



EXPANDING

**2020**

State of Education  
In Tennessee

**STUDENT  
SUCCESS**

**SCORE**  
State Collaborative on Reforming Education

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LETTER FROM

# SENATOR BILL FRIST AND DAVID MANSOURI



Dear Friends,

As a new decade begins, we at the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) are hopeful about the state of education in Tennessee.

The firm policy foundation laid 10 years ago to raise academic standards, authentically measure student progress against those standards, and hold ourselves accountable for helping all students achieve at their highest levels remains strong. Tennessee has never ranked higher on the Nation's Report Card than it did in 2019.

Yet, it also is clear that we are not as a state delivering real success to students in college, career, and life. Currently a little more than a

quarter of Tennessee students graduate from high school and go on to earn a bachelor's or associate degree, but more than half of jobs in 2025 will require a postsecondary credential. The future of Tennessee's economic prosperity requires us to continue to work on the hard job of ensuring our education system is working for students from the moment they enter their kindergarten classroom until the day they start their careers.

In recognition that serving students well requires a truly aligned education system, SCORE merged with Complete Tennessee last year to form one statewide organization with a mission that encompasses the entire education spectrum from kindergarten to postsecondary completion and aims to ensure student success in college, career, and life. We remain as focused as ever on what it takes for K-12 students to be successful, and we have expanded the SCORE team to tackle the issues related to postsecondary and career success.

As we have since SCORE was founded in 2009, we are issuing our annual *State Of Education In Tennessee* report to measure progress over the past year, identify gaps, and set an agenda of priorities for this year. As always, this report focuses on the needs of students and challenges us to do things that may be hard but are nevertheless the right steps for students. For the first time, our list of priorities truly spans the education spectrum from the early grades through high school and on to postsecondary education:

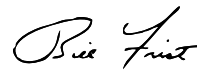
- **Create equitable opportunities for college and career success**
- **Address Tennessee's literacy crisis**
- **Strengthen teacher preparation and improve teacher pay**
- **Demand, support, and expand high-quality schools**

As we work this year to take the action required by those priorities, we will be taking the first steps toward achieving a grand goal. The future of Tennessee's economic prosperity requires us to continue to strive for an education system that works for students from the moment they enter their kindergarten classroom until the day they start their careers.

Tennessee must be a pioneer to create this coherent student-focused education system we envision, but we have been pioneers since our state was founded in the 18th century. There are difficult education challenges to overcome, but Tennessee has met similar daunting challenges in education before. In 2010, we as a state resolved that our students were bright enough to rank not in the bottom of the nation but among the best in the nation – and we are on our way to that goal.

And that is why we are hopeful about the state of education in Tennessee. Time and again, Tennessee's educators, policymakers, community and business leaders, and parents have risen to the challenge of doing what is best for students, and our students have risen to meet our high expectations. We have no doubt that Tennesseans will rise to the challenge again. Let the work begin now.

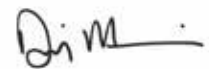
Sincerely,



**Bill Frist**

SCORE Chairman  
and Founder

Former Senate Majority  
Leader



**David Mansouri**

SCORE President  
and CEO



# TENNESSEE'S FOUNDATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



Across the previous decade, Tennessee posted outsize progress in student achievement and equity of opportunity. Student-focused policies that raise expectations, emphasize student outcomes, and encourage innovative and research-based practices have enabled educators and schools to help more students achieve at higher levels. These policies form the foundation for student growth and success beginning in kindergarten through postsecondary completion and ensure that Tennessee's progress is widespread and systemic, not just limited to a few bright spots.

The progress Tennessee has made – and continues to make – is significant, but it falls short of achieving our goal of setting up every student for success in college, career, and life. To extend the progress, Tennessee must protect and build upon these foundations as our leaders embrace strategies that make student success much more likely – especially for our historically underserved students who need the most opportunity for success.



# Tennessee Education Foundations

## High Expectations: Tennessee's Academic Standards And Aligned Annual Assessments

Tennessee's college- and career-ready standards reflect the state's belief that each student should have the opportunity to be successful beyond high school. National research has found that Tennessee's standards are among the most rigorous in the country.<sup>1</sup> These expectations are consistent across geography, socioeconomic status, and race so that students are being prepared for success regardless of their circumstances. While it will take considerably more work to make these expectations a

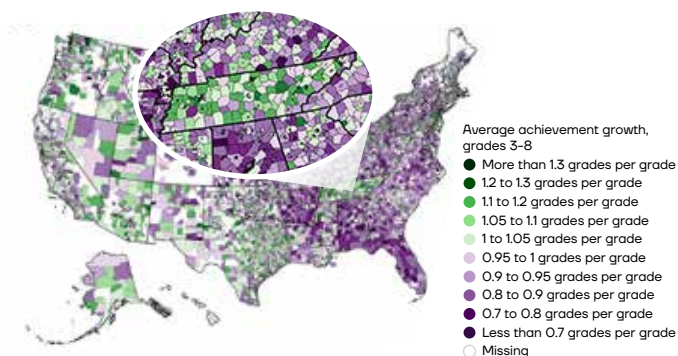
reality for all students and to implement them well in every classroom, Tennessee has the right foundations to continuously improve K-12 teaching and learning.

Tennessee's annual, rigorous statewide assessment provides valuable feedback that benefits Tennessee educators, students, parents, and communities. Because the assessment is aligned with Tennessee's academic standards, its data reveal the state's progress toward raising student achievement, as well as opportunities for improvement for all students. After Tennessee raised the assessment rigor to better reflect real-world expectations, the state was nationally

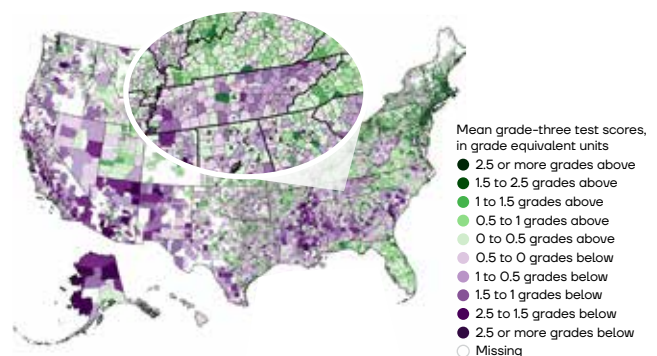
## MAPS HIGHLIGHT SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Two maps powered by the Stanford Education Data Archive present both the successes and the challenges of Tennessee's elementary and middle schools. Areas of green are above-average student growth. The first map shows that between 2009 and 2015, Tennessee outpaced most other states in student growth in grades 3–8. But when achievement results for just third grade are analyzed on the second map, the green gives way to purple, signifying lower levels of achievement.

AVERAGE TEST SCORE GROWTH RATES, MATH AND READING AVERAGED, US PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS 2009–15



AVERAGE THIRD-GRADE TEST SCORES, MATH AND READING AVERAGED US PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS 2009–15



Source: Stanford Education Data Archive (Reardon et al. 2017a)



recognized for both making systemic gains and closing the “honesty gap” between state and national measures of student achievement.<sup>2</sup>

TNReady was successfully administered in 2019, and such seamless administration must continue in order to know how our students are performing and where adjustments – in practice or policy – are needed. Future work must focus on improving early elementary outcomes, as research shows that our third-grade assessment results trail numerous communities around the country.<sup>3</sup>

### Excellent Educators: Educator Support And Accountability

The cornerstone of Tennessee’s academic improvement journey so far has been a focus on supporting effective teaching. Tennessee put in place many policies that are aimed at supporting educators, including the foundational multiple-measure evaluation system. This system, properly implemented, provides regular feedback and includes measures of student growth and achievement. The introduction of educator accountability also coincided with intentional state and district efforts to provide professional learning aligned to Tennessee’s rigorous academic standards.

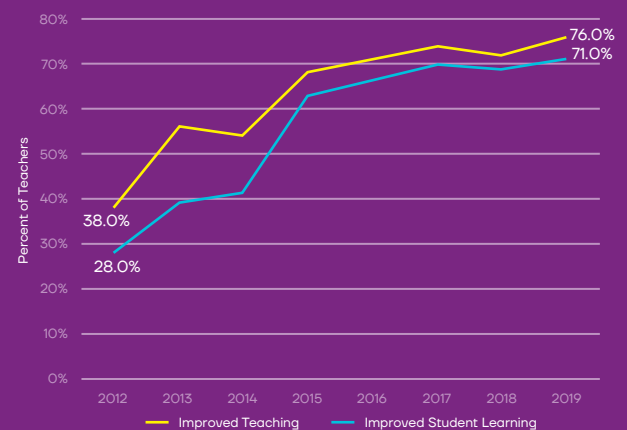
The evaluation system was built on two foundational beliefs: Each student should grow at least one year in learning every academic year, and each teacher should receive individualized feedback multiple times a year. Tennessee has a systematic way to drive teaching and learning improvement, but more work remains to ensure that we retain our most effective educators, provide individualized feedback to all teachers, and provide our students with equitable access to our most effective educators.

