



Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment

Educator Pass Rate Report

Tennessee Department of Education | October 2025

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Executive Summary

This report's purpose is to communicate the first-time pass rate of applicable candidates on the Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment (TELA) to the State Board of Education (SBE), pursuant to [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-5619\(d\)](#). To ensure all educators are adequately trained in foundational literacy skills, beginning on August 1, 2023, the Tennessee Literacy Success Act required teachers endorsed to teach in grades kindergarten to third (K-3) and instructional leaders to complete a foundational literacy skills assessment or professional development course to acquire, renew, or advance a license. The Tennessee Department of Education (department) launched the TELA following SBE approval and communicated the assessment's availability in August and September 2023 across various stakeholder groups. The TELA evaluates educators' knowledge of foundational literacy skills standards, and the passing score requires answering 80 percent of the assessment questions correctly.

The TELA aligns with Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Foundational Literacy Standards and the emphasis on high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) use and familiarity. The TELA is uniquely designed for Tennessee educators and teacher candidates. The TELA is not a substitute for any required licensure assessments found in the SBE's Professional Assessments for Tennessee Educators Policy 5.105, but it is one of the options for certain educators to meet the requirements of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act to acquire, renew, or advance their license. The TELA is free to test takers and EPPs.

Introduction

The department proposed the TELA, a foundational literacy skills assessment to be administered to teacher candidates in Tennessee to prepare for grades K-5 licensure, to the SBE in May 2023. The SBE approved the assessment in June 2023 and approved an 80 percent cut score as the passing score to indicate appropriate teacher knowledge. The recommendation and indication of a passing score align with the cut score established for both the Early Reading Training and the Secondary Literacy Training assessments.

The administration of the TELA is made available to Tennessee teacher candidates in grades K-5 through the department's online learning platform. The TELA assesses a teacher candidate's knowledge around evidence-based foundational literacy instruction and the use of HQIM. The purpose of this assessment is to ensure that all Tennessee educators have a shared body of knowledge about the research and science behind learning to read.

The 25-item assessment represents categories and subcategory domains of teaching and learning, including sounds-first instruction, decoding and fluency, phonemic and phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, morphology and vocabulary, and includes items referencing the use of HQIMs. The assessment items include various question types, such as multiple choice, multiple select (selection of correct responses in a series of choices), drop-down (select from a list of choices), and matching.

Purpose of Reporting

Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-5619(d) requires the department to report the first-time pass rate of applicable candidates on the TELA to the SBE. The SBE is required to include the first-time pass rate of applicable candidates on the TELA from each approved EPP in the SBE's annual Teacher Preparation Report Card prepared pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-108.

Licensure Requirements

Effective August 1, 2023, candidates seeking to obtain, renew, or advance a teaching license with at least one qualifying endorsement as identified in the SBE Educator Licensure Policy 5.502 must provide evidence documenting the completion of an approved foundational literacy skills training course or passage of the TELA. Completing the free Tennessee Early Reading Training, Secondary Literacy Training, or passing the TELA meets this training requirement. Any licensure transactions received on or after August 1, 2023, for initial licensure, licensure renewal, licensure advancement, licensure reactivation, and additional endorsements with at least one qualifying endorsement ([listed here](#)) must meet this requirement prior to transaction approval. Of those qualifying endorsements, there are 80,649 active educator licenses and 15,945 instructional leader licenses that are required to comply with this component of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act. The assessment has now been available for two full years and continues to see strong participation. Since its launch in May 2023, a total of 11,214 users successfully completed the assessment. The state also provided a free foundational literacy course that was launched in spring 2021 and remains available for educators and instructional leaders. The training has been successfully completed by over 65,000 educators and leaders in Tennessee.

Looking specifically at the most recent program year, from July 1, 2024, through July 1, 2025, there have been 5,138 successful completions. This demonstrates that participation has remained steady and that a significant number of educators continue to engage with the assessment annually.

