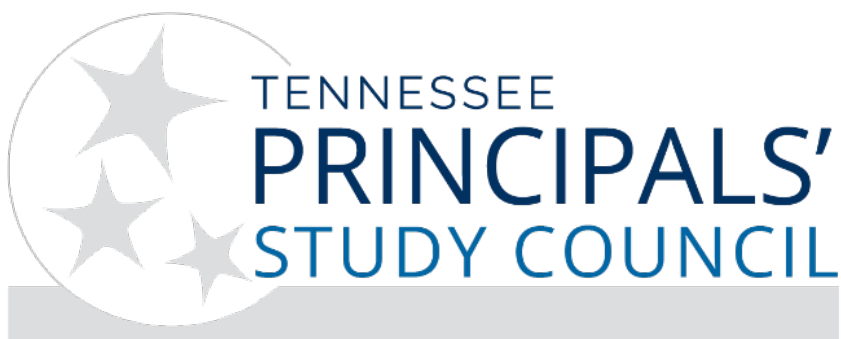




Principals' Study Council Executive Committee Position Paper and Department Responses

February 2019



Introduction

In spring 2018, the Principals' Study Council (PSC) Executive Committee created and administered a survey with both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The design assigned non-grade band-specific questions to all participants and grade band-specific questions to appropriate leaders. All eight CORE regions and the Achievement School District (ASD) responded; all grade bands and school configurations were represented.

The Executive and Steering Committees of the Principals' Study Council met in June 2018 to disaggregate the survey data and articulate the experiences of our school leaders. This resulting document is shared with Tennessee Department of Education leadership. The ultimate goal is to increase collaboration and communication between the department and school leaders in Tennessee.

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PSC Vision

- We strive to be a collaborative network of school leaders working with the department to improve public education in Tennessee.

PSC Mission

- Act as mutual voice for both leaders across our state and the department
- Offer recognition and celebration of leadership
- Support continuous learning
- Encourage collaboration and networking for leaders within their districts
- Enable collaboration and networking for leaders within the CORE regions
- Empower leaders to effectively support teachers and students
- Provide differentiated learning and capacity building through high-quality professional learning

The Structure of This Report

School leaders throughout the state were given the opportunity to share perceptions and opinions in five key areas:

- School safety
- Chronic absenteeism
- Second grade assessment
- Early postsecondary options
- Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²)

In the following pages, you will find a **synopsis** of the information gathered from the survey, **quotes** from Tennessee school leaders, **key data points** taken from the survey analysis, a list of **recommendations** from the study council, and **department responses** to those recommendations. The document concludes with a **prioritized recommendations for department action and funding** from the PSC Executive and Steering Committees.

PSC Opinion: School Safety

School officials have made strategic changes designed to meet ever-growing safety needs. Leaders have added monthly drills, increased police visits, and restructured supervision expectations. Additionally, leaders have implemented reunification training, updated entry/visitor procedures, and enacted identification badge requirements. More than 81 percent of respondents indicated school safety plans have been updated as a result of recent school events. These plans include procedures for managing a wide range of safety breaches including:

- school fights
- bomb threats
- weapons/active shooters
- custody issues
- intruders
- chemical spills
- inclement weather

It is my #1 top priority to keep all students and all personnel safe. We continually analyze our procedures and protocols to better prepare for school emergencies.

~Tennessee School Leader

Percent of school leaders responding that:



Other frequently expressed safety concerns included:

- managing student mental health issues,
- vulnerability of portable classrooms,
- volatility surrounding non-custodial guardians, and
- inadequacy of safety equipment (including doors/windows and security equipment).

Recommendations:

As advocates for principals across the state, the PSC Executive Committee offers the following recommendations to the department regarding school safety:

- Increase training for educator awareness, identification, and support of student mental health issues.
- Provide funding for increasing school security and safety, including both basic building safety and specialized security equipment.
- Provide support for leaders to collaborate with local police departments to identify, place, and retain school resource officers.
- Develop leader training for managing volatile situations.

Department Response to Recommendations:

School Safety

Recommendation 1:

- **Increase training for educator awareness, identification, and support of student mental health issues.**

Response:

The department will continue to provide professional development to districts and schools on [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#), Building Strong Brains: Strategies for Educators, and [the Comprehensive School Mental Health Model](#). Additionally, the department is currently negotiating a training contract with a nationally recognized organization to provide threat assessment training to school and district teams. Training should start in December 2018 or January 2019.

Recommendation 2:

- **Provide funding for increasing school security and safety, including both basic building safety and specialized security equipment.**

Response:

The General Assembly appropriated \$35 million in school security funding to implement security and safety measures in schools during 2018-19. In order to be eligible to receive a portion of the appropriation, each school conducted a school security assessment of their buildings to identify risk areas. Funds should be used to address the findings from the school security assessments. ([See the press release for more information.](#)) The department will continue to advocate for additional school safety funding to support additional security and safety measures.

Recommendation 3:

- **Provide support for leaders to collaborate with local police departments to identify, place, and retain school resource officers.**

Response:

The department will be working with relevant parties [Homeland Security, sheriffs/chiefs, school resource officer (SRO) association] to develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with local law enforcement that clearly

define the role and responsibility of the SRO. Involvement of the PSC Executive Committee is welcomed. We suggest a representative from the study councils be included in the working group that is developing the MOUs. Those interested in serving on the committee can contact Brenna Morse at Brenna.Morse@tn.gov.

Recommendation 4:

- **Develop leader training for managing volatile situations.**

Response:

The department is currently negotiating a training contract with a nationally recognized organization to provide threat assessment training to school and district teams. Training should start in December 2018 or January 2019.