After nearly a decade of implementation, approximately three-quarters of Tennessee’s educators believe that the evaluation system has led to improved teaching and student learning.<sup>4</sup>

Tennessee-specific research also showed that teachers continued to grow beyond their first years as a teacher, and more so in the years after Tennessee adopted the evaluation system.<sup>5</sup>

### TEACHERS SAY EVALUATION LEADS TO IMPROVEMENT

Since Tennessee strengthened its evaluation system, increasing numbers of teachers report on the Tennessee Educator Survey that evaluation is improving teaching and learning.



Percentage of teachers who agree or strongly agree that their evaluation led to improvements in teaching and learning, 2012-19. For 2012-14 the First to the Top survey administered by TN Consortium of Research, Evaluation, and Development stated this item as, “the teacher evaluation process will improve my teaching” and “the teacher evaluation process will improve my students’ achievement.”

Source: Tennessee Education Research Alliance, 2012-19

### Student Success: School Accountability And Improvement

A strong system of data-driven feedback for schools tells leaders and stakeholders whether Tennessee’s schools are serving all students well. Tennessee’s school accountability system is built on a foundation that values both student achievement and growth of all students, in addition to other measures of school quality. The system highlights which schools we should learn from and which schools need more support to better serve students.

A postsecondary credential is increasingly necessary for high-quality careers in Tennessee, both today and as projected in the future.<sup>6</sup> Tennessee Promise demonstrates the state's belief that all students can benefit from postsecondary education. Ensuring that access leads to success and completion – a yet unrealized goal for many students – should continue to be a key driver for our future postsecondary improvement work.

## Completion Focus: Outcomes-Based Funding

Tennessee's pioneering outcomes-based funding formula for postsecondary education institutions has played a key role in driving postsecondary alignment toward student success. A signature feature of the 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act, the formula recognizes the different roles each type of postsecondary institution plays, incentivizes institutions to focus on retaining and graduating students, and begins to focus on historically underserved students in postsecondary education. The formula is an essential foundation for Tennessee institutions of higher education to understand their own student outcomes in order to create more equitable opportunities for success.

There is wide variance across Tennessee counties in the percentage of adults with a postsecondary degree or certificate.

The map displays the percentage of the population aged 65 and over across the United Kingdom. The data is as follows:

Region	Percentage
North East	11.5%
North West	22.5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	27.4%
East of England	22.2%
London	23.3%
South East	37.3%
South West	28.5%
West Midlands	37.5%
East Midlands	17.5%
North East	18.2%
North West	16.8%
Yorkshire and the Humber	16.0%
East of England	18.5%
London	21.9%
South East	13.9%
South West	20.7%
West Midlands	32.7%
East Midlands	20.9%
North East	22.0%
North West	23.6%
Yorkshire and the Humber	41.4%
East of England	20.0%
London	23.4%
South East	22.9%
South West	18.5%
West Midlands	24.9%
East Midlands	18.2%
North East	21.6%
North West	13.7%
Yorkshire and the Humber	29.2%
East of England	15.4%
London	19.8%
South East	17.9%
South West	14.7%
West Midlands	31.6%
East Midlands	14.0%
North East	18.5%
North West	15.0%
Yorkshire and the Humber	32.2%
East of England	21.5%
London	18.5%
South East	24.8%
South West	29.9%
West Midlands	30.4%
East Midlands	34.6%
North East	26.3%
North West	18.5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	24.9%
East of England	20.1%
London	18.6%
South East	20.1%
South West	17.4%
West Midlands	19.7%
East Midlands	24.9%
North East	19.1%
North West	25.3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	41.5%
East of England	32.1%
London	19.7%
South East	21.3%
South West	19.0%
West Midlands	14.8%
East Midlands	21.6%
North East	22.1%
North West	26.8%
Yorkshire and the Humber	29.4%
East of England	21.1%
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North East	21.1%
North West	21.1%
Yorkshire and the Humber	21.1%
East of England	21.1%
London	

## 09 Expanding Student Success

## Empowered Institutions: **FOCUS Act**

The 2016 Focus on College and University Success (FOCUS) Act reorganized higher education governance in Tennessee. The six universities formerly governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) now have individual governing boards, allowing TBR to focus

exclusively on better serving students at the state's 13 community colleges and 27 Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and encouraging cross-institution collaboration. The FOCUS Act helped create the structure for locally governed institutions (LGIs) to adopt campus-focused decision-making and to take ownership of strategies to advance student outcomes.





## TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS TIMELINE

- 2007 Tennessee receives three F's from the US Chamber of Commerce *Leaders and Laggards* report for inflated proficiency rates, large achievement gaps, and poor college and career readiness
- 2010 Tennessee's First to the Top Act raises academic standards, incorporates student growth measures into educator evaluation, and creates a system for holding schools accountable for serving all students
- 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act introduces the outcomes-based funding formula
- 2011 Tennessee lifts its charter school caps and improves authorization process
- 2013 Tennessee trains 60,000 teachers in new academic standards over three years
- 2013 Tennessee sets its first postsecondary attainment goal through Drive to 55
- 2015 Tennessee Promise launches
- 2016 Tennessee adopts the FOCUS Act converting six universities into locally governed institutions
- 2016 State Board of Education releases redesigned educator preparation report card
- 2018 Tennessee's plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act rated among the best in the nation
- 2018 Tennessee Reconnect launches
- 2019 Tennessee adopts the Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE) Act

● K-12    ● Postsecondary    ● K-12 and Postsecondary



# Foundations For Continued Progress

What were innovations a decade ago are now the foundations for Tennessee's future success. Tennessee has adopted foundational policies that prioritize equity and make student success possible.

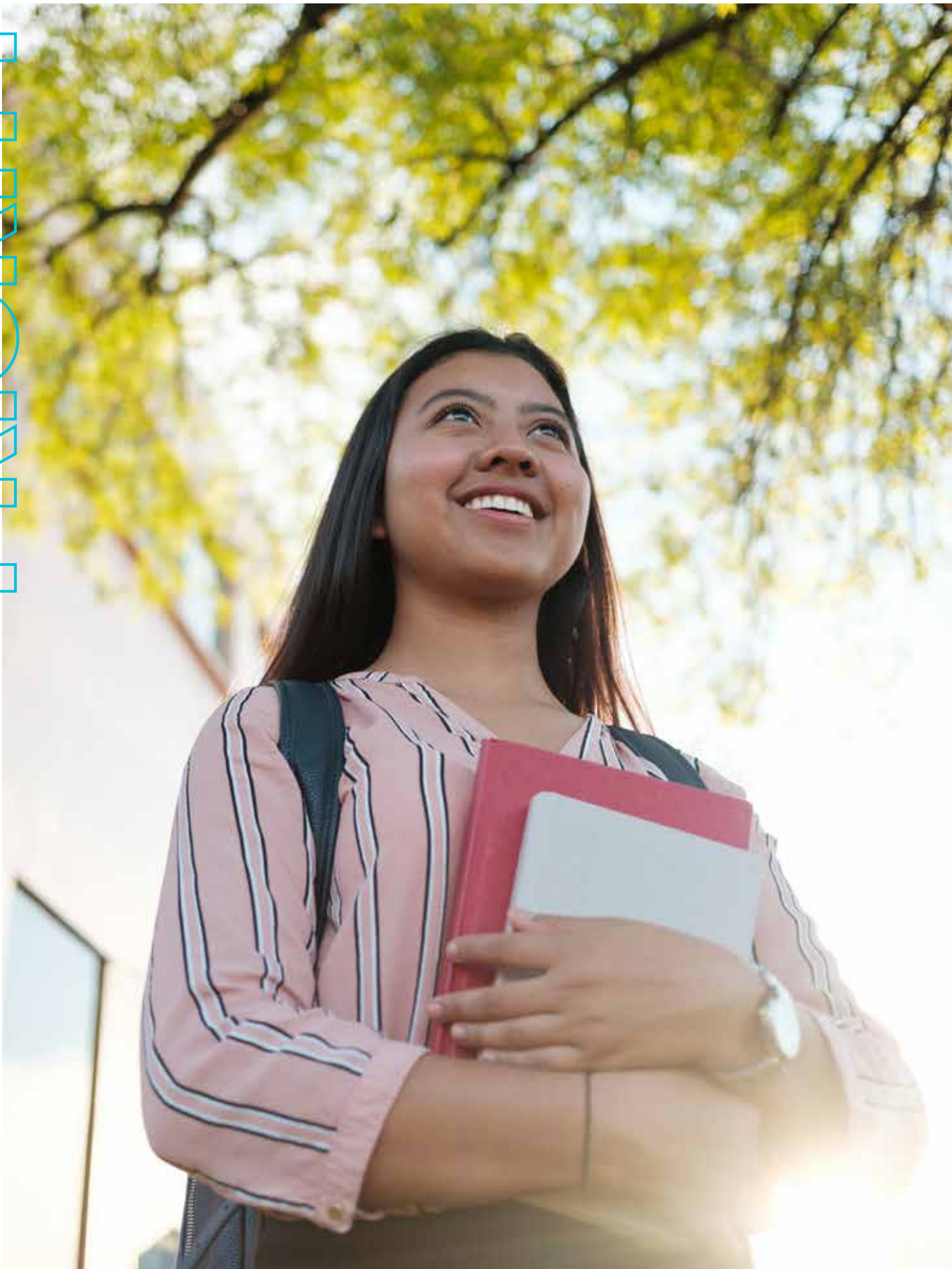
It will be up to all of us in Tennessee – educators, policymakers, community and business leaders, and students – to create schools and institutions where our aspirational expectations become reality. By creating an environment where high expectations for all and continuous improvement are the norm, evidence and research are the basis for monitoring progress, and coherent experience for students is a shared goal, Tennessee can work toward a future where each and every student is ready for college, career, and life.