When users access the assessment, they are asked to self-report the category that best describes them and select from the following options:

- Out-of-State Licensed Educator
- Tennessee Teacher Candidate
- Tennessee Educator Renewing or Advancing Current License
- Other

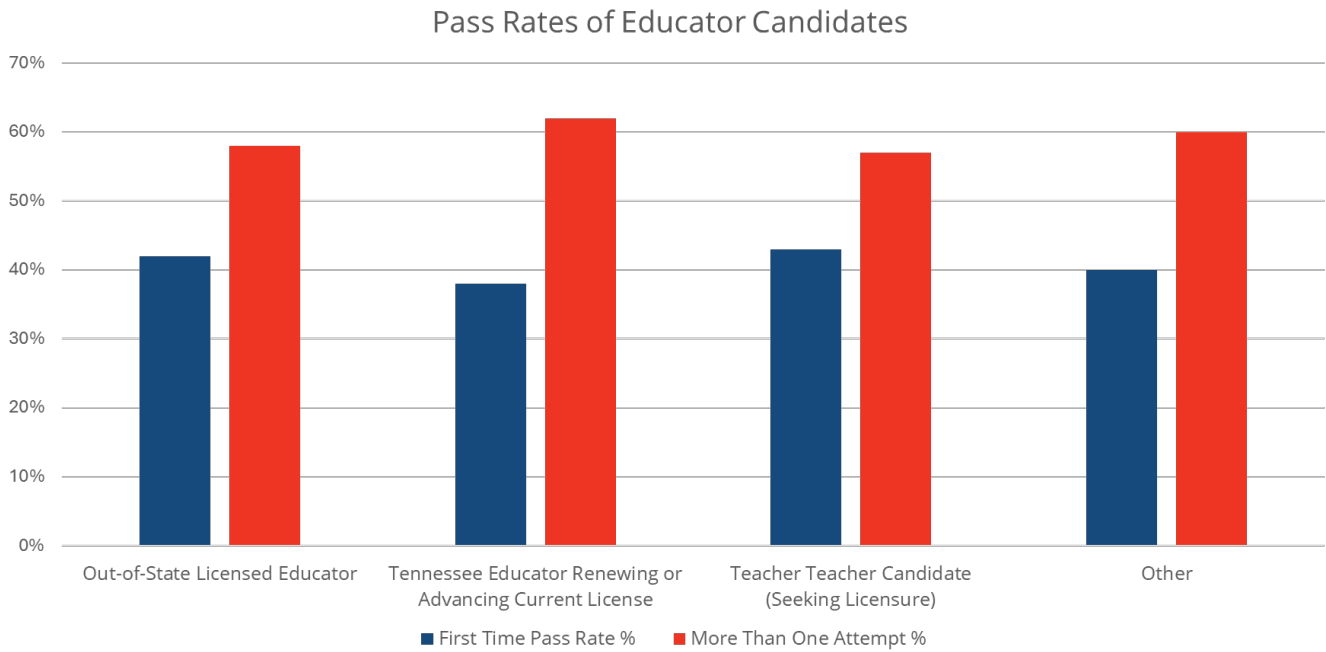
In a follow-up question, they are asked to select their EPP. Users will select their EPP from a pre-populated dropdown menu that includes an “N/A” option. Again, all information provided to the department in this portion of the TELA administration is self-reported by test takers.

Pass Rates of Educator Candidates

Users may take the TELA more than once. To meet the statutory requirement of reporting the first-time pass rate, the graph below shows first-time pass rates for the different user categories. The graph also shows overall pass rates—that is, whether candidates who took the TELA more than once passed for the different user categories. The current first-time pass rate for year two is 35 percent, which is slightly lower than the first-year rate of 40.2 percent.

The pass rate when participants are broken up into categories closely mirrors the overall pass rate. The graph below shows pass rates by category, including participants who selected “Other.” Among the four groups, “Tennessee Teacher Candidate (seeking licensure)” had the highest first-time pass rate. Their performance was about two percent higher than “Out-of-State Licensed Educator,” three percent higher than “Other,” and two percent higher than “Teacher Educator Renewing or Advancing Current License.” The “Tennessee Teacher Candidate (seeking licensure)” group improved its first-time pass rate from 39 percent last year to 43 percent this year, surpassing the “Tennessee Educators Renewing or Advancing a Current License,” who had held the higher rate in 2024.