We believe training should include information pertaining to domestic incidents that become workplace violence. Additionally, we would like to work with the study council to develop a more specific definition of “volatile situations” to guide our professional development plans.

Areas for Further Exploration:

The department has identified the need to provide support for schools to continue updating emergency operation plans (EOPs) that meet state law requirements and reflect national best practices. The department recently completed a qualitative study of school EOPs that can be found [here](#). There is significant variability across the state in terms of quality of these plans. The department-provided EOP templates can be found [here](#).

With questions regarding school safety, reach out to Brenna.Morse@tn.gov.

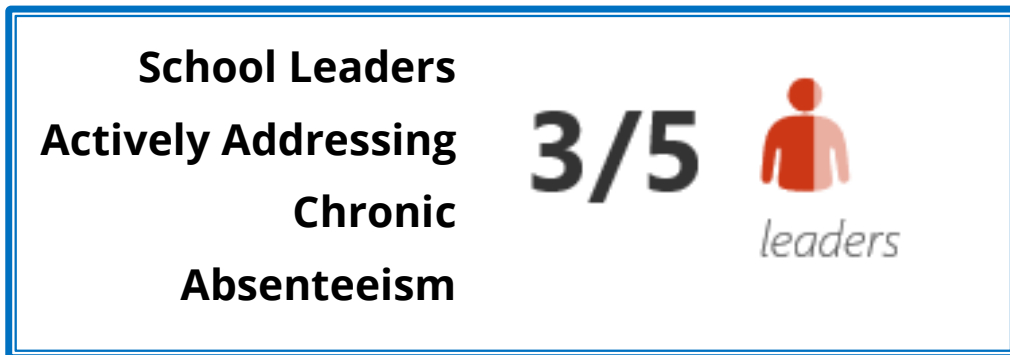
PSC Opinion: Chronic Absenteeism

While many school leaders have experienced success, some struggle to decrease the number of chronically absent students in their charge. Nearly one-third of respondents reported significant attendance problems after focusing on attendance interventions for a full year. Survey responses show:

- 65.6 percent of our responding administrators indicated the lack of parent/guardian support for attendance as their most significant challenge to strong attendance.
- 56.5 percent of respondents reported dissatisfaction with support from truancy and other courts.

For those who are extremely chronic, there is ... no incentive for coming back. If students aren't begging to come into our doors, we are doing something wrong.
~Tennessee School Leader

Additionally, many administrators reported concerns with the medical community over excessive numbers of doctors' excuses. A final thread of concern surfaced over statewide inconsistencies in procedures for qualifying medically fragile students.



Recommendations:

The PSC Executive Committee offers the following recommendations to the department regarding the chronic absenteeism accountability measure:

- Develop a strong advertising campaign to communicate to non-educator stakeholders the importance of student attendance as a critical factor contributing to student success.
- Provide guidance for collaborating with the medical community to address concerns about excessive excused absences.
- Collaborate with court systems across the state to align statewide truancy practices.
- Increase communication and clarity about medically fragile qualifications and uniform identification procedures.
- Reduce or introduce a gradual increase in the impact of the chronically out-of-school measure for school accountability.

Department Response to Recommendations:

Chronic Absenteeism

The division of special populations and student support is committed to supporting district and school leaders in their efforts to address chronic absenteeism. The chart below lists four issues/behaviors commonly associated with chronic absenteeism and factors that may contribute to each.

Barriers	Avoidance	Disengagement	Discipline
Illness	Struggling academically or socially	Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction	Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions
Lack of health, vision, or dental care	Bullying	No meaningful relationships with adults in school	Lack of alternatives to exclusionary discipline
Transportation/Unsafe route to school	Negative parental attitudes toward school	Stronger peer network outside of school	
Frequent moves or school changes	Undiagnosed disability	Unwelcoming school climate	
Faulty beliefs	Anxiety and/or depression	Failure to earn credits	
Trauma/chaotic home environment		No future plans or vision for future	
Faulty beliefs regarding importance of attendance		Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes	

The department is committed to engaging with school and district administrators to provide information about the chronically out-of-school indicator as a measure of school quality; guidance on data analysis at the district, school, and student levels; and resources to address factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism.

The department values the insight of the Principal's Study Council (PSC) Executive Committee and the recommendations they provided to address chronic absenteeism.

Recommendation 1:

- **Develop a strong advertising campaign to communicate to non-educator stakeholders the importance of student attendance as a critical factor contributing to student success.**

Response:

Most recently, the department developed an intentional social media engagement/promotion during attendance awareness month in September and promoted some existing toolkits around attendance awareness (e.g., [here](#)). We are committed to continuing this activity and ensuring that districts are aware of resources they can use to encourage attendance like the [back-to-school attendance toolkit](#).

Recommendation 2:

- **Provide guidance for collaborating with the medical community to address concerns about excessive excused absences.**

Response:

The department is happy to engage with the PSC to discuss the guidance needed to collaborate effectively with the medical community and would welcome more detail around the concerns that need to be addressed. This may be an area where the Tennessee Department of Health could also engage with local communities.

Recommendation 3:

- **Collaborate with court systems across the state to align statewide truancy practices.**

Response:

The department participated in the General Assembly's Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force; however, juvenile court judges continue to have wide discretion in responding to truancy. The department also assisted the [Tennessee School Board Association](#) (TSBA) in developing a model policy for the progressive truancy interventions now required for school districts. [Contact TSBA](#) for more information. We will continue to explore opportunities for alignment in truancy practices.