Looking ahead, Tennessee's opportunities for improvement and innovation must first maintain our strong foundation. Tennessee's progress over the last decade cannot continue without a commitment to go deeper on the foundational areas of work and simultaneously embrace innovations that keep students at the center of decision-making. This report outlines four priorities for focused attention in 2020 to extend our state's record as a national leader in improving student opportunity and outcomes:

- Create equitable opportunities for college and career success
- Address Tennessee's literacy crisis
- Strengthen teacher preparation and improve teacher pay
- Demand, support, and expand high-quality schools



# PRIORITY





# Create Equitable Opportunities For College And Career Success

Tennessee students who enroll in postsecondary education deserve a fair chance to complete their degrees or certificates. This belief should be the north star for Tennessee's postsecondary improvement work.

## Postsecondary Education Increasingly Necessary

Formal education beyond high school is increasingly necessary for access to a high-quality career – a reality that Tennessee has embraced through signature initiatives such as the HOPE Scholarship, Complete College Tennessee Act, Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, FOCUS Act, and GIVE Act.<sup>7</sup> Based on current labor market opportunities and projections for jobs requiring postsecondary attainment, Tennessee must rapidly and equitably improve postsecondary completion rates for students – currently, not even half of students at public postsecondary institutions complete a degree within six years. According to the Center for Economic Research in Tennessee, there are more than 224,000 projected high-demand job openings through 2026, most of which will require an industry certificate or college degree.<sup>8</sup>

The immediate stakes are high. For the one-third of students in the high school graduating class of 2017 who directly entered the workforce without postsecondary education, average annual wages are little more than \$13,000.<sup>9</sup> Tennessee also has close to 1 million adults in the state who enrolled and attended some college but did not earn a degree.<sup>10</sup> Nationally, the average bachelor's degree holder earned \$30,000 more each year than the average person with only a high school diploma – a wage premium of 75 percent.<sup>11</sup>

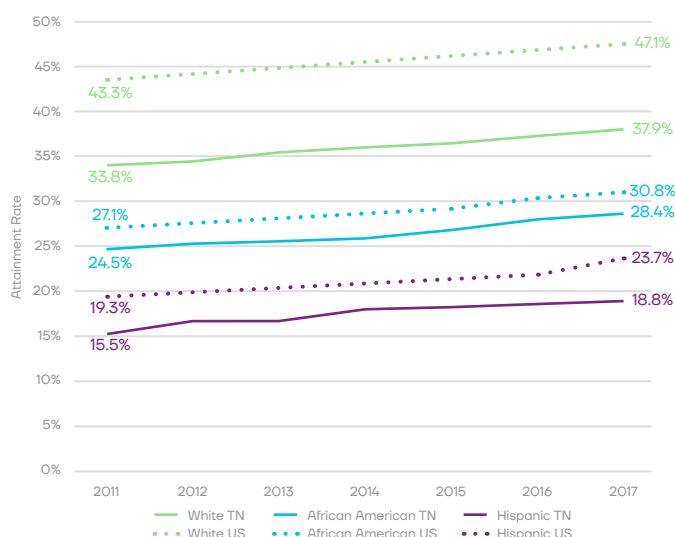


National research suggests that despite progress in advancing degree attainment across racial groups for the past three decades, racially inequitable access to good jobs continues.<sup>12</sup> These patterns are also reflected in Tennessee-specific data.<sup>13</sup>

Postsecondary credentials also have value beyond workforce and career impact. Research has linked postsecondary attainment with improved health outcomes, increased community vitality and civic engagement, and prevention of and recovery from interactions with the criminal justice system.<sup>14</sup>

## TENNESSEE TRAILS NATION IN EARNING POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

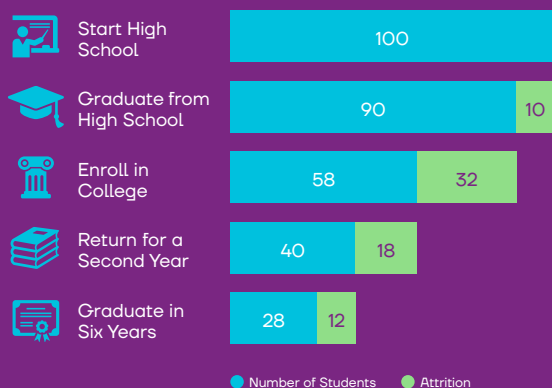
In Tennessee, 42.7 percent of adults have attained postsecondary degrees and certificates, about 5 points below the national average of 47.6 percent. When looked at by racial and ethnic groups, the gap ranges from just over 2 points to more than 9 points.



Tennessee vs. US, postsecondary credential attainment rates by racial/ethnic group, 2011-17.

Source: Lumina Foundation, 2019

## TENNESSEE'S CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM WORKS FOR ONLY ONE IN FOUR STUDENTS



\*\*\*This visual and its conclusions are drawn from publicly available data. Because of methodological differences, the underlying success rates may be marginally different than the rates used to calculate the 28% figure.

Current success rates across public K-12 and postsecondary institutions in Tennessee suggest that only about 28 percent of students are well served by the system. Here's the math:

- High School Graduation Rate:** When 100 Tennessee students begin high school, only about 90 of them will graduate, based on our current graduation rate of 89.7 percent, and 10 will not.
- College-Going Rate:** Of the 90 who graduate high school, only about 58 students will enroll in postsecondary education, based on our college-going rate of 64.1 percent, and 32 will not.
- First-Year Persistence:** With a persistence rate of 68.6 percent, only about 40 of the 58 students who entered college will return for their second year.
- Six-Year Graduation Rate, Across All Institutions:** With a six-year postsecondary graduation rate of 48.2 percent for the 58 students who enrolled in college, only about 28 of those initial 100 high school freshmen will earn a postsecondary degree.

Source: TDOE and THEC, 2019



## Postsecondary Completion A Challenge

With barely one in four students graduating high school and earning a postsecondary degree, it is clear that Tennessee needs to provide more postsecondary completion support in order to meet the statewide goal of 55 percent of Tennesseans holding a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025. While postsecondary completion rates vary across institution types and by student groups, the underlying imperatives are the same. To deliver success for students in college, career, and life, we must establish better coordinated and more efficient efforts across K-12, postsecondary, and employers.

The postsecondary education landscape across the nation is complex and arcane, particularly for students who have limited experience with the system. Students who are historically underrepresented in postsecondary education – students of color, students learning English, first-generation college students, adult learners, students from low-income families, or students from rural communities – most acutely face barriers to success, including:

- Inexperience with and under-preparation for postsecondary academic demands
- Misalignment between coursework and students' career opportunities
- Complexities of navigating postsecondary social, academic, and financial resources
- Lack of support for dealing with out-of-school emergencies

Even before arriving on campus, students need support to avoid “summer melt,” the phenomenon where students accepted to and planning to attend a postsecondary institution do not complete enrollment.<sup>15</sup>

At Tennessee's community colleges, about one in five students obtain a degree – which is typically an associate degree – within four years

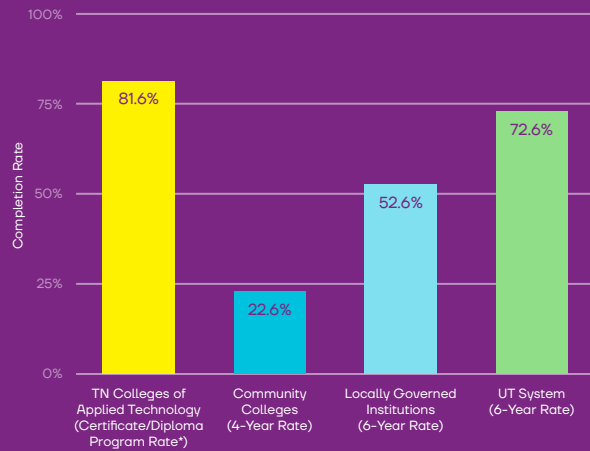
of starting college. Designed as open-access institutions, meaning they accept enrollment from anyone with a high school diploma or the equivalent, community colleges have worked to remove barriers in recent years to improve the first-year persistence rate.

