

2021-22 Tennessee Principal of the Year Application Extended Response Guidance

The goal of the Tennessee Principal of the Year program is to recognize and celebrate the wealth of excellent school leaders that exist across the state. The tips and suggestions included in this guidance are not to be considered “magic.” However, they can help guide reflection about the application and can encourage fruitful conversations about the essays. There is not a formula and there aren't right or wrong answers. Using these suggestions does not guarantee a specific outcome in the selection process. The purpose of this guidance is to help you present yourself and your instructional practices in the best light.

The Application Extended Response Prompts

1. How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders to support your school's mission, vision, and goals? *Do not exceed 750 words.*
2. How do you define diversity within your school and community? In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader? How have you applied this commitment in your school and community? *Do not exceed 750 words.*
3. The following questions pertain to the [Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards](#) (TILS) listed below:
 - Standard A: Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement
 - Standard B: Culture for Teaching and Learning
 - Standard C: Professional Learning and Growth
 - a. Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength? How do you utilize this strength to ensure success? *Do not exceed 500 words.*
 - b. Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth? How do you plan to improve within this area? *Do not exceed 500 words.*

Criteria Used to Evaluate the Prompts

Overall, each response question will be assessed according to the degree to which the response:

- adheres to standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation conventions;
- answers the question clearly and concisely; and
- provides a compelling narrative that speaks to the applicant's ability to serve as the Tennessee Principal of the Year.

Additionally, the application will be evaluated holistically to assess the degree to which the applicant demonstrates superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties;
- evoking high standards;
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence;
- implementing innovative programs; and
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.

Though a strong response may look different for each extended response prompt, these guiding criteria can help you ensure that the components of your application complement one another and give the most comprehensive view of your excellence as an educator.

Questions to Address Common Missteps

- Are you answering the question?
 - Take the time to unpack the question and think about what it is asking.
 - Ask someone else to read your response and ask if they can determine the question being addressed.
- Are you answering **all parts** of the question?
 - Use the unpacking strategy below to ensure that you plan for and address all parts of the prompt with sufficient detail.
- Are you giving a comprehensive picture of yourself as an educator throughout all responses?
 - Try to avoid using the same example or idea in your response to each question. Your goal is to give a complete picture.
- Are you writing to show what learning looks like in your classroom?
 - Write to **show not tell**. Use examples and things that students, parents, or colleagues have said.
 - Show how your work influenced the learning and growth of others through examples and evidence. Highlight your accomplishments rather than being humble about them.
 - Write “through” the word count in your draft. Often, it takes writers some time to get to the best part of their responses, so begin by writing more than you need to and then strategically edit to meet the word count.

Unpacking the Application Prompts

Unpacking is a useful writing preparation strategy that can ensure you successfully plan for and address all aspects of a writing prompt with sufficient detail. Often, it can be easy to allocate a significant portion of your allotted word count to one aspect of the prompt, leaving the other aspects unanswered and ultimately sabotaging your success. A sample “unpacking” for each application prompt is provided below. Again, it is important to note that using this strategy and these samples will not guarantee a particular outcome in selection. Instead, this strategy should serve as a solid foundation to ensure that the personal experiences and instructional practices you describe in each response are represented in a way that allows reviewers to focus on evaluating your innovation and excellence as an educator.

Question 1

How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders to support your school’s mission, vision, and goals? Do not exceed 750 words.

[How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders..] [What actions do I take to engage with the community around my school? I should describe any community engagement activities or strategies I](#)

employ. [...to support your school's mission, vision, and goals?] I should articulate my school's mission, vision, and goals. I should clearly connect the community engagement I described to the mission, vision, and goals. Where possible, I should include stories, anecdotes, data, and other types of evidence to show the impact of community engagement on my school.

Question 2

How do you define diversity within your school and community? In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader? How have you applied this commitment in your school and community? *Do not exceed 750 words.*

[How do you define diversity within your school and community?] I should clearly articulate what diversity means in my school and community, particularly for students and teachers. Is my school or community diverse in race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or disability? [In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader?] In my role, what does it look like to serve the population I described in the first part of the question? In addition to diversity, I should also address the themes of equity and inclusion, as well as why these themes are important to my context and education. [How have you applied this commitment in your school and community?] I should describe and provide evidence of specific actions I have taken as a result of my commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. What stories, anecdotes, data, or other evidence can I provide to show the impact of my commitment on my school and community?

Question 3

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength? How do you utilize this strength to ensure success? *Do not exceed 500 words.*

[Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength?] I should clearly identify a TILS that I particularly excel at. I should use this opportunity to articulate my strength with pride. I should thoroughly address how I exemplify each indicator within the standard using stories, anecdotes, examples, data, or other evidence. [How do you utilize this strength to ensure success?] I should articulate a clear relationship between the standard I chose and the success of my school. What evidence can I provide that my strength in this area has tangibly improved my school? I should use stories, anecdotes, data, and metrics to show the impact of my strength in this standard.

Question 4

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth? How do you plan to improve within this area? *Do not exceed 500 words.*

[Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth?] I should identify a TILS standard where I could continue to improve and grow. I should reflect on why this standard is an area of opportunity and connect to specific indicators where possible. I

should describe in my response how I identified this standard as an area of opportunity, including external feedback and internal self-reflection. I should clearly articulate an understanding of why growth in this area would benefit me professionally and support the continued success of my school. [How do you plan to improve within this area?] I should describe a plan to improve within this standard that includes specific action steps I will take to grow.