

Tennessee's ESSA Plan Revisions

High-level adjustments to Tennessee's ESSA plan

On June 30, the Tennessee Department of Education received [initial feedback](#) from the U.S. Department of Education on our plan to transition to the new federal K-12 education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act. In response, the department has clarified and made some adjustments within our plan. These changes provide clarity to assist the federal government in ensuring we are complying with the law while maintaining the core decisions in our final plan and aligning with the over 6,000 pieces of feedback we received from Tennessee's education community over the course of a 10-month engagement process.

We have now re-submitted our ESSA plan to the U.S. Department of Education and await their final review, which is due within 120 days of the May 3 deadline. Once our ESSA plan has been finalized, we plan to release several tools to help both districts as well as advocates ensure that our plan is implemented with fidelity. Among those will be an **overall implementation guide**, which will be complemented by additional resources such as a **guide** to help **districts expand the number and type of Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs)** they offer students, **framework for supporting English learners in early grades literacy**, **toolkit** for promoting and increasing **student attendance**, updated **special education framework**, and **guidebook** for cultivating a **strong postsecondary-going culture**. These resources will help schools transition to key accountability metrics and ensure that our schools are preparing all students to be successful after graduation.

Below are the notable adjustments and clarifications to Tennessee's ESSA plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on July 14:

Accountability Adjustments and Minimum N-Size (*pages 57, 72, 94-102*)

- Tennessee explained in greater detail how both the n-size of 30 for accountability and the n-size of 10 for transparency reporting protect students' privacy. We also detailed the steps the state takes to ensure students' privacy.
- We made some adjustments to the school accountability framework. On the achievement indicator, Tennessee revised the school grade weightings to accommodate graduation rate and science as separate, stand-alone indicators. Tennessee strongly believes that this framework provides clarity and consistency for stakeholders, who clearly valued including both science and graduation rate as part of a more comprehensive accountability framework. At the same time, it also puts substantial weight to each indicator and maintains greater weight for achievement in math and English language arts, student growth, graduation rate, and the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) for English learners.

- We made minor adjustments to the weighting of some indicators. Graduation rate is now included as a stand-alone metric at a 5 percent weighting. The Ready Graduate indicator, which now will be weighted at 20 percent, still reflects graduation rate. Previously, the Ready Graduate indicator was weighted at 25 percent.
- We also clarified that the ninth grade cohort, and not the extended cohort rate, will be used for accountability calculations.

Accountability Subgroups (*pages 67-72*)

- Tennessee added the state’s definition for the four accountability subgroups: economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and English learners.
- Additionally, we clarified in our plan how and why the black, Hispanic, Native (BHN) combined subgroup is utilized in the accountability framework:
 - To determine if the BHN subgroup was in the best educational interest of Tennessee’s students, we used historical data to model the school accountability framework outlined in this plan, first using the BHN subgroup and then modeling with each group separately. We then used the results to analyze the BHN approach, which is summarized in the table on page 69 of our ESSA plan. Among the benefits of using the BHN group: more students are captured in the accountability system; more schools are held accountable; it provides consistency and stability for districts, which have been held accountable under this approach since 2012; this method has a track record of success, with achievement gaps narrowing among individual racial groups since 2012; and reduced error.

Based on this analysis, and given that the state will publicly report data for each racial subgroup separately at an n-count of 10 for all indicators, Tennessee determined the continued use of the BHN subgroup for the accountability model is in the best interest of Tennessee students. Our ESSA plan outlines the actions Tennessee will take to monitor and report on this approach from an equity and student achievement perspective. Through annual monitoring of data trends, Tennessee will review whether each individual subgroup within the major subgroups continues to make progress and that the correlation between subgroups continues to be strong. Currently, there is a very strong, positive association between a school’s black and Hispanic student test scores in every subject in schools across our state. The state’s historical data also shows a strong positive association between improvements for these two groups.

If annual data analysis determines that the progress of student groups and/or the correlation weakens, Tennessee will alter its approach and revise its plan based on the best interest of Tennessee students that are the furthest behind.

Focus Schools *(pages 103-104)*

- Tennessee added its definition of “consistently underperforming” as related to targeted assistance schools. Additionally, we clarified how we will determine “additional targeted support schools,” which are identified based on subgroup performance.
- We defined “consistently underperforming” as a school receiving an overall letter grade of ‘D’ in the accountability system for meaningful, annual differentiation. “Additional targeted support schools” are defined as schools in which the performance of one of the four accountability subgroups of students is in the bottom 5 percent based on all indicators in Tennessee’s school accountability system.

Native Languages in Tennessee *(pages 50-51)*

- Tennessee amended its state plan to include a definition of “languages other than English that are present to a significant extent in the participating student population.”
- The languages will be identified as follows:
 - at least 4 percent of the overall student population, or
 - 20 percent of the student population within a single LEA, or
 - 20 percent within a single grade level at the state.
- Spanish is the only language meeting this requirement. We will not, however, create any assessments in languages other than English, as determined by state law. The department will provide state-level print resources in Tennessee’s most frequently spoken languages other than English; conduct outreach to disadvantaged groups; provide awareness training for districts and other stakeholders; and deliver content in various forms to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders, including the utilization of technology to convey program content via audio and closed-captioning. The department will ensure that equal access policies are carried out across the department through training and review of state-level activities.

Other Areas of Clarification *(among others, pages 65, 77-78, 158, 200-207, 207-209, 212, 221-224)*

- Tennessee also updated and clarified language in other areas of our plan, including sections on the extended cohort graduation rate; the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA); Title I, Part C: Education of Migratory Children; Title I, Part D: Prevention & Intervention Program for Children & Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk; Title III, Part A: Language Instruction for English Learners & Immigrant Students; and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children & Youth Program.