Replacing traditional remediation courses with a co-requisite approach in key first-year courses – where students enroll in college courses with additional support instead of traditional noncredit remediation courses – has led to success rates of 54 percent and 65 percent in college math and reading courses, respectively.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the first-year retention rate of only 55 percent means that almost half of the students who enroll do not return to campus for a second year – a pattern found across the country as well.<sup>17</sup> Addressing Tennessee's postsecondary completion challenges will require increased support for and sharpened focus on the state's community colleges.



## POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION RATES VARY WIDELY

Students are more likely to complete their postsecondary education depending on the type of institution they attend.



Completion rate by institution type. \*TCAT programs shorter than 900 credit hours issue certificates, while those longer than 900 hours issue a diploma.

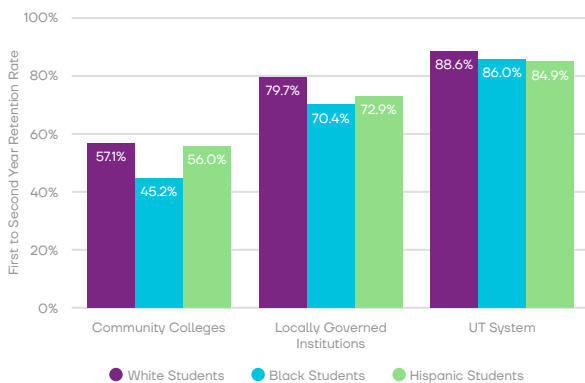
Tennessee has four types of public higher education institutions:

- Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT):** There are 27 TCATs in Tennessee, governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents. TCATs are open-access institutions that accept all applicants regardless of academic preparedness and offer shorter courses of study. TCATs have a variety of technical programs for short-term and long-term diplomas and certificates.
- Community College:** Tennessee's 13 community colleges are also open-access institutions. Governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents, community colleges award associate degrees and certificates.
- Locally Governed Institution (LGI):** Six public four-year universities are LGIs: Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and the University of Memphis. Each LGI has its own board of trustees responsible for the university's governance.
- University of Tennessee System (UT):** UT has campuses in Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Martin plus the Health Science Center in Memphis. The system is governed by a single UT Board of Trustees, though the campuses in Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Martin each have an advisory board.

Source: THEC, 2019

## MANY POSTSECONDARY FRESHMEN DO NOT RETURN FOR SECOND YEAR

Retention rates in Tennessee vary depending on the student group and the type of postsecondary institution.

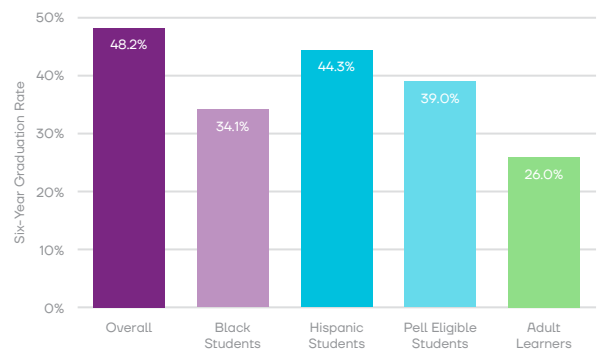


First to second year student group postsecondary retention by public institution type, 2017-18

Source: THEC, 2019

## POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION RATES NEED IMPROVEMENT

Student groups have different rates of success when it comes to completing college. These percentages are overall rates across all public institutions in Tennessee (CCs, LGIs, UT).



Tennessee college graduation rates for 2012 cohort by student group

Source: THEC, 2019

## High School As The Onramp To College And Career

While Tennessee reached its highest-ever high school graduation rate in 2019, there are numerous signs that students are not ready for college and career.

Results from the 2019 Ready Graduate indicator – a newer K-12 accountability measure of readiness for college and career that includes data on ACT scores, early postsecondary opportunity (EPSO) access, military entrance exams, and industry credentials – show not only the extent of student under-preparedness but also inequitable patterns of access and success for Tennessee’s historically underserved students. Less than half of high school graduates are considered Ready Graduates, with rates for students of color and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds half that of the overall high school graduate population. To address this, high schools must develop innovative strategies to combat the well-documented pattern of inequitable access to high-quality college and career programming.<sup>18</sup>

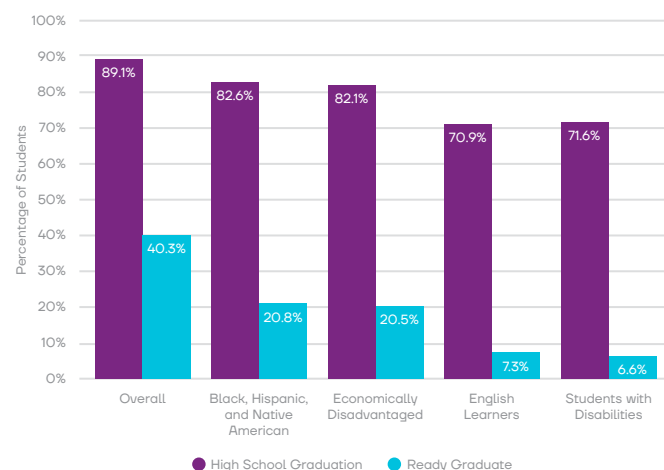
Research has demonstrated the value of EPSOs, such as Advanced Placement and dual-enrollment courses, in advancing equitable access to postsecondary success. Emerging research suggests that high-quality advising and exploration activities can have a positive impact on student aspirations for college and career.<sup>19</sup> Advising and EPSO opportunities are particularly beneficial to students of color or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>20</sup> While Tennessee has invested in college counselors to increase college-going culture for some of the state’s most underserved schools through Advise TN, more must be done to support students to access the widest set of high-quality postsecondary options.

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) has done important work in recent years to ensure career and technical education (CTE) leads to some form of a credential and is better aligned to workforce needs — essential steps if our students are to reap the attainment and career outcomes found in high-quality, coherent CTE programs in other states.<sup>21</sup> In 2019, the state built on this work with the GIVE initiative. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) administers the program, which provides grants to advance work-based learning, apprenticeship opportunities, and CTE dual enrollment courses for high school students.

Improving postsecondary completion and attainment in Tennessee will require stakeholders and leaders in K-12, postsecondary, and industry to work together to ensure that access to opportunity more frequently leads to success in college, career, and life.

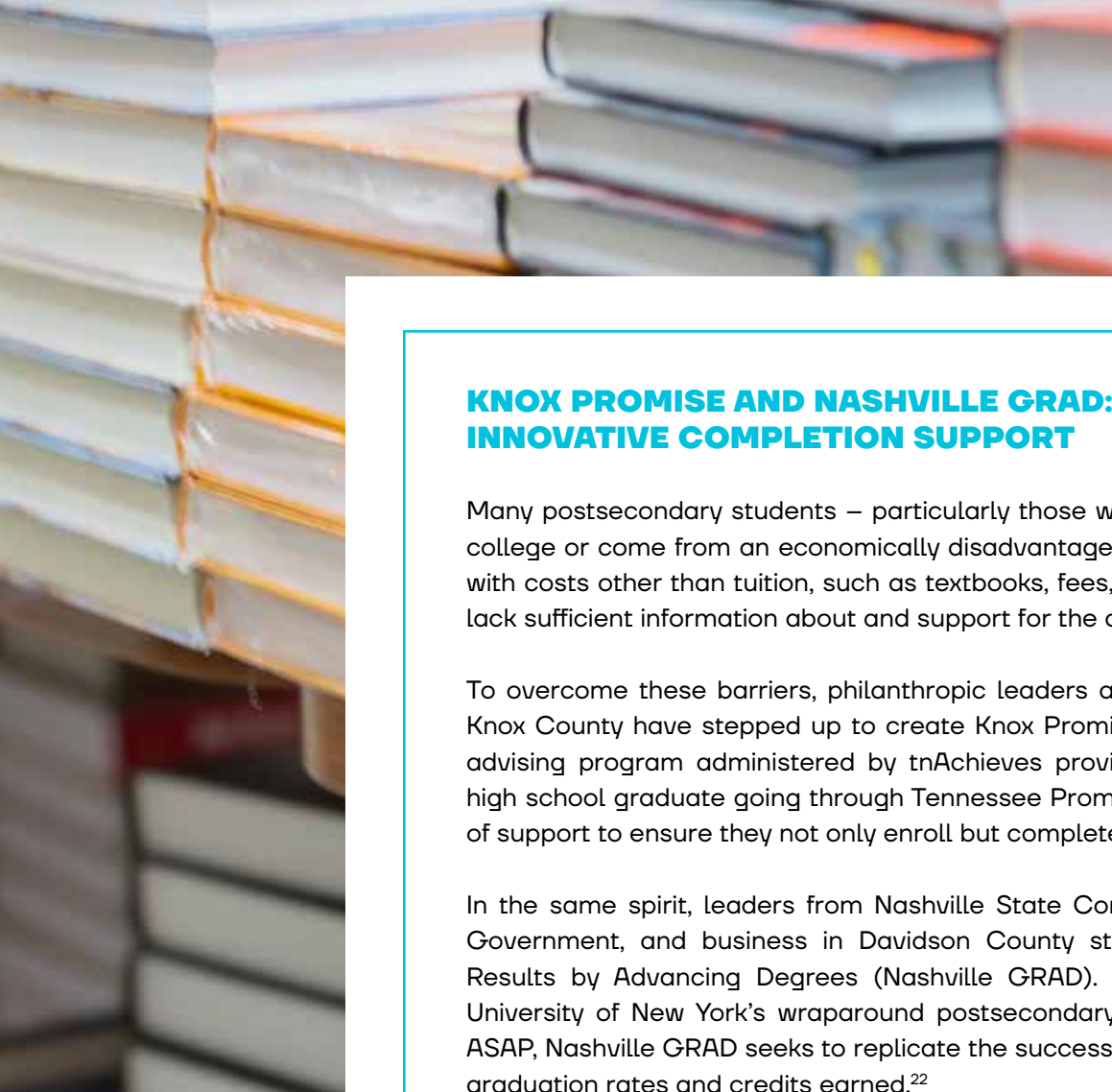
### NEARLY ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GRADUATE, BUT FEW ARE READY FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

Although most Tennessee students graduate high school, the new accountability measure called Ready Graduate shows that most Tennessee students graduate high school unprepared for success in postsecondary education or career.



