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**Tennessee Education Commissioner Releases New Plan Focused on Equity, Opportunities**

*Tennessee's final plan to transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act builds on Tennessee Succeeds to ensure students are prepared for college, careers, and military*

NASHVILLE—Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen released a new plan today that builds on the department's vision to prepare all students to be successful on their chosen path in life. The plan, which has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education and outlines how Tennessee will transition to the new Every Student Succeeds Act, was developed over the course of a year based on feedback from thousands of Tennessee parents, educators, district leaders, advocates, business leaders, and community groups.

Overall, Tennessee's ESSA plan incorporates much of the work that is already underway in Tennessee's schools and that is included in the department's strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*. The final plan also updates the department's work in several key areas, including district and school accountability, school improvement, support for English learners and historically underserved populations, and strengthening teacher and principal pipelines. These updates are both in response to feedback from Tennessee's education community as well as federal and state requirements, all of which are intended to strengthen schools and empower districts to provide a high-quality education for all students throughout their academic journey.

"Our state's commitment to education is why Tennessee is the fastest improving state in the nation, and Tennessee's ESSA plan supports our belief that every child should have access to opportunities and a great education regardless of zip code or income level," Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam said. "This plan builds on progress we've made to increase support for our educators and students. Most importantly, it focuses on ensuring all students are on track and ready for their next steps into college, the workforce, or the military – a goal that not only strengthens our economy but shapes our children's future and the future of the next Tennessee."

The department released a draft ESSA plan in December with the help of six working groups and about 3,000 comments from Tennesseans and stakeholders. Following a series of six regional town halls attended by more than 1,000 Tennesseans and after receiving more than 2,000 additional comments, the department finalized the plan this winter while continuing feedback loops with stakeholder groups. These conversations will be ongoing over the next several months while the department works with the education community to implement the ESSA plan, which goes into effect on July 1.

"Tennessee has one of the best ESSA plans in the country, and it is because of our education community," said Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen. "Our stakeholders have been key to the process, and the feedback we received undoubtedly has made our plan better. These strong partnerships are now absolutely critical as we move forward in our work to ensure all students are ready and able to access a wealth of opportunities after high school graduation."

The final plan includes several updates from the draft in December. Most notably, the final plan strengthens the accountability framework to both shine a spotlight on all students and to expand the focus on providing a well-rounded education that prepares Tennessee students for success on their chosen path in life. Some key areas include:

- **School accountability:** As required by state legislation, the department will provide an A-F letter grade to schools following the 2017-18 school year. The final ESSA plan outlines a multiple measure grading

framework based on five indicators. These include a Ready Graduate metric that credits schools for providing a variety of early postsecondary pathways for students, including ones that lead toward readiness for college, careers, and the military. The weightings of the five indicators have been updated since the draft plan to reflect stakeholder feedback.

- **District accountability:** The district accountability framework has been aligned to mirror, as close as possible, the priorities and structure of the school accountability framework.
- **School improvement:** The final ESSA plan maintains urgency around turning around the lowest performing schools and builds on what the department has learned over the past several years. Of note, the final plan provides a revised Priority school improvement continuum, which outlines a series of evidence-based intervention options, clear entrance and exit criteria, and proof points that check for progress. The state will provide support to districts with Priority schools through a new Office of School Improvement and the processes outlined in the continuum. The plan also includes additional clarity on the role of the Achievement School District, which remains the department's most intensive intervention and is focused on its original mission of turning around the state's lowest performing schools. The final plan resets the timing for the next Priority school list to run in 2018 in alignment with first A-F school designations. The school improvement continuum and associated interventions will begin this summer for current Priority schools. Additionally, the plan defines which schools will be considered Focus schools and the specific supports available to help them improve students' performance within specific subgroups.
- **English learners:** The final plan provides additional accountability and support to ensure English learners make progress, as well as increase transparency about their performance. The department is also continuing to research and partner with advocates on how to best serve English learners, particularly both long-term English learners and recently arrived English learners.
- **Assessment:** Next year, third and fourth grade science and social studies TNReady assessments will be cut in half, and the department will continue to explore how to streamline assessments throughout all grades, particularly in the 11th grade year.
- **Teachers and leaders:** The department will support teacher and principal residencies to create more high-quality pipeline opportunities for prospective candidates to move into those roles. The department will also create a new grant initiative that focuses on increasing diversity in the educator workforce.

More information about these key areas, an overview of changes from the December draft, and several additional resources—including the final ESSA plan—are available on the department's [website](#). For questions about the ESSA plan, please contact Eve Carney, executive director of consolidated planning and monitoring, at [Eve.Carney@tn.gov](mailto:Eve.Carney@tn.gov). For media inquiries, please contact Sara Gast at [Sara.Gast@tn.gov](mailto:Sara.Gast@tn.gov) or call 615-532-6260.