

## Tennessee Succeeds: ESSA Final Plan

### Overview of key changes in the approved plan

Beginning in May 2016, the department engaged stakeholders across the state in the development of Tennessee's ESSA plan. The department received feedback on the draft ESSA plan from more than 1,000 Tennesseans who attended six regional town halls and from 2,000 comments submitted online. The final, approved ESSA plan is stronger as a result of that input. While the final plan reflects many adjustments from the draft to submission, there were also minor changes in the approved plan. This document details notable areas of change or clarifications made in key areas: school and district accountability frameworks, the Priority list timing, Focus schools, school improvement, English learners, assessments, and supporting teachers and leaders.

#### School accountability framework

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Support a well-rounded education*
- *Adjust the name and weighting of the "opportunity to learn" indicator*
- *Incorporate military readiness*
- *Achievement indicator should not only include absolute proficiency but also progress in meeting rigorous annual measurable objectives (AMOs)*
- *Achievement indicator should be more heavily weighted*
- *Focus on growth across the indicators is critical*
- *Weighting of all students and subgroups should continue to reflect statewide demographics*

Given the new requirements of ESSA to both differentiate all schools annually and to include a metric of school quality and student success, the department created a framework for school accountability that aligns with state goals and priorities. It provides multiple measures to capture the range of ways schools serve our students, and all schools have the opportunity through rigorous indicator targets to earn an "A." Moreover, the school accountability framework builds on and is aligned with the district accountability model and meets the new state legislation that requires an A-F grade for all schools.

The *Opportunity to Learn* metric has been re-named as the *Chronically Out of School* indicator to best reflect the nature of the indicator, and the weighting is reduced to reflect that at this time it contains the following metrics: chronic absenteeism and out-of-school suspensions. It factors into the school accountability framework at 10 percent for all student groups and schools.

The *Ready Graduate* indicator now includes a fourth "readiness check" to account for students who complete two early postsecondary opportunities and achieve a sufficient military entrance score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. The *Ready Graduate* indicator counts 20 percent of a high school's grade, while graduation rate counts for 5 percent. These indicators reflect the feedback from Tennesseans on the importance of postsecondary, workforce, and military readiness. Students who earn a high school diploma must have the knowledge and skills they need to pursue opportunities to be successful in college and compete for a living wage job.

Within the school accountability framework, the department is placing slightly more emphasis on achievement than growth in terms of the individual indicator weighting, while maintaining an overall emphasis on progress

across all indicators. Achievement will be captured through either absolute proficiency or through progress in meeting rigorous annual measurable targets to reflect the Tennessee's prioritization of growth for all students. Additionally, English learners' progress in achieving English language proficiency (ELPA) is now included in the "all student" results to ensure their progress is not diluted by only reflecting results in subgroup performance.

Finally, the weighting of the all students and subgroup determinations has been maintained to reflect statewide demographic trends. Students in racial/ethnic subgroups are somewhat concentrated in the state's largest cities, with nearly 40 percent of all students identifying within racial/ethnic groups statewide.

## **District accountability**

*Stakeholders told us:*

- *Ensure alignment between district accountability and the new school accountability framework and add the new measures of school quality and student success to district accountability*
- *Maintain "best of" options for districts*
- *Include science assessments within the achievement and growth indicators, not just math and English language arts*
- *Continue focus on ACT*
- *Maintain emphasis on assessment participation rate*

Due to provisions in ESSA that require additional indicators of student success and/or school quality in school accountability, Tennessee introduced new metrics in the district accountability framework to align with the school accountability framework. The department has proposed to add metrics that capture the *Chronically Out of School* and *Ready Graduate* indicators, as well as make additional methodological changes to align district and school accountability as much as possible. There were no changes made to district accountability from the submitted version to the approved plan.

Districts are evaluated according to a minimum progress goal that requires 95 percent participation rate on state assessments and that identifies districts that are not showing even minimal evidence of student progress. These districts move directly to a designation of *In Need of Improvement*. For all other districts, after advancing beyond the minimum progress goal, the model determines an "All Students" status based on the outcomes of all students and a "Subgroup" status based on the outcomes of students within four historically underserved student groups. The district's final determination of *Marginal*, *Satisfactory*, *Advancing*, or *Exemplary* is comprised of the weighted average of the district's performance with all students and subgroups based on six indicators.

To provide additional support for districts who are designated as *In Need of Improvement*, the department will engage through regional data analysts and interventionists to develop plans that help districts not only address areas of challenge but also capitalize on areas of promise. Regional consultants will monitor the fidelity of implementation and use of funding allocations. Additionally, through the annual dissemination of the District Strategies document, all districts will receive more tools and data to develop district plans that are aligned both to their needs and the department's strategic plan.

