
Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS)

The Background:

In 2005 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to work with two Tennessee universities to reinvent the principal preparation process. Further, SREB requested that the SBE, TDOE and THEC jointly appoint a commission to oversee the development and implementation of a new system of instruction leadership development. The resulting learning-centered instructional leadership system policy laid out the research-based changes needed to guarantee that every public school had an effective instructional leader.

In July 2011, Tennessee became one of the first states in the country to implement a comprehensive, student outcomes-based, statewide educator evaluation system. This implementation was a key tenet of Tennessee's First to the Top Act, adopted by the General Assembly with bipartisan support during 2010's Extraordinary Session under the backdrop of the federal Race to the Top competition. This landmark legislation established the parameters of a new teacher and principal evaluation system and committed to implementation during the 2011-12 school year. The act required 50 percent of the evaluation to be comprised of student achievement data—35 percent based on student growth as represented by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) or a comparable measure and the other 15 percent based on additional measures of student achievement adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) and chosen through mutual agreement by the educator and evaluator. The remaining 50 percent of the evaluation is determined through qualitative measures such as teacher observations, personal conferences and review of prior evaluations and work.

The resulting implementation of the evaluation system emphasized, in part, several leadership skills for leaders (developing shared leadership structures, coaching teachers with specific feedback related to the evaluation process, and differentiated professional learning opportunities for teachers) that were not evident in the existing TILS.

Similarly, a revised state-level leadership strategy was needed to reflect the changing skill sets required by educators in Tennessee to move from an individual manager as leader model to a shared instructional leader model. This shared instructional leader model demanded a bold, comprehensive strategy to integrate all of the elements of the leadership talent life cycle (preparation, recruitment and hiring, licensure, evaluation, and professional learning and support) to both redefine our understanding of leadership and deepen the pool of highly effective teacher-leaders capable of leading from either the classroom or the main office. By developing all aspects of the leadership talent life cycle, the State of Tennessee will redefine leadership through the early identification, recruitment, and development of our most effective educators.



Tennessee seeks to transform what it means to be an effective instructional leader at all phases of a leader’s career. This aim is accomplished by setting high standards for effective leadership based upon research and best practice, supporting leaders to reach those standards, and empowering districts to build a network of exceptional instructional leaders who get results. Operating from the belief that ethical behavior permeates the mindset and actions of every effective leader, the revised Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) embed the phrase, “ethical and effective instructional leader,” into the opening stem of each leadership standard. The purposeful placement of this phrase articulates the intrinsic nature of ethical behavior in all facets of school leadership. Attributes such as honesty, respect, sound judgment, commitment, fairness, compassion, work ethic, and a genuine belief that all children can learn and grow, contribute to the foundation of ethical behavior connected to leadership. Effectiveness pertains to “educators’ capacity to meet performance expectations, implement evidence-based practices, create and sustain conditions for effective learning, and increase student learning” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 20). Based upon best practice and current research, and sharpened by the wisdom of experienced educators, the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) identify core performance indicators of ethical and effective instructional leaders.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends acceptance of this item on first reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.