Recommendation 4:

- **Increase communication and clarity about medically fragile qualifications and uniform identification procedures.**

Response:

Students who are "medically fragile" are typically eligible for special education and/or section 504 with an [educational disability](#). "Medically fragile" is not a separate qualification nor is it identified as a separate disability. Although students who are medically fragile may contribute to this metric, the attendance of these students does not generally result in a school reaching the threshold of more than 10 percent of students identified as chronically out-of-school. Additionally, a student's individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan can document the need for a modified schedule or shortened day. If the decision is made to modify a student's schedule based on his or her least restrictive environment, the student is only marked absent if he or she misses the days he or she is expected to attend. The department will continue to explore opportunities to communicate these factors explicitly and consistently.

Recommendation 5:

- **Reduce or introduce a gradual increase in the impact of the chronically out-of-school measure for school accountability.**

Response:

The chronically out-of-school indicator is currently 10 percent of a school's overall grade. This weighting was based on broad stakeholder feedback and received U.S. Department of Education approval. At this time, the department is not engaged in discussions to make changes to this measure, and would not recommend a reduction to this measure as it is already minimally weighted and takes into account growth over the baseline year.

With questions about chronic absenteeism, contact Theresa.Nicholls@tn.gov.

PSC Opinion: Second Grade Assessment

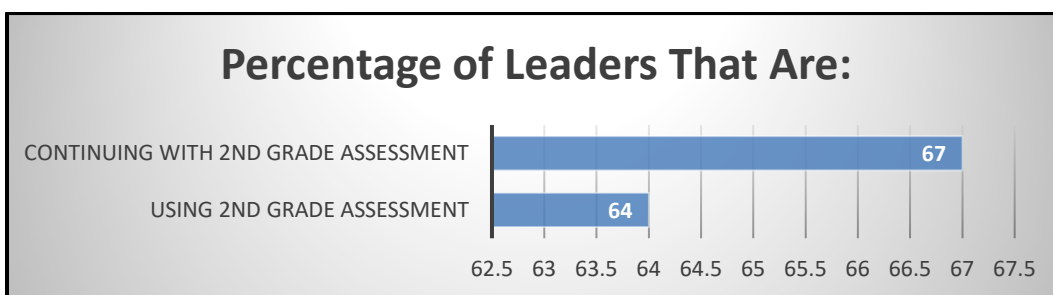
School leaders for early grades were asked about equitability of implementation, data use, and recommendations for future test administration of the second grade assessment.

Leaders responded positively about the usefulness of the assessment data, most specifically for:

- informing school-based decisions and school-wide planning,
- structuring PLCs, and
- providing teacher feedback.

We look for patterns of teacher strengths and weaknesses to discuss ways to improve teaching of standards. We are able to use the data to direct our PLC collaboration.

~Tennessee School Leader



Leaders indicated a lack of clarity around the department’s vision for second grade testing, and when asked if they would support mandated second grade testing, only 43.1 percent of respondents agreed. Many school leaders requested second grade assessment data not be used in individual level of overall effectiveness (LOE) score calculations for any teacher. Others suggested delaying its use in LOE score calculations until the test was required for all second grade students.

When asked about test formatting/process concerns, a single response dominated: principals and assistant principals, almost to a person, indicated student anxiety was widespread and troubling. The following reasons for student anxiety surfaced repeatedly:

- unsuitability of testing for the age group,
- copious amount of testing throughout the year, and
- lack of alignment to second grade standards.

Recommendations:

The PSC Executive Committee offers the following recommendations regarding 2nd grade assessment implementation and use:

- Continue allowing systems to opt in or out of the 2nd grade test, but discontinue using 2nd grade scores in the calculation of individual LOE and system/school TVAAS measures, until statewide implementation occurs.
- Allow universal screener data to be used to show student gains.

- Provide clear communication regarding the vision for 2nd grade assessment.

The PSC Executive Committee recommends the following changes to the 2nd grade test format:

- shorten text passages,
- add more breaks during the test, and
- use untimed sessions for reading passages or increase time allowed for the reading passages, with the exception of passages used for testing fluency,
- examine the second grade curriculum and assessment to ensure alignment, and
- create a document to show vertical alignment between second and third grade assessments.

Department Response to Recommendations:

Second Grade Assessment

Recommendation 1:

- **Continue allowing systems to opt in or out of the optional grade 2 assessment, but discontinue using second grade scores in the calculation of individual level of overall effectiveness (LOE) and system/school TVAAS measures, until statewide implementation occurs.**

Response:

The department will continue to allow districts to choose whether or not they opt into the administration of the grade 2 assessment, and the vast majority of districts statewide have chosen to do so. For instructional purposes, grade 2 growth data is provided to all schools and districts that administer grade 2 assessments. However, for the purposes of school and district accountability calculations, **grade 2 data is only included in TVAAS calculations if the data benefits the school or district accountability determination.** Currently, Tennessee state policy requires all growth data to be included in evaluation as part of the LOE.

Recommendation 2:

- **Allow universal screener data to be used to show student gains.**

Response:

The use of universal screening data three times per year is essential in determining student progress in the core curriculum. Analyzed in conjunction with the second grade assessment, both sources of data can paint a more comprehensive picture of student growth for second grade students. The second grade assessment and universal screening tools are different types of assessments that provide different information regarding student progress and serve different purposes. Universal screening tools such as Aimsweb and easyCBM are brief, formative assessments that reveal student progress on key indicators tied to future academic proficiency. These measures are nationally normed, which provides a picture of how students are performing compared to other same-grade peers across the country. Due to their brief nature, these assessments can be administered three times a year, which allows for the information to be utilized in adjusting instruction within the second grade year based on student results. The second grade assessment, however, is a summative assessment that provides teachers, leaders, parents, and community stakeholders information on how our students are performing at the end of their second grade year on Tennessee-specific standards. Because it assesses the full breadth of the standards, the data is highly beneficial in determining how students are progressing toward mastering the standards.