Tennessee high school graduation rate vs. Ready Graduate rate by student group, class of 2018

Source: TDOE, 2019



## **KNOX PROMISE AND NASHVILLE GRAD: INNOVATIVE COMPLETION SUPPORT**

Many postsecondary students – particularly those who are less familiar with college or come from an economically disadvantaged background – grapple with costs other than tuition, such as textbooks, fees, and transportation, and lack sufficient information about and support for the college-going process.

To overcome these barriers, philanthropic leaders and nonprofit partners in Knox County have stepped up to create Knox Promise. This scholarship and advising program administered by tnAchieves provides every Knox County high school graduate going through Tennessee Promise with additional types of support to ensure they not only enroll but complete their degrees.

In the same spirit, leaders from Nashville State Community College, Metro Government, and business in Davidson County started Nashville Getting Results by Advancing Degrees (Nashville GRAD). Modeled after the City University of New York's wraparound postsecondary support system, CUNY ASAP, Nashville GRAD seeks to replicate the success CUNY ASAP has seen in graduation rates and credits earned.<sup>22</sup>

### **Support To Navigate College**

It can be difficult to navigate the complex processes and academic rigor of postsecondary education, especially for students whose families are less familiar with college.

Knox Promise provides students with both a summer support program between their first and second years of college and a tnAchieves coach to help them through degree completion. Students who sign up for Nashville GRAD are provided with supports such as hands-on tutoring, academic and career advising, and leadership development.

### **Financial Support Beyond Tuition**

Understanding that college supplies are expensive and emergencies happen, Nashville GRAD, which supports over 250 Davidson County students who enrolled in the fall of 2019 at Nashville State Community College or TCAT Nashville, offers support in purchasing textbooks, transportation, technology fees, industry certification fees, and emergency needs. Similarly, Knox Promise provides all Knox County high school graduates participating in and meeting requirements for Tennessee Promise – currently just over 1,500 Knox County students from the class of 2019 – with an emergency fund for unforeseen circumstances, as well as a textbook stipend.



## 2019 POSTSECONDARY DEVELOPMENTS IN TENNESSEE

- The state passes the GIVE Act, community grants to develop work-based learning and opportunities for high school students as well as funding for four CTE dual enrollment courses through the GIVE Student Grants.
- SCORE merges with Complete Tennessee to advocate for alignment between K-12 and higher education to ensure more students are attaining postsecondary credentials and seeing success from classroom to career.
- The state's Future Workforce Initiative helps launch new CTE programs focused in STEM fields, grow the number of teachers qualified to teach work-based learning and advanced computer science courses, and expand postsecondary STEM opportunities in high school such as dual credit, AP, and dual enrollment.
- The University of Tennessee System announces UT Promise, a last-dollar scholarship and mentorship program covering mandatory tuition and fees at UT campuses for students whose family household income is under \$50,000 a year.

# How Tennessee Can Create Equitable Opportunities For College And Career Success

Key to Tennessee's goal of preparing students for success in college, career, and life is ensuring the state can meet its attainment goal of 55 percent of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025. All Tennesseans who begin a postsecondary program must have support to completion. Given that only about one in four Tennessee public school students complete a public postsecondary education in six years, systemic work needs to be done to ensure equitable opportunities and supports exist for all students. Tennessee must urgently work to improve first-to-second-year persistence, a key barrier at community colleges where completion rates require the most attention.

### **Expand Support For Students To Complete**

**Build capacity to address common barriers to first-year postsecondary persistence and postsecondary completion at all institutions.**

Successful completion is the critical lever for Tennessee's postsecondary improvement work. In the next year, Tennessee should focus its immediate attention on creating supports that increase the likelihood that our students will persist from year 1 to year 2 of postsecondary and have the momentum and supports to attain a degree or certificate. This will be particularly important at Tennessee's open-

access community colleges, where many students enter academically unprepared, as well as for students who are less familiar with postsecondary education.<sup>23</sup>

Access to high-quality advising is crucial. Students who are less familiar with postsecondary expectations need help to arrive at and navigate campuses. These advisers must also be empowered with real-time data insights to provide specific and individualized advising that leads to students finding the right next steps. Such data insights include verifiable enrollment information, academic standing, and course credit accumulation – information that usually arrives at the conclusion of the semester, when it is too late for advising to influence a student's trajectory.

Advising can also facilitate smoother transitions to campus, as well as help to combat summer melt between high school graduation and beginning classes at postsecondary institutions. Importantly, better advising can help students access academic and financial resources on campus as well as build their sense of belonging and skills to navigate their institutions. While some of Tennessee's public institutions have begun building these supports and are starting to see success, more investments and attention will be needed – particularly for institutions serving greater proportions of students from economically disadvantaged and first-generation backgrounds.

Tennessee's institutions should learn from the innovative and successful work of Georgia State University, which has in four years improved its six-year completion rate by 6 percentage points to 54 percent – a level of progress that is rarely seen at postsecondary institutions. This work has included reducing advising ratios to closer to the national median – by some estimates, approximately 300 students per adviser— in addition to paying attention to shorter-term outcomes such as student attendance.<sup>24</sup> While Tennessee's outcomes-based funding formula rightly focuses institutions on completion as

the ultimate outcome, institutions should build advising structures that are driven by a range of short- and long-term data and have the capacity to serve students who need advisers the most.

## **Remove Financial Barriers Beyond Tuition**

**Expand efforts to address postsecondary affordability, including unmet financial needs.**

Even as the importance of a postsecondary degree or credential for today's workforce increases, college is costly for our students and their families. Tennessee took significant steps to alleviate the growing costs of college, including the Tennessee HOPE Scholarship and the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant, Tennessee Promise, and Tennessee Reconnect.

However, more work remains to ensure that access leads to completion for all students. Research and conversations with current Tennessee college students make plain that nontuition costs – such as transportation, childcare, textbooks, supplies, and emergencies – are areas of unmet need for many students and can be substantial barriers to success.

Tennessee now has emerging examples of how communities and philanthropy are stepping up to support students with nontuition costs. Initiatives focused on tackling these barriers, such as Nashville GRAD and Knox Promise, both in their early stages of implementation, should be evaluated, and successful components of those programs should be replicated across the state.<sup>25</sup> Initiatives to support rural students can learn from the work of the Ayers Foundation, which has leveraged philanthropy to provide financial support beyond tuition, as well as a “high school through completion” advising model for students from partnering high schools that is showing groundbreaking results in postsecondary enrollment and persistence.

## Drive High School Innovation

### Support districts to start or scale up innovative school models.

Currently, our public education system is not setting up enough students for success in college, career, and life. While the work to build a stronger foundation from kindergarten through middle school continues, Tennessee must also build new models or pathways in high schools that support our students toward a range of high-quality college and career options.

This work can focus on data-driven insights, such as addressing the disconnect between high school CTE choices and postsecondary pathways. Data currently show that the majority of students who concentrate on a specific CTE pathway do not follow that pathway into postsecondary, suggesting that the pathways students are choosing in high school may not be aligned to their actual interests and future career aspirations. However, those data are not publicly available and rarely make their way into the hands of K-12 educators and leaders.<sup>26</sup> With sizeable differences in success rates across postsecondary institution types, our students could also benefit from innovative advising models that help them find their best postsecondary options.

The state should also invest resources in communities that not only seek to cross the traditional boundaries of K-12, postsecondary, and business but that do so in a way that enhances equitable access. Tennessee already has much of the policy flexibility needed to encourage collaboratively developed innovative high schools. The state should encourage districts to understand and embrace this flexibility to develop new school models and innovative programs.

Examples include incentivizing the growth of school models that reimagine the structure of a traditional school day to integrate rigorous academic offerings and career-based learning, such as long-term internships and structured apprenticeships. Tennessee should explore models such as early college, Big Picture schools, and early TCATs that put students on the path to earn credentials and career experience before leaving high school. Furthermore, communities can learn from models such as the Centers for Applied Science and Technology in San Antonio or the Regional Vocational Technical Schools in Massachusetts as a way to encourage cross-district development of high-quality college and career experiences.