## **Adjusting the timing for the release of the new Priority list**

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Align with the first A-F grading and Focus list identification*

- *Include TNReady data and adjust for data challenges*
- *Provide opportunities for schools to exit the Priority list each year based on rigorous success rates*
- *Initiate school improvement continuum of interventions immediately for all current Priority schools*
- *Uphold sense of urgency on improving outcomes for students in the lowest performing schools*

The 2017-18 school year provides a natural reset point for the next Priority school list, since all schools will be provided an A-F designation according to the new school accountability framework that begins in 2017-18. This also allows for the 2018 Priority list to be based on three years of the new TNReady math and English language science exams as well as three years of the same science test. On this timeline, the 2021 Priority list would also be based on three years of the same assessment for all four content areas. There were no changes to how Tennessee will identify schools for the Priority list, which are also called Comprehensive Support schools, from the submitted version to the approved plan.

The new School Improvement Continuum and associated interventions will begin this summer and will include all current Priority schools. All current Priority schools who are likely to be on the next Priority list either will receive a planning grant for the 2017-18 year or will continue to have funding available to appropriately plan and prepare next steps. This will ensure that rigorous interventions and processes are not delayed for an entire year until the Priority list in summer 2018. Per state law, the department will release a new “cusp list” this fall to notify districts and the public of schools that are at risk of being identified on the 2018 Priority list.

## **Focus schools**

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Outline a clear process to identify Focus schools*
- *Identify “F” schools annually*
- *Support all “D” schools*
- *Increase transparency on how schools are identified as Focus schools*
- *Improve support for all Focus schools*

In the final phase of plan submission, we engaged again with stakeholders and spoke with the U.S. Department of Education to gain additional clarity on what is part of the federal statute, and that led to some adjustments to Focus school identification. [In the final plan](#), we will identify Focus schools based on the *individual* performance of all six federally recognized racial and ethnic groups present in Tennessee, including Asian, Black, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and White students, provided the student count for the specific racial/ethnic group meets the n-size of 30, as well as the performance of the combined BHN student group. We do not anticipate that a significantly larger number of schools would be identified under this change than we have previously communicated, and given that some student groups have historically been higher performing, it is possible that not every racial/ethnic category will have schools identified for Targeted Support.

Additionally, all schools earning an overall letter grade of “D” will be identified as Focus schools. Based on analysis of historical data, the vast majority of schools earning an overall grade of “D” will be identified as a Focus school based on low subgroup performance. In order to help stakeholders to identify schools with challenges in subgroup performance that received higher overall letter grades, Focus schools will receive a “minus” on their grade. For example, if a school earns an overall average of “B” but is identified as a Focus

school for low subgroup performance, the overall school grade would be reported as “B-.” Any “A-” school would not be eligible for Reward school recognition.

Focus schools will be identified annually. The first identification will occur in 2018 alongside the new A-F designations and new Priority list. Once identified, districts must put forth plans describing how they will support Focus schools. This would include strategies and interventions with ESSA funds, as well as additional state and local resources.

Priority schools will not be eligible for Focus school designation as they are already identified and supported through the School Improvement Continuum and interventions. Schools identified as Focus schools will receive targeted support from both the district and state expertise and resources.

The department’s service model for Focus schools is a tiered approach that will allow for Focus schools to access supports currently available at the state-level and leverage best-practices from the field through networking and partnerships. The new Office of School Improvement will have dedicated staff and resources to serve Focus schools and connect school leaders with the tools needed to make progress.

## School improvement

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Maintain urgency on improving outcomes for students in the lowest performing schools*
- *Give districts the first opportunity to turn around schools that are new to the Priority list*
- *Clarify entry into and exit from the Achievement School District (ASD)*
- *Provide proof points for all Priority schools, including ASD schools*

Since 2012, Tennessee has identified its lowest performing 5 percent of schools and awarded competitive grants to districts and schools to implement plans for turnaround. From these intervention options, we have seen more than 20 schools move out of the bottom 5 percent since 2012. As we developed our continuum of intervention and support for our lowest performing 5 percent of schools, much of what we have learned is embedded in our model. Tennessee’s theory of action is an evidence-based one that will set priorities and boundaries for the state’s turnaround efforts.

Tennessee’s system of performance management for district and school plans will operate through the new School Improvement Continuum for Priority schools. The state will provide support to districts with Priority schools through the new Office of School Improvement and the processes outlined in the continuum. Tennessee commits to making the state’s lowest performing schools, and the improvement of these schools, a priority. Tennessee’s School Improvement Continuum will go into effect July 1, 2017, with current Priority schools. All schools, including schools in the ASD, will have annual proof points. These proof points are clearly articulated on the revised Priority school continuum as well as the new ASD continuum (pg. 111 in the final plan). The School Improvement Continuum also outlines the interventions that schools will be eligible for and required to partake in based on the track of intervention. Districts will have the first opportunity to intervene in schools that are new to the Priority list in 2018.