Since the grade 2 assessment is aligned to Tennessee Academic Standards, it is criterion-referenced as opposed to norm-referenced. Conversely, universal screeners are norm-referenced and skill-based as opposed to standards-based. As it is noted in the Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework, “A nationally normed skills-based universal screener is necessary because relying only on local performance could give a false impression of student proficiency. Universal screeners are not assessments in the traditional sense.” The data gathered from the suite of statewide assessments provides useful information concerning a student’s progression toward mastery of the standards, whereas a universal screener provides accurate information for making informed decisions about skills-specific interventions, remediation, re-teaching, and enrichment for each child.

Recommendation 3:

- **Provide clear communication regarding the vision for second grade assessment.**

Response:

The optional grade 2 assessment was designed to take the place of SAT-10; however, it differs in that it is criterion-referenced as opposed to norm-referenced. Thus, it only assess Tennessee Academic Standards providing Tennessee teachers, leaders, parents, and community members information on how our students are performing at the end of their second grade year on Tennessee-specific standards. Because it assesses the full breadth of the standards, the data is highly beneficial in determining how students are progressing toward mastery of the standards.

It is the department’s belief that this assessment provides invaluable data to both second and third grade teachers, ensuring that our youngest students are strengthening foundational literacy and math skills early in their academic careers. This assessment also helps schools and districts measure their progress toward the state’s goal of having 75 percent of third graders reading on grade level by 2025. Commissioner Candice McQueen noted, “Most importantly, the optional grade 2 assessment measures the standards in a way that reflects classroom instruction.”

Recommendation 4:

- **Shorten text passages.**

Response:

The multi-step passage selection process is detailed in the TCAP 2nd Grade English Language Arts Passage Specifications document (publically available in the near future). Passages for the grade 2 assessment are carefully selected by the assessment vendor, WestEd, based upon a quantitative and qualitative measurement process which is explicitly outlined in the passage specifications document. The chosen passages are then sent to the department for an executive review. Additionally, a committee of Tennessee educators is selected through a rigorous application process to participate in the ELA Passage Review. The Passage Review process includes detailed training, calibration, and review at which time the committee can accept, accept with revisions, or reject a passage. Once the passages have been selected, item development can begin. Additionally, Tennessee educators provide recommendations concerning the assessment items that are developed once passages have been selected.

Below is an excerpt from the Grade 2 Passage Specifications document:

Quantitative Analysis—Text Complexity and Word Count

Text Complexity:

To provide students with texts that are appropriately complex, quantitative measures of text complexity (readability metrics) must be used. Quantitative data are used to determine the appropriate grade band (i.e., grades 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–10, or 11-CCR) for a particular text. For this assessment, the data from two different

measures must be used. If these two measures do not agree, a third measure may be used as a kind of “tie-breaker.”

The following table provides the ranges associated with three readability metrics for the 2–3 grade band.

Look-Up Table for Use of Four Quantitative Measures

Grade Band	Flesch-Kincaid	The Lexile Framework®	Degrees of Reading Power® (DRP)*
2–3	1.98–5.34	420–820	42–54

Word Count:

The following table suggests an approximate word-count range for a passage or passage set across the assessment components.

Word Count for English Language Arts Grade 2 Assessment

Assessment Component and Passage Type	Range of Number of Words
Reading (Reading passages)	200–500
Writing (short Reading/Writing passages)	100–200
Listening (Listening passages)	80–125

Qualitative Analysis

The specific grade level for a particular text is not determined by quantitative data (alone) but instead is determined by a qualitative analysis. (Note: In order to determine a passage’s qualitative measures, a Text Complexity Worksheet must be completed. The Text Complexity Worksheet provides the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee educators participating in the Passage Review process with the information needed to determine if the passage meets the qualitative demands as noted in the Grade 2 Passage Specifications document.) Passage features such as text structure, language features, knowledge demands, and levels of meaning and purpose are passage characteristics for consideration in the Text Complexity Worksheet.

Recommendation 5:

- **Add more breaks during the test.**

Response:

Students taking the optional grade 2 assessment are given breaks in between each of the four subparts. In order to consider adding additional breaks to those that are currently allotted during the administration of the test, we would need to consider the psychometric ramifications as the assessment was field tested under specific conditions. As with all statewide assessments, there is an overall time limit to the optional grade 2 assessment. However, the design does allow for some flexibility of administration with regards to timing.

Recommendation 6:

- **Use untimed sessions for reading passages or increase time allowed for the reading passages, with the exception of passages used for testing fluency.**

Response:

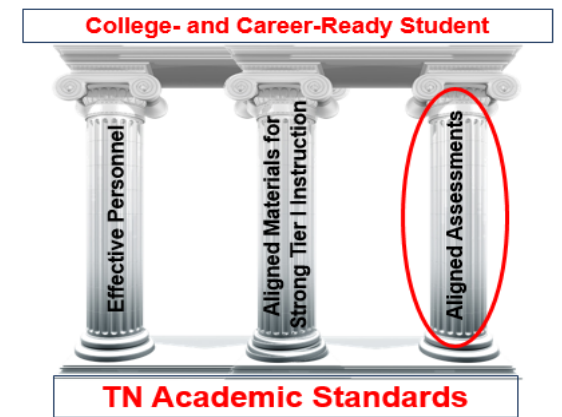
There would be psychometric implications to increasing reading time since items are field tested under certain conditions and need to be delivered operationally under the same conditions. Passages must fall within a certain word count band in order to adhere to the time allotment per subpart. In our continual efforts to ensure that Tennessee is providing high-quality assessment experiences and meaningful data, the department applies research based practices when determining the amount of time recommended for students to read a passage and answer the associated items.