The state should also provide additional funding beyond the four EPSO courses currently covered in order to expand the number of students graduating from high school with a postsecondary credential or college credit. Particularly for students who have been historically underserved, the opportunity to earn degrees or credentials while still in the more structured K-12 environment better positions them for future success. These resources also must be applied to relieve current inequities in EPSO access and success for our students.



# PRIORITY





# Address Tennessee's Literacy Crisis

Across Tennessee and around the nation, early literacy rates have seen little improvement for more than a decade. According to the Nation's Report Card, the percentage of Tennessee fourth-graders proficient in reading was chronically flat across the past decade, hovering around 35 percent. This performance contrasts starkly with fourth-grade mathematics, where gains have built over time and Tennessee is now in the top half of states in performance. Tennessee has a literacy crisis as our students struggle to learn to read and write.

## TENNESSEE'S FOURTH-GRADE READING SCORES FLATLINE

While Tennessee math results have shown significant growth since 2009 on the Nation's Report Card, reading performance has not improved since 2013.



Tennessee vs. US fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress reading and math scores, 2009-19

Source: NAEP, 2009-2019

## Early Literacy Success Essential

Research paints a grim picture of what happens when students miss the key third-grade reading milestone: **A student who does not meet reading expectations by third grade is four times less likely to graduate high school by age 19 than a child who reads proficiently by that time.**<sup>27</sup> Students need to have the tools to interact with increasingly complex content and concepts after third grade, instead of spending time struggling to read, write, and communicate. Given the necessity of postsecondary education for a rewarding career in Tennessee, the consequences of not addressing Tennessee's literacy crisis are dire for the state's workforce and communities.

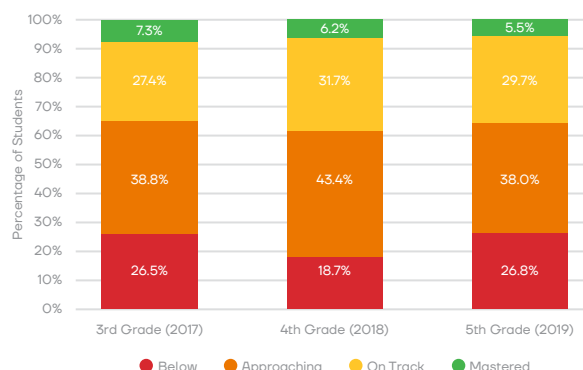
2019 TNReady results show that for every one student who is on track in third-grade English language arts (ELA), two other students are not. There are twice as many students who cannot read after third grade than there are students who can.

The assessment data also show that students do not catch up in the later grades. Once students fall behind in third grade, they are unlikely to ever become strong readers and writers.<sup>28</sup> Among historically underserved students, third-grade ELA proficiency rates are as low as 22 percent for economically disadvantaged students, 21 percent for English learners, and 12 percent for students with disabilities. Across all tested grades, just over a third – 35 percent – of Tennessee students met or exceeded grade-level expectations for ELA in 2019.

Tennessee's ability to raise student achievement and address key achievement gaps could be accelerated if we addressed this early learning gap. Stanford University research that highlights Tennessee as providing student academic growth that is ahead of the nation also shows that when it comes to third-grade academic performance, Tennessee trails the nation – suggesting that Tennessee's student growth since 2009 is in spite of the state's stagnant early grades performance.<sup>29</sup>

## STUDENT LITERACY PERFORMANCE CHANGES LITTLE AFTER THIRD GRADE

Tennessee third-graders who are not on track in English language arts do not catch up in the following years.

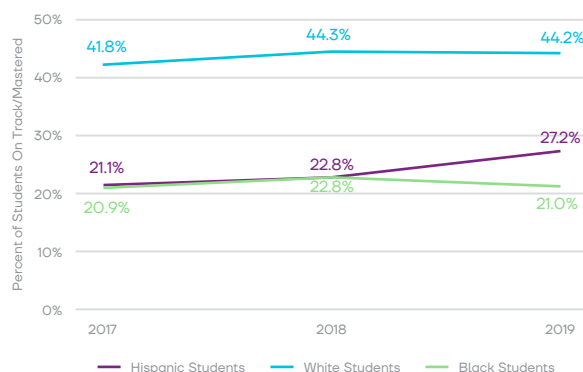


TNReady ELA assessment results for students who were in third grade in 2017 and fifth grade in 2019

Source: TDOE, 2019

## STUDENTS OF COLOR EXPERIENCE GREATER LITERACY CHALLENGES

The literacy proficiency rates for students of color are about half the rates for white students in Tennessee. There has been little growth in literacy for white and African American students over the past decade, while Hispanic students have experienced faster growth.



TNReady third-grade ELA assessment results by student group

Source: TDOE, 2019

## Science of Reading

Learning to read is a complex process, but research has identified clear ways for students to be successful. Foundational skills, such as decoding and systematic phonics instruction, must be taught to all students, as few students learn to read easily without explicit instruction in phonics.<sup>30</sup> As students learn to decode words, they simultaneously need to build knowledge so they can comprehend the meaning of what they are reading.

While evidence about reading instruction has existed for decades, educators and leaders have not had consistent exposure to this research, and Tennessee as a whole has not prepared our educators to lead literacy instruction according to this research. The consequences for students have been devastating. Tennessee's ELA textbook adoption in 2020 is a key opportunity for districts to prioritize providing our teachers with instructional materials based on the science of reading.



## LIFT: USING HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS WELL TO IMPROVE STUDENT READING SKILLS

Leading Innovation for Tennessee (LIFT) is a network of Tennessee districts working together for the past four years to improve literacy by using high-quality, aligned instructional materials – all the materials a teacher uses to ensure students learn the skills defined by the standards. Educators from Sullivan County Schools, serving a largely rural and economically disadvantaged student population, and Lenoir City Schools, where the proportion of English learner students is the third highest in Tennessee, have had notable early success through the use of high-quality instructional materials aligned to the science of reading.

On the 2019 TNReady ELA assessment, Sullivan County saw each of its 22 elementary schools meet or exceed growth expectations, and Lenoir City nearly doubled the percentage of third-graders on track or above, moving from 17.5 percent to 31.8 percent.

Key lessons from Sullivan County and Lenoir City:

- **High-Quality Instructional Materials Form The Foundation**

While research has shown for decades the need to provide systematic phonics instruction in early literacy, teachers needed lessons and units that reflected that research and were coherent within and across grades. Leveraging curriculum reviews from EdReports, a nonprofit providing educator-driven reviews of instructional materials, district leaders deeply engaged teachers in selecting high-quality instructional materials aligned to district needs.

- **Start Small To Learn, Scale Up For Systemic Change**

Both districts engaged a core group of teachers to test out their materials strategy and identify any potential roadblocks. As they expanded this work, new teachers learned from the core teachers, accelerating the learning process, and serving as advocates within the district. By full implementation, the focus was on building the capacity of teachers and leaders to ensure *students* own the learning, leveraging standards-aligned instructional materials to meet the needs of diverse learners, and supporting all students to reach the standards.

- **Give Teachers Embedded Support**

Both districts provided intentional and intensive support to teachers, including regular informal classroom observations using a standard tool and protocols for unit and lesson preparation. They also prioritized and protected regular collaborative time for teachers to learn pieces of the curriculum, practice, share with their peers, and reflect on implementation. Both districts had clear and ongoing roles for district, school, and teacher leaders to all participate in what would become a district-wide initiative.





## 2019 LITERACY DEVELOPMENTS IN TENNESSEE

- › The state invests \$1.8 million in a literacy coaching pilot for Tennessee's priority schools.
- › The State Board of Education adopts Literacy and Specialty Area Standards for Educator Preparation to ensure every teacher candidate can effectively teach reading and writing.
- › The Tennessee Department of Education releases the Official List of Textbooks and Instructional Materials approved by the State Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission.
- › The LIFT Education network releases its guidebook with best practices for implementing high-quality instructional materials.

# How Tennessee Can Address The Literacy Crisis

Literacy skills are critical for students to be successful in college, career, and life. Only one-third of Tennessee third-graders are on grade level in English language arts, an unconscionable reality for a major learning milestone that has barely improved in over a decade. Research into how students learn to read and the experience of innovative school districts in Tennessee identify a clear path forward to systematically improve our early literacy outcomes.

