience, will be the first to face the new retention policy. The State Board's Promotion and Retention Policy should be strengthened to ensure that any student in Kindergarten through 3rd grade identified as having a significant reading deficiency receives intervention and support beyond existing RTI² requirements.
 2. Students who have been retained in the third grade and students who were promoted to the 4th grade through the retesting, summer learning bridge camp, or an appeals process should be placed with a highly effective teacher. TDOE's human capital reports can make it easier for districts to coordinate these placements, and the State Board should encourage this practice through policy. Additionally, students retained or who were at risk of being retained should have access to tutoring services to support their growth in the following academic year.
 3. The state should annually and publicly report on the number and percentage of students who are retained in Kindergarten through 8th grade and the number and percentage of students promoted to 4th grade with an exemption, disaggregated by various demographics including race and retention pathway.

2. The state should provide timely information about the summer program requirements to districts and public charter schools.

1. By April 1, district leaders need streamlined and clear information about program requirements and available flexibilities – such as instructional time, structure, and days per week. They also need clarity about how learning impacts will be measured and what incentives they may offer for attendance. Districts have been asked to submit their ESSER 2.0 plans by March 15, but in order to strategically prioritize ESSER funds they need to know how student participation will impact funding allocations, what additional funds may be available for transportation or additional support staff such as nurses or English Learner translators, and parameters on allowable scope of services from community partnerships. If students are not provided appropriate support services, then their ability to participate and benefit from the summer learning opportunity is significantly diminished.
2. The state should incentivize districts to staff the summer learning opportunities with highly effective teachers. The state should collect information and feedback from districts about the effectiveness of the teachers who staff summer learning opportunities to determine whether stronger incentives should be put in place in future summers, especially once bridge camps become a path for third graders at risk of retention.

3. The new tutoring program created in the legislation should include rigorous training and implementation guidelines for districts.

Research points to the effectiveness of high-quality tutoring on student outcomes, but program design and rollout are key in getting results for students.

1. Before districts begin planning and recruiting, the state should establish rigorous criteria for tutor selection, modeled after Tennessee’s teacher licensure requirements. District recruitment efforts should target individuals who hold, or have held, a teaching license or who are enrolled in a state board-approved educator preparation program.
2. Selected tutors should receive significant training from TDOE that is aligned to Tennessee’s academic standards and ensures tutors are ready to use high-quality instructional materials in their tutoring. Tutors in other Tennessee programs received nearly 60 hours of training on content, instructional strategies, and relational components before beginning with students. Before the student enrollment period begins, districts need information about tutors that have completed the professional development course and are available for summer camp support.
3. Tutoring program implementation guidelines should be developed and communicated quickly to districts. Those guidelines should align as closely

as practicable with rigorous research evidence, which include a maximum of a one adult to four student ratio, prioritize stability of the tutor-student relationship that enables engagement, and be offered at least three times a week. Tutors will also need ongoing support and professional development. Districts need clarity about the timeline, hiring, selection, and training for the tutoring program by April 1 to inform their planning process.

4. Through the clarity of the guidelines, the Department should empower districts to design, operate, and iterate on tutoring programs by identifying outcomes, enforcing shared data collection, and monitoring compliance while flexibly responding to local needs and limitations. This includes sharing a funding application that commits districts to those guidelines, requires attendance at the state-developed training, and the use of shared data collection tools for student participation in tutoring sessions, student and tutor experience, and academic growth.

Concluding Thoughts

After Governor Lee called a special session of the General Assembly, lawmakers acted swiftly to pass the administration's package of student-centered proposals. These new state laws outline important steps in delivering student success.

Passing education policy is the first step to creating for a stronger path forward for Tennessee students. In order for our state to see improved outcomes for students, implementation will be critical. Looking ahead, SCORE will continue to monitor implementation of these policies and report out on progress against the recommendations surfaced in this memo. We stand ready to support district and state leaders in this work, so that all students are supported and have the opportunity to succeed.