Recommendation 7:

- **Examine the second grade curriculum and assessment to ensure alignment.**

Response:

As indicated in the Pillars of Success graphic to the right, student learning should be built upon the strong, standards-based foundation represented in the Tennessee Academic Standards. Additionally, students should have access to highly trained and effective personnel who have access to standards-aligned instructional materials. The third pillar represents the importance of standards-aligned assessments that provide the data necessary to indicate a student's strengths as well as their gaps of understanding.



When these three pillars are built upon a strong, standards-based foundation, they support our goal of ensuring that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully embark upon their chosen path in life.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that our assessment development process involves the very educators who are standards experts, who understand the complexities of quality assessment questioning, and who are effectively able to assist the department in creating a high-quality, rigorous assessment for Tennessee students.

Both the passages that are selected and the items that are written for the optional grade 2 assessment are specifically chosen to align with the revised grade 2 standards (both math and ELA). Additionally, both the passages and the items are vetted through a multi-step process to ensure standard alignment. The vetting process includes the convening of an item review committee, which consists of Tennessee educators from across the state who are chosen through a rigorous application process. This committee receives extensive training prior to reviewing the items that will appear on the assessment.

While the optional grade 2 assessment is a department-created assessment rooted in the Tennessee Academic Standards, curriculum is chosen at the district level and may not be aligned to our Tennessee-specific standards.


Recommendation 8:

- **Create a document to show vertical alignment between second and third grade assessments.**

Response:

Vertical alignment is evident in the structure of our Tennessee Academic Standards. Since both the optional grade 2 assessment and the grade 3 assessment are developed and aligned specifically to Tennessee standards, a specific document showing the assessment progression should not be necessary. The major difference between the optional grade 2 and grade 3 assessments are the item types students will encounter. However, in order to provide additional information concerning the intentional scaffolding of the writing portion of the assessment from grade 2 through grade 5, the department created and released the chart below:

Writing: Standards Alignment		
Grade	Scaffolding of Foundational Literacy Standard 6	Scaffolding of Writing Standards
Grade 5	Write multiple cohesive paragraphs on a topic.	Standards 1, 2, or 3 (opinion, informative/explanatory, or narrative)
Grade 4	Write several cohesive paragraphs on a topic.	Standards 1, 2, or 3 (opinion, informative/explanatory, or narrative)
Grade 3	Write a cohesive paragraph.	Standard 8 - Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources to answer a question (mode of writing specified)
Grade 2	Link sentences into a simple, cohesive paragraph.	Standard 8 - Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

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Additionally, the writing rubrics are scaffolded from grade 2 to 3 and again to grade 4.

With questions regarding second grade assessment, contact Sandy.Qualls@tn.gov.

PSC Opinion: Early Postsecondary Options

On the PSC survey, leaders prioritized EPSO program improvement and ACT growth among the areas of greatest concern.

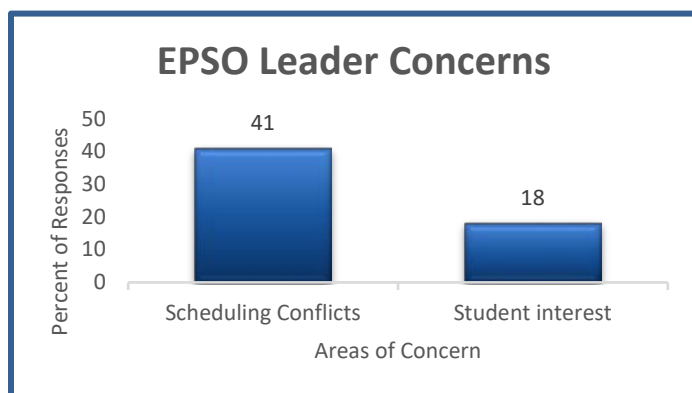
Highlighted challenges include:

- issues with scheduling for teachers and students,
- a shortage of highly qualified personnel,
- a lack of student interest and vagueness around postsecondary goals,
- a need for greater support from local industry,
- concerns over the cost of EPSO completion, and
- misgivings around the term "Ready Graduate."

We examine course requests and increase course offerings for the programs in high demand. We are also working with our Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing to offer courses that will directly employ students upon certification.
~Tennessee School Leader

Many leaders reported schedule conflicts because the same educators teach AP, dual enrollment, and other EPSO courses. Likewise, the same students are requesting access to multiple EPSO courses. The combination creates gridlock in school scheduling and lessens student access to opportunities.

Fewer school leaders shared concerns around the lack of interest/willingness to enroll in EPSOs, most prevalent among students scoring 20 or lower on the ACT. Similarly, principals report lack of connection to local industries around *Ready Graduates* and need support with the creation of a school-to-industry pipeline.



Cost was identified as a roadblock for students attempting to meet the *Ready Graduate* indicator. While HOPE scholarship money can be used for this, a student can spend an entire semester of the scholarship by taking one course in high school. For economically disadvantaged students who have not met the ACT benchmark score of 21, this cost can be insurmountable.