## **Support Implementation Of High-Quality Instructional Materials**

**Provide intensive support for districts to adopt and have strong implementation of high-quality instructional materials.**

Tennessee's school districts are scheduled to adopt ELA textbooks in 2020. Districts must prioritize an educator-driven and evidence-based adoption of high-quality materials, and

the state should provide resources and guidance that prioritize strong implementation. Research has shown that adopting better materials is a cost-effective strategy for improving instruction and for giving our students equitable access to rigorous learning.<sup>31</sup>

Research also underscores the critical need for deep implementation support for educators. Districts must choose to invest in professional learning and support for our teachers and school leaders to ensure materials are implemented well and lead to student achievement.<sup>32</sup> The state should support school and district leaders to understand the expectations articulated in these materials so that teachers get coherent support in implementation. It will be essential to provide consistent and ongoing opportunities for teacher collaboration, support leaders to maintain a clear and focused vision for implementation, and differentiate resources and support depending on community needs.<sup>33</sup>



## Prepare Teachers To Teach Reading On Day One

**Ensure teacher candidates demonstrate a deep working knowledge of the science of reading.**

Tennessee's stagnant early literacy outcomes mirror national trends and are a barrier for student opportunity throughout the rest of their education. We know more about how students learn to read than ever before, particularly regarding systematic phonics instruction in the early grades, the role of knowledge building for comprehension, and other insights from modern cognitive science. Our teachers must be prepared to teach reading in this way.

Tennessee has a responsibility to ensure that research guides our practice. This responsibility must go beyond having literacy standards for educator preparation programs (EPPs). EPPs must revamp their literacy instructional programs to embed the science of reading. As more school districts make the shift to high-quality instructional materials, it will be essential that teacher candidates are prepared to use them. EPPs should partner with districts to address this need.

Tennessee should also re-examine teacher candidate assessments to ensure they measure knowledge of evidence-based literacy instruction. The assessment currently in use has received low ratings on national reviews for not comprehensively testing science of reading knowledge.<sup>34</sup> While the State Board and TDOE have worked with Tennessee's testing vendor to make some improvements, the state must consider literacy assessments better aligned with science of reading or the development of a Tennessee-specific literacy test.

Addressing the pipeline of teachers entering our classrooms is essential to ensuring that the disconnect between research and practice is eliminated in Tennessee. When we know better, we must do better.



### **Support Current Classroom Teachers To Learn The Science Of Reading**

**Ensure all teachers, and particularly early elementary teachers, have a deep working knowledge of the science of reading.**

Tennessee must immediately provide professional learning opportunities for current teachers to learn about the science of reading. While the immediate focus should be on elementary teachers, our students struggle to read beyond third grade as well, and middle and high school teachers are often the least equipped to address their needs.

This support can be modeled on some of the strategies employed by Mississippi, where students made especially strong gains in literacy on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress. In addition to more than a decade of requiring educator preparation

programs to include early literacy courses for teacher candidates, Mississippi has annually offered professional learning on the science of reading to any interested teachers or higher education faculty since 2014.<sup>35</sup> High-needs schools also received dedicated and highly trained literacy coaches to assist with the application of the science of reading.<sup>36</sup> Ensuring that all Tennessee teachers understand the science of reading is critical to addressing our state's persistent literacy crisis.

In recent years, Tennessee emphasized the importance of early literacy by launching programs like Read to Be Ready. It is time for the state to study the impact of this initiative on early literacy outcomes, publicly release a clear analysis of teacher practice and student outcomes, and ensure that lessons learned guide future work to urgently improve literacy outcomes.



# PRIORITY







# Strengthen Teacher Preparation And Improve Teacher Pay

Teachers are at the heart of Tennessee's ability to improve learning for all students. Inside our schools, teachers are the most important contributors to student learning and have a lifetime impact on student outcomes, research shows.<sup>37</sup> Tennessee experienced its fastest gains in student achievement and teacher improvement during the period when the state supported teachers with professional development in the state's new, higher standards and a multiple-measure evaluation system.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, Tennessee students and teachers benefited from these initiatives.

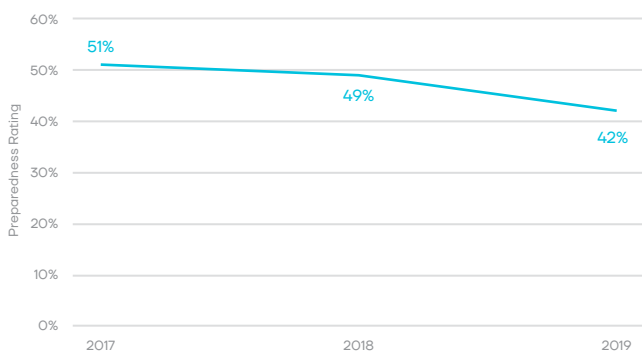
By ensuring that schools and districts have better tools for identifying and supporting teachers through the state's multiple-measure evaluation system, Tennessee students benefit from a more dynamic teaching profession that supports teacher growth. Tennessee has been a national leader both in the development and implementation of research- and data-driven policies for teacher practice, helping our students while serving as a national model for systemic improvement at a time when many states have stepped away from these policies.<sup>39</sup>

The teacher evaluation system has focused schools and districts on the idea that who leads our classrooms and what they do in those classrooms matters greatly for our students. Tennessee-specific research found that the most effective teachers were more likely to stay in the classroom, and schools with robust evaluation systems experienced strong teacher growth.<sup>40</sup> Effective principals in Tennessee used evaluation information to support and retain their most effective teachers.<sup>41</sup>

With a return in 2019 to stable and well-implemented annual assessments that inform our teacher evaluation system, Tennessee is poised to redouble the efforts to support educators through recruiting top talent into teaching, better preparing teachers, increasing teacher pay, and supporting teachers during their first years in the classroom.

## EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS FEEL LESS PREPARED

The majority of Tennessee's newest teachers say they were not well prepared for their classrooms.



Percentage of early-career teachers who feel well prepared by their preparation program to teach in their school setting, 2017-19

Source: TDOE, 2019

## Teacher Preparation Progress And Opportunities

Tennessee also has shown progress in teacher preparation. The Tennessee Educator Preparation Report Card finds more programs have improved the effectiveness of our early-career teachers, with 26 of 40 programs earning the two highest effectiveness ratings.<sup>42</sup>

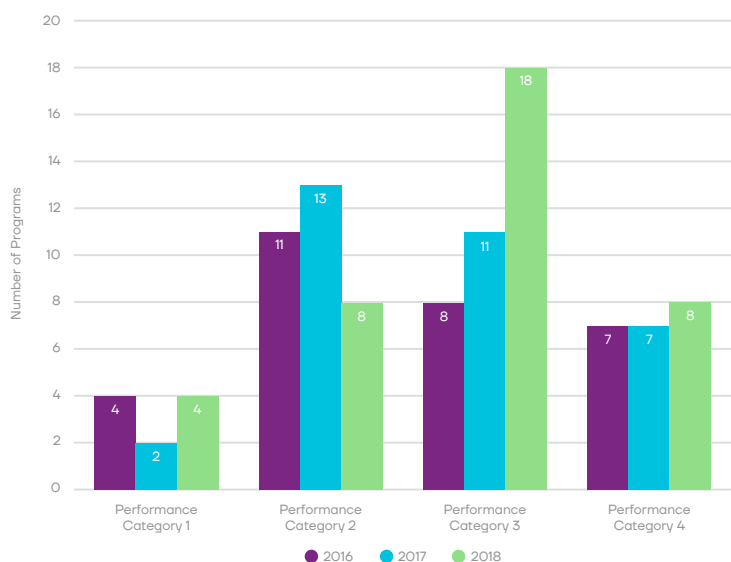
At the same time, the 2019 Tennessee Educator Survey shows that less than half of early-career teachers in Tennessee feel well prepared to teach – and that number is declining.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the number of candidates completing programs has declined by approximately 10 percent since 2016.

In 2019, the State Board of Education (SBE) released research on the strategies Tennessee's educator preparation programs use to drive program improvement. This study found that EPPs have worked to increase diversity in the teacher candidate pool, align in-service teacher practice expectations with districts, improve clinical experiences, build district partnerships, and strengthen the use of data in program planning.<sup>44</sup>

However, we must do much more to elevate the profession and attract great teacher candidates who feel prepared to succeed in their first classrooms. These early steps are only scratching the surface in terms of what is needed to transform the preparation experience.

## EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS HAVE IMPROVED OVER TIME

The number of EPPs earning top ratings, category 3 or 4, has grown since the EPP report card was redesigned.