Schools will exit Priority status by meeting one of the following exit criteria:

- The school is not identified on the next Priority school list, and therefore is no longer in the bottom 5 percent
- The school exceeds the 15th percentile in the state using a one-year success rate

- The school exceeds the 10th percentile in the state using a one-year success rate for two consecutive years
- The school earns a level 4 or 5 TVAAS performance in all subject/grade content areas for two consecutive years
- If identified for consistently underperforming subgroups, schools may exit by meeting AMO targets for that subgroup for two consecutive years
- If identified for graduation rates below 67 percent, schools may exit by exceeding graduation rate of 67 percent for two consecutive years

A school in the ASD will remain in the ASD for no more than 10 years, and it may have the opportunity to exit and begin the transition back to the district after two Priority List cycles. There were no changes made to the school improvement section from the submitted version to the approved plan.

## English learners

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Ensure ELPA indicator has meaningful weight in the school accountability framework*
- *Increase supports for schools struggling to serve English learners*
- *Improve reporting and supports for long-term ELs*
- *Delay recently arrived English learners' inclusion in accountability but allow for students to demonstrate growth*

As mentioned in the school accountability framework section above, English learner proficiency assessment (ELPA) results will now be included in the "all students" category to ensure their progress is not diluted by only reflecting results in subgroup performance. The n-size for the indicator has been reduced to 10 valid tests, which allows the state to hold 40 percent of schools accountable for EL performance. Additionally, the department will add regional capacity to work with districts and Focus schools identified based on English learner performance.

The department is defining long-term English learners (LTELs) as those students who finished their sixth year of ESL instruction without qualifying to exit. All students beginning a seventh year of ESL instruction will be highlighted as LTELs. Tennessee is increasing capacity to serve English learners by adding up to three regional positions and specialists to work directly with schools and districts as part of the new Office of School Improvement. Technical assistance for working with LTELs will be offered through professional development beginning in summer 2017 to regional professional learning communities. Overall, our goal is to reduce the number of LTELs by intervening the first time a student does not meet the growth standard on the ELPA. The department will continue to review research and promising practices, as well as convene stakeholders and external partners to determine state-level support for serving LTELs.

Recently arrived English learners (RAELs) are English Learners who arrived to the U.S. within the last 12 months and are within their first year of ESL services. Tennessee will utilize the flexibility option in ESSA that allows states up to three years before including RAELs' results from state assessments in accountability. In year one, RAELs will participate in state assessments, but those results will not count. In year two, RAELs will participate in state assessments, and their results will be included in the TVAAS growth metric for accountability. Results for RAELs in year three and beyond will be included in both achievement and growth metrics for accountability. This timing will help schools and districts be able to better serve students by seeing their growth in year two without placing undue pressure on their first testing experience. The department will

continue to work with researchers and stakeholders to determine potential hybrid options for assessing RAELs.

## Assessments

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Reduce testing in the early grades*
- *Align ELA component in early grades to mirror state focus on reading*
- *Explore streamlining assessments in 11th grade*
- *Maintain focus on the ACT*

Starting in the 2017-18 school year, the science and social studies TNReady exam will be cut in half for students in third and fourth grade. Additionally, we will modify the English language arts test to allow for more granular score reporting on reading progress—and help teachers and parents understand how to best support their students. This also means that the assessments can play a greater role in the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) framework used across the state, potentially reducing the overlap between elementary testing and RTI<sup>2</sup> screeners.

The department is also continuing to investigate the possibilities for test reduction in grade 11 by reviewing results on TNReady and ACT for the next two years. This process will allow for the collection of three full years of data from TNReady to evaluate any potential redundancies between TNReady end-of-course assessments and ACT. Current analysis reflects significant differences in the purposes and structure of TNReady and the ACT that will need to be reviewed more thoroughly with additional data.

## Supporting teachers and leaders

*What stakeholders told us:*

- *Provide a variety of supports and pathways to support the development of teachers and principals*
- *Focus on expanding diversity within the educator workforce*
- *Support evaluation through the transition to TNReady*

Districts share in the challenge of recruiting, hiring, and retaining educators who reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of their student population, and many regions of the state experience the same shortages in content areas. This is an area for which we have a variety of emerging work.

To help address challenges in diversity, our initial plans include inviting districts with the largest demographic gaps to apply for a planning grant to develop a multi-pronged, multi-year plan to increase the representation of minority teachers in their local schools, with the expectation that proposals will identify key partners, institutions of higher education, and other nonprofit organizations to explore immediate, near-term, and long-term opportunities. Additionally, working closely with the department's college, career and technical education team, districts will be supported in developing more "Grow Your Own" programs via increased course offerings in teaching as a profession and expanding student interest groups.

In addition, department is establishing educator residencies in high-need districts across the state, starting first with principals and expanding to teachers. These programs will allow prospective principals and teachers to learn alongside an effective principal/teacher in a mentor capacity and gain invaluable knowledge and skills



through this experience, which would be followed by continued support after the principal or teacher is in their new role.

The department is also committed to supporting teachers throughout the transition to the new assessment through a phase-in of growth scores into their evaluations. This spring, the department proposed legislation to reduce the weight of TNReady to 10 percent for the 2016-17 school year, down from 20 percent, and reset the growth score to phase into teachers' evaluation over the next three years.