Feedback surfaced regarding confusion around the definition of "Ready Graduate." Many leaders reported negative community reaction when students meeting graduation requirements did not receive recognition as "Ready Graduates."

Recommendations:

As advocates for principals across the state, the PSC Executive Committee offers the following recommendations to the department regarding early postsecondary options:

- Provide support for recruitment, retention, and training of EPSO-qualified educators.
- Provide examples of non-traditional school scheduling options.

- Create marketing/communication around EPSOs that can be shared with students, parents, and local industries to increase engagement with all three groups.
- Provide additional funding options for all *Ready Graduate*-required EPSOs.
- Create a more parent-friendly term for *Ready Graduate*. (Suggestions include *EPSO Graduate*, *Accomplished Graduate*, or *Achievement Graduate*.)

Department Response to Recommendations:

Early Postsecondary Opportunities

Recommendation 1:

- **Provide support for recruitment, retention, and training of EPSO-qualified educators.**

Response:

A well-qualified early postsecondary opportunity (EPSO) educator pipeline is a key component for schools seeking to implement a portfolio of EPSOs. The [Early Postsecondary Implementation Guide](#) outlines the professional development requirements for each of the eight EPSOs, as each type has different training requirements. Additionally, the department is working to create key resources that will assist administrators in identifying high school teachers that meet adjunct faculty requirements at TCAT, two- and four-year institutions, respectively. Technical support from the department in this area could eliminate barriers associated with transportation, capacity, scheduling, and course offerings.

Recommendation 2:

- **Provide examples of non-traditional school scheduling options.**

Response:

Anticipating the various scheduling needs across the state can be a challenge; however, the department is committed to the ongoing development of new resources and guidance that will assist schools and districts in implementing strong scheduling practices.

- In the spring and summer of 2017, the department convened a master scheduling advisory group to gather input on strong master scheduling practices and existing challenges to schedule creation in order to assist districts in building capacity for local staff. As a final product of this working group, guided principles and recommendations were created and approved for submission to the commissioner of education.
- The department has provided planning tools schools and districts can use to think about which early postsecondary course offering most aligns to the needs and interests of students in their school building.
- Using the [Tennessee Transfer Pathway](#), schools and districts can begin to build a portfolio of courses that align to a particular area of study at the postsecondary level. The Tennessee Transfer Pathway is a program designed to allow students the opportunity to begin their college studies at a community college or similar two-year program, earn an associate degree, and know that credits will transfer to a bachelor's degree program at public and many private universities.
- The department will continue to provide additional resources in the form of updates to the Early Postsecondary Implementation Guide. We will plan to partner with schools that have successfully implemented a portfolio of EPSOs to share innovative schedules and promising practices.

Recommendation 3:

- **Create marketing/communication around EPSOs that can be shared with students, parents, and local industries to increase engagement with all three groups.**

Response:

Tennessee students have an unprecedented opportunity for education and training after high school through the Tennessee Promise, which specifically set goals targeted to help meet the governor's Drive to 55 to ensure the majority of Tennesseans have a postsecondary credential, certificate, or degree by 2025. Early postsecondary opportunities ensure that students are ready to take full advantage of Tennessee Promise and successfully obtain a postsecondary credential. Research has shown a correlation between student participation in EPSOs and increased postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion—as well as stronger performance on college and career readiness assessments, such as the ACT.

With a renewed focus on K-12 education and early postsecondary courses through the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA), the department has developed a suite of resources and materials to assist schools and districts in expanding early postsecondary offerings for all students. Key resources and materials include, but are not limited, to:

- [Early Postsecondary Implementation Guide](#): school- and district-based supplement to the state's overarching *EPSO Strategic Growth Plan*, which can be found on the department's [EPSO webpage](#). The growth plan outlines the state's role in growing EPSOs, while the guide is meant to assist district and school leaders with the decisions they need to make to expand EPSOs within their local context. The guide includes: an overview of each of the state's eight recognized early postsecondary opportunities, guiding questions, diagnostic, and planning tools and templates to assist you in identifying, selecting, and implementing the right mix of EPSOs for your school or district portfolio, information on funding, pilot opportunities, technical assistance resources, and links to contacts for materials and professional development you can harness to start new EPSOs and improve the EPSOs you currently offer, and answers to common challenges to improve their EPSO offerings facing schools and districts.
- [EPSO Poster](#): a quick reference for educators, parents, and students. The EPSO poster provides a brief overview of each early postsecondary opportunity.
- EPSO Week: designed to generate excitement regarding early postsecondary opportunities, engage students and parents in conversations about postsecondary education, and highlight the importance of offering a portfolio of EPSOs to school and district leaders. EPSO Week will serve as a platform for districts to highlight opportunities for students to earn college credit/certificates while in high school. Participating schools receive a [toolkit](#) with great resources/materials, as well as suggested events and information prior to the week.

The Office of Early Postsecondary is remains steadfast in our committed to the department's vision that all students deserve to be on **aligned pathways leading to postsecondary and career** success. We will continue to provide schools and districts with the resources and materials necessary to ensure that all students graduate from Tennessee's K-12 education system ready to succeed on their chosen path in life. Additional resources for students, parents, community partners, and employers can be leveraged through new initiatives like [Tennessee Pathways](#), which is structured around three key elements: 1) High-quality **college and career advisement** K-12; 2) Rigorous **early postsecondary and work-based learning opportunities** in high school; and 3) Seamless **vertical alignment** between K-12, postsecondary programs, and career opportunities as a result of **effective partnerships** between school districts, higher education institutions, employers, and community organizations. Additional information and resources will be released in Spring 2019.