Figure 1. Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment scores by category



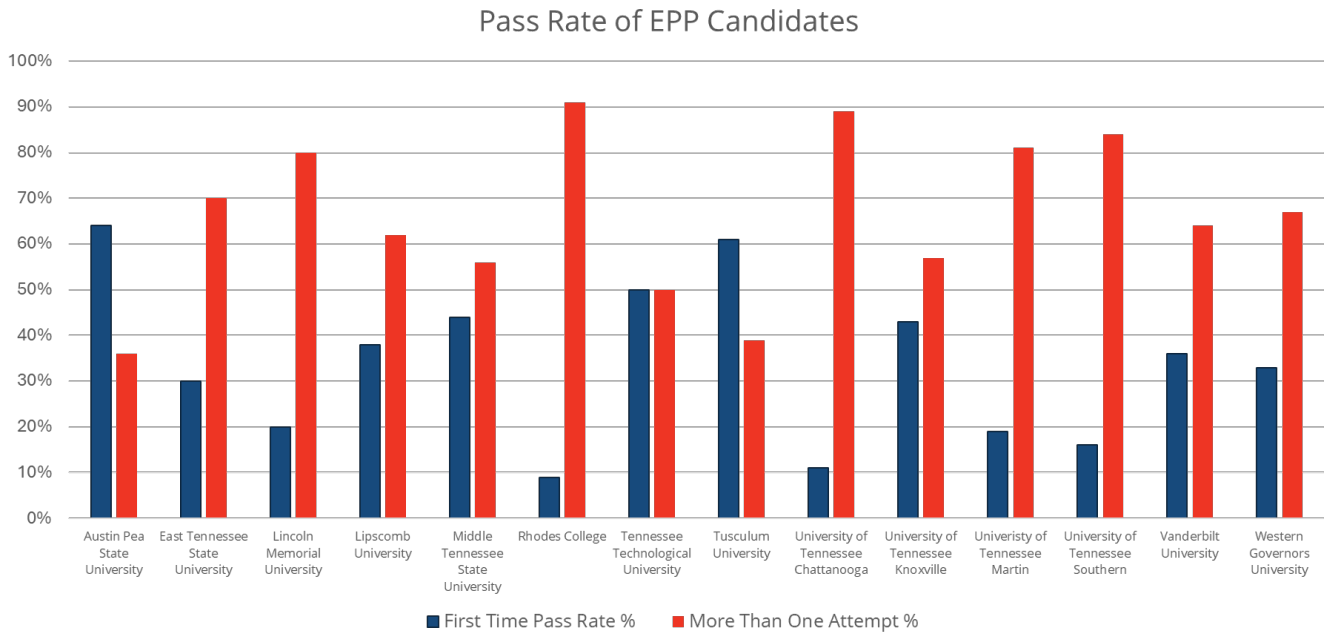
Pass Rates by Educator Prep Providers (EPPs)

Among users who selected “Tennessee Teacher Candidates” and provided an EPP or selected “N/A” for their EPP, the first-time pass rate is 35 percent. Twenty-eight EPPs are represented in the data, but only fourteen EPPs, plus the N/A category, have 10 or more users. EPPs must have at least 10 users for the department to share their data to protect users’ data privacy. The following are EPPs with 10 or more test takers and reported on the graph below:

- Austin Peay State University
- East Tennessee State University
- Lincoln Memorial University
- Lipscomb University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Rhodes College
- Tennessee Technological University
- Tusculum University
- University of Tennessee Chattanooga
- University of Tennessee Knoxville
- University of Tennessee Martin
- University of Tennessee Southern
- Vanderbilt University
- Western Governors University

Two of the 10 EPPs had similar pass rates for first-time test takers and for those who took the test more than once: Austin Peay State University (64 percent first-time pass rate) and Tusculum University (61 percent first-time pass rate). The other eight EPPs reported first-time pass rates ranging from nine percent at Rhodes College to 50 percent at Tennessee Technological University.

Figure 2. Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment scores by EPPs



Conclusion

Tennessee has made significant progress in ensuring that all educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver evidence-based foundational literacy instruction and effectively use HQIMs. As part of the improvements, the department implemented the TELA for all teacher candidates in Tennessee to prepare individuals to provide foundational literacy instruction in grades K-5.

Data obtained from the assessment demonstrated an overall first-time pass rate of 35 percent. Because there are multiple ways to demonstrate knowledge of literacy instruction, some individuals elected to abandon and/or complete a different literacy assessment (e.g., Early Reading training, Secondary Literacy training), which contributed to the pass rate. The TELA is one of two approved pathways to demonstrate compliance with the Tennessee Literacy Success Act. Educators have the option of an assessment or training pathway to meet requirements. Some individuals may have elected to utilize the training-only pathway or attempted the Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment and then transitioned to the training pathway. The department will continue to monitor participation and interaction with the assessment and review data and report to stakeholder groups as needed.

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