Recommendation 4:

- **Provide additional funding options for all *Ready Graduate*-required EPSOs.**

Response:

The [EPSO funding table](#) outlines various funding options for each of the eight early postsecondary opportunities. Additional guidance for funding EPSOs is located in the coordinated spending guide (located in the LEA document library of ePlan), which is updated annually. Currently, the department provides funding for ACT Retake, Cambridge, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement exams.

Recommendation 5:

- **Create a more parent-friendly term for *Ready Graduate*.**

Response:

One of the new requirements included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for school and district accountability is an “indicator of school quality and student success.” To ensure consistent messaging that aligns to what is outlined in our state ESSA plan, it is important that we seek to clarify for parents what is meant by the term “*Ready Graduate*.” This indicator is meant to capture evidence of student performance beyond academic proficiency to represent a holistic, well-rounded education. Within this indicator, Tennessee is focusing on two key areas: opportunity and readiness.

Tennessee has approached ESSA’s indicator of school quality and student success with two specific proposed indicators, including the *Ready Graduate*, which measures the percentage of students who earn a diploma from a Tennessee high school and who have met measures of success that increase their probability of seamlessly enrolling in postsecondary education and securing high-quality employment.

- It is important for parents to know that the *Ready Graduate* indicator is not a new high school graduation requirement. The *Ready Graduate* indicator is a new part of the accountability model that points to Tennessee’s vision for postsecondary and career readiness while addressing one of the ESSA requirements. The indicator focuses on two key areas: opportunity and readiness. Early postsecondary programs provide broad opportunity and access to ensure student readiness for future education and careers.
- Portions of the *Ready Graduate* [frequently asked questions](#) and [overview](#) documents can be adapted to be parent-facing.
- It may be helpful to share with parents some of the data surrounding high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment. As outlined in the state [Drive to 55: Pathways to Postsecondary](#) report, 89 percent of Tennessee students graduated high school in 2016, but only 63 percent of those graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the summer or fall following graduation. Tennessee’s goal in developing this accountability indicator is to give a measure of a school’s ability to influence a student’s probability of success—both a student’s opportunity to learn and the result of that student’s pathway through K-12 education.

Areas for Further Exploration:

The Principals’ Study Council Executive Committee Position Paper highlights several areas the department may need to explore in order to improve EPSO implementation, including:

- providing robust supports and opportunities for educator professional learning,
- routinely updating and providing communication materials for various stakeholder groups, and
- continuing to explore additional funding streams for EPSOs.

With questions regarding EPSOs, contact Patrice.Watson@tn.gov.

PSC Opinion: Response to Instruction and Intervention

When responding to survey questions regarding Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²), nearly 100 percent of leaders reported some or full implementation of a successful program. Responding leaders shared success around moving students out of Tiers II and III, gap closure, and the impact of interventionists on student progress.

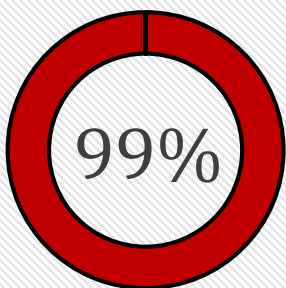
Highlighted concerns included:

- identifying qualified personnel;
- creating effective schedules;
- meeting the RTI² time requirements given the constraints of competing time obligations for ELA, math, and physical activity;
- managing the rate of progress monitoring;
- providing resources and training;
- completing data tracking/paperwork; and
- funding for the initiative.

Our students know that everyone works in a group, the groups change, and the instructors may change as well. No one feels they are being singled out and everyone has something that they are working to improve.

~Tennessee School Leader

Leaders Reporting Success with RTI² Implementation



Recommendations:

As advocates for principals across the state, the PSC Executive Committee offers the following recommendations to the department regarding Response to Intervention and Instruction:

- Increase support for identifying and developing highly qualified personnel to ensure equitable implementation.
- Evaluate and restructure the sometimes conflicting time requirements of simultaneous initiatives.
- Streamline processes and provide resources to support progress monitoring and associated paperwork.

- Allocate funding for high-quality RTI² implementation.

Department Response to Recommendations:

Response to Instruction and Intervention

In spring 2018, the department conducted a statewide listening tour to gain feedback around current strengths and challenges regarding RTI² implementation. Takeaways from the listening tour resulted in the creation of a series of documents outlining action steps the department plans on taking across the 2018-19 school year to help districts build capacity around RTI² implementation.

Recommendations 1 and 2:

- **Increase support for identifying and developing highly qualified personnel to ensure equitable implementation.**
- **Provide resources and training.**

Response:

A main priority of the department is to continually reflect on the ways in which we support the development of personnel and provide training and resources for RTI² implementation. This document was released in July 2018 and indicates several ways the department plans on providing guidance and support for RTI² implementation. In addition, the department has identified specific action steps related to guidance and support for high school RTI² implementation specifically. This year the department is providing regional professional learning opportunities around effective math intervention practices, piloting RTI² micro-credentials in over 23 districts across the state, and creating intervention resource guides for all content areas.

Recommendation 3:

- **Evaluate and restructure the sometimes conflicting time requirements of simultaneous initiatives.**

Response:

Feedback from the listening tour conducted in spring 2018 also pointed to the challenge of integrating seemingly competing initiatives.

- Professional learning occurring across the 2018-19 school year will provide opportunities to make explicit connections between the various initiatives (i.e., Ready to be Ready, Tennessee Pathways) allowing for educators to see how they complement and align with each other rather than compete. Continued collaboration across departments overseeing various initiatives will allow for guidance about how districts can best balance time demands.
- [RTI² Framework Manual](#) refinements, set to be released in July 2019, will include a renewed emphasis on the use of the problem solving model that is essential to effective RTI² implementation. Clarification will aim to improve understanding of what is required versus best practices in RTI² implementation, especially in regards to time recommendations. The department hopes these changes will help leaders and school/district RTI² teams better engage in problem solving and schedule development that best meet the needs of their students.
- The RTI² Implementation Guide will be continuously updated this school year. Updates will include new examples of school schedules that best meet the instructional needs of students.

Recommendation 4:

- **Streamline processes and provide resources to support progress monitoring and associated paperwork.**

Response:

As indicated in the [guidance and support document](#) mentioned above, the department is currently conducting a Request for Proposals (RFP) for universal screening and progress monitoring tools that will be completed by July 2019. Once this is completed, districts will receive information about the updated vendor-approved list of universal screening and progress monitoring tools. Completion of this RFP will provide districts with an updated list of the strongest most technically sound tools to use for universal screening and progress monitoring.

The RTI² Framework Manual refinements will include an emphasis on revising and clarifying the use of progress monitoring in making data-based decisions. [This document](#) outlines in detail the shifts the department intends to make in the RTI² framework. This will streamline the process of progress monitoring by shifting the focus back to the student and away from the overemphasis on collecting a certain number of data points.

Recommendation 5:

- **Allocate funding for high-quality RTI² implementation.**

Response:

Providing funding for RTI² implementation has been a large focus of the department for the past year.

- The BEP now allots funding for a minimum of one RTI² position per district, with additional funding allotted at a ratio of one position to every 2,750 students. The department has created a [document to help guide districts](#) in utilizing these new positions, including the potential roles and responsibilities, specific skill set needed, and benefits of these district-level positions. Further information and training for district RTI² personnel is forthcoming over the next several months. Several districts across the state have chosen to create new district-level RTI² positions in order to move this work forward.
- Many districts across the state have utilized the blending and braiding resources guide (located in the LEA document library in ePlan) to determine ways in which they can utilize funding toward RTI².

Areas for Further Exploration:

The Principals' Study Council Executive Committee Position Paper highlights several areas the department may need to explore in order to improve RTI² implementation, including:

- Districts may benefit from guidance outlining considerations in identifying intervention providers and school or district RTI² team members. Identifying the most appropriate people for these roles will help improve the likelihood of success.
- Recommendations indicate the potential need to revisit qualities of strong progress monitoring tools and their purpose as well as how to most effectively use them. Doing so will help districts make the process of progress monitoring most efficient for their system.
- The continuing trend of concerns around funding the implementation of the RTI² framework points to the need to explore how the department partners with districts in determining how financial resources for implementing RTI² can be best utilized.

With questions regarding RTI², contact Karen.Jensen@tn.gov.

In Closing

The Principals' Study Council Executive Committee, on behalf of school leaders in Tennessee, respectfully submits these suggestions for support of and changes in the five areas identified in this document.

Because we share the goal of having an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective leader in every school, the PSC wishes to strengthen the collaboration between the study council and the department. This document represents the first step in building that collaborative culture, and we look forward to meeting with department leadership to continue this dialogue.

By partnering for communication and professional development around these and other areas, we can:

- **strengthen connections between the department and sitting school leaders,**
- **increase communication to support universal understandings and clear visions for key initiatives, and**
- **provide professional learning and support to leaders in the field.**

The Principals' Study Councils strive to be a collaborative network of school leaders working with the department to improve public education in Tennessee. We anticipate reaching this goal in concert with department leadership.

Authors:

2017-18 Principals' Study Council Executive Committee

Charlotte Shivley, Chairperson

Donna Singley, Vice-Chair

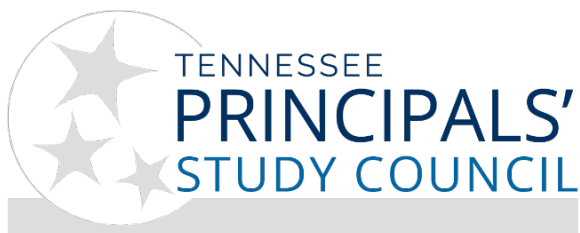
Varissa Richardson, Secretary

Karen King, Past Chair

Monti Hillis, Middle Region

Patton Gamble, Chair Emeritus

Martha Moore, TDOE Liaison



PSC Round Table: Priorities

On Nov. 29, 2018, the Principals' Study Council (PSC) Executive Committee and Area Chairs met with Commissioner McQueen and other content specialists to debrief the 2018 PSC Position Paper. At that meeting, Commissioner McQueen requested greater specificity around the council's **prioritization of concerns** and **use of funding** to address those concerns.

The table below contains the Executive and Steering Committees' **prioritized recommendations for department action and funding**.

The Principals' Study Council Executive Committee, on behalf of school leaders in Tennessee, respectfully submits the following prioritized suggestions.

Priority	Topic of Concern	Funding Priority
Priority 1	School Safety	Addition of mental health support services
Priority 2	RTI ²	Funding for interventionist positions
Priority 3	Chronic Absenteeism	Addition of attendance officers and/or school based health services
Priority 4	Early Post-Secondary Options	Dual enrollment certification training for teachers
Priority 5	Second Grade Assessment	Continued development of/improvement to the second grade test

The Principals' Study Councils strive to be a collaborative network of school leaders working with the department to improve public education in Tennessee. We anticipate reaching this goal in concert with department leadership, and appreciate the continued dialogue with the office of the commissioner.

Submitted by Donna Singley, PSC Executive Committee Chair