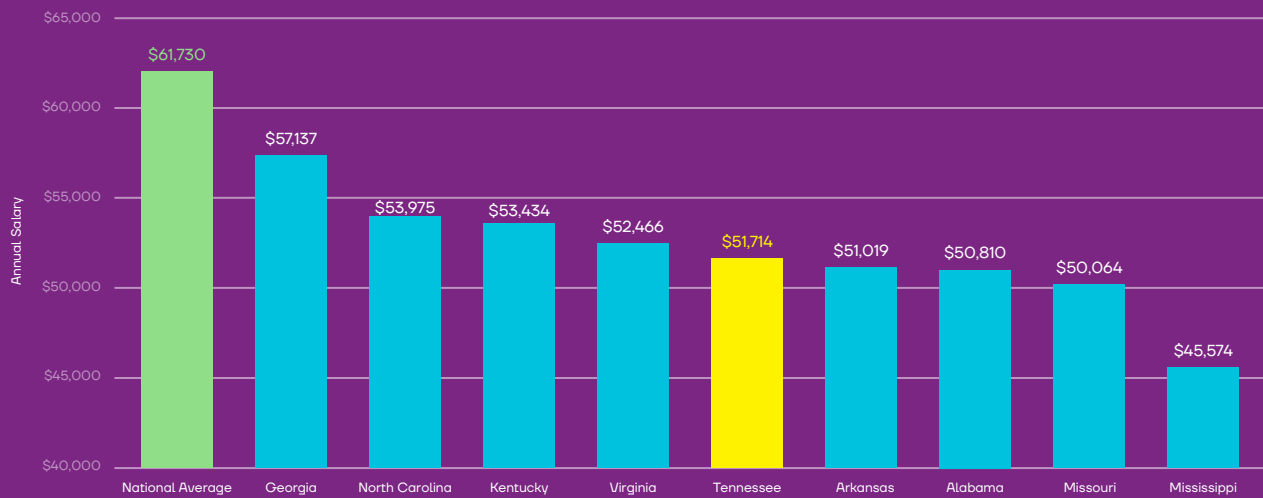


Educator preparation programs performance categories, 2016-18

Source: SBE, 2018

## TENNESSEE TEACHER PAY LAGS NEIGHBORING STATES

Tennessee's average teacher salary ranks fifth among nine states in the Southeast.



Teacher salaries across the Southeast, 2019

Source: National Education Association, 2019

## Accelerating Teacher Compensation Growth

Over 10 years, Tennessee has invested nearly \$600 million toward the state's portion of teacher compensation. Nevertheless, Tennessee's average teacher pay ranks 35<sup>th</sup> nationally and in the middle of the pack in the Southeast. Registered Tennessee voters contacted in a 2019 poll conducted by SCORE chose raising teacher compensation as the top education priority for the state.<sup>45</sup> Further, one in three Tennessee teachers reported that they would leave the profession as soon as possible if they could get a higher paying job.<sup>46</sup> We must do more to improve compensation for teachers as one way to better recruit talented individuals to teaching, retain effective educators, and improve equitable access to excellent teachers.



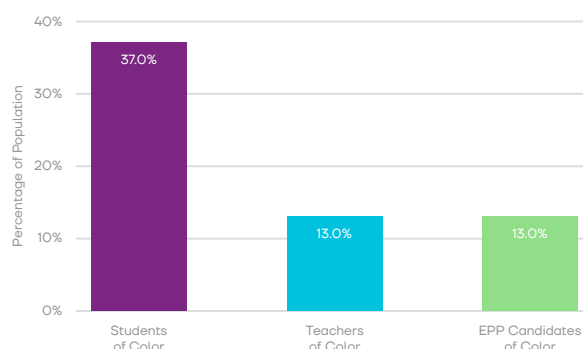
## Diversifying The Talent Pool

To give all students equitable access to excellent teaching, Tennessee must demonstrate progress on educator diversity. Research finds that a teacher workforce that resembles the student population can help improve student achievement for all students, especially for students of color.<sup>47</sup> More than a third of Tennessee's nearly 1 million public school students are students of color, but barely an eighth of the 65,000 teachers are teachers of color.<sup>48</sup>

Tennessee-specific research has identified strategies for improvement, such as creating leadership pathways for teachers of color and providing better school leader and teacher preparation support. However, Tennessee-specific and national studies suggest additional strategies must be in place, such as improving teacher compensation to make teaching a sustainable profession, developing culturally competent school environments that reflect the needs of a diverse student and teacher population, and removing cost barriers during educator preparation. Another practice, holding educator preparation programs accountable for improving educator diversity, is already in place in Tennessee.<sup>49</sup>

### DIVERSITY IS TRAILING IN THE TEACHING WORKFORCE AND PIPELINE

As the student population has become more diverse in Tennessee, diversity in the teaching pipeline and teaching workforce has not kept pace.



Percentages of students, teachers, and teacher candidates of color in Tennessee, 2017-18

Source: TDOE, 2018





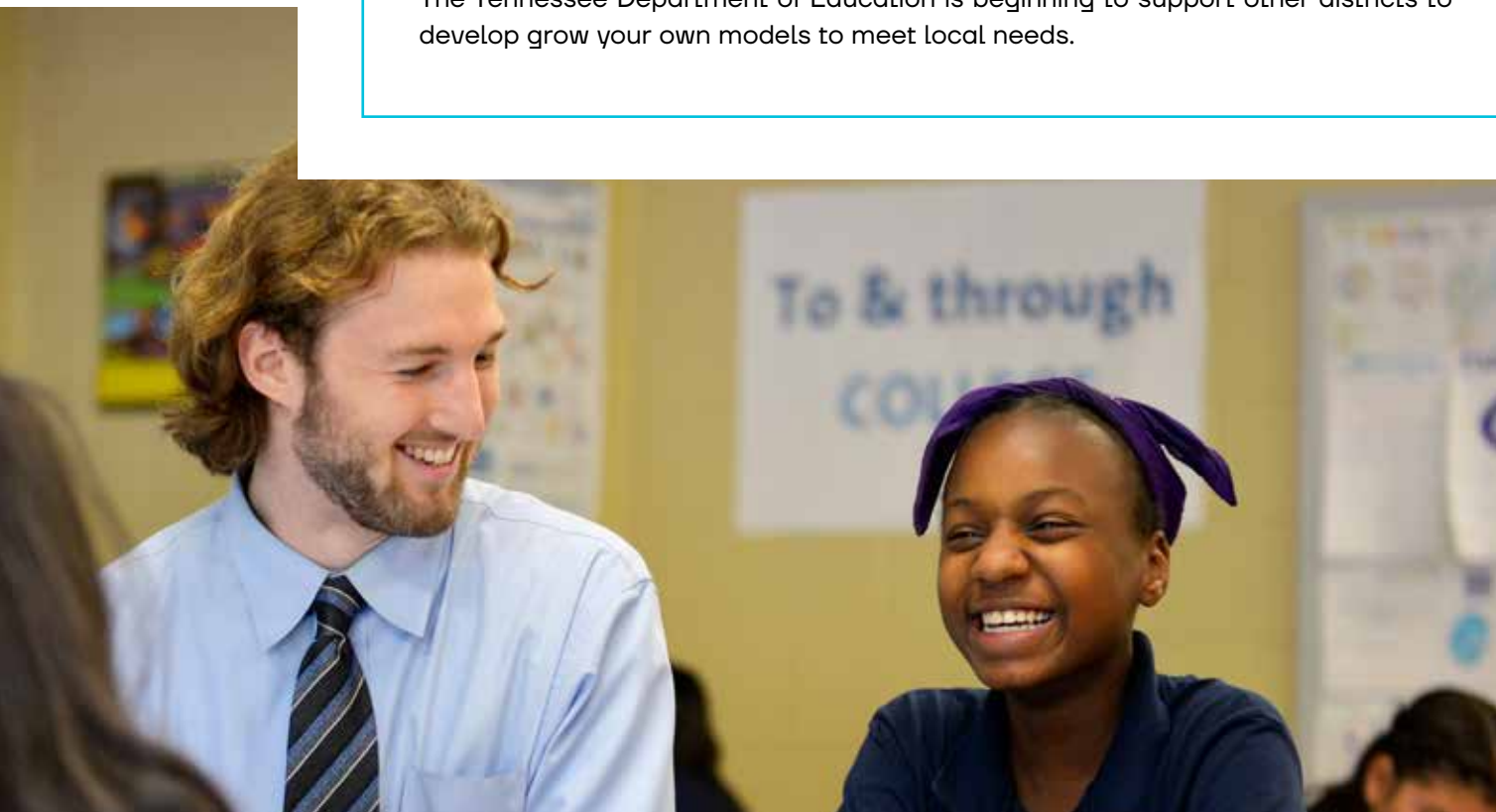
## **CLARKSVILLE-MONTGOMERY COUNTY AND APSU: GROWING THEIR OWN TEACHERS**

Like many communities across Tennessee, the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) faces a teacher shortage. At the start of the 2019-20 school year, 30 substitute teachers were placed in classrooms due to a lack of certified teachers.

To address this shortage, CMCSS partnered with Austin Peay State University (APSU) to create the Early Learning Teacher Residency (ELTR) program. ELTR is a three-year program in which recent high school graduates and current teacher's aides serve as full-time educational assistants while taking classes at APSU – all at no cost to them. Those who complete the program will graduate with a bachelor's degree in education from APSU, a K-5 teaching license with an endorsement in special education, and a guaranteed job teaching in the district.

As a “grow your own” initiative, ELTR specifically recruits students of color and first-generation candidates. In addition to addressing the teacher shortage and providing a clear career pathway for ELTR residents, ELTR seeks to increase teacher diversity. Beginning the fall 2019 semester, 20 recent high school graduates and 20 CMCSS teacher's aides began as the first residents of the ELTR program and are set to graduate in the spring of 2022. In addition to addressing teacher shortages and teacher diversity, the CMCSS model provides more robust residency experiences, leans on experienced and effective teachers to serve as mentors, and creates teacher leader pathways for those mentors.

The Tennessee Department of Education is beginning to support other districts to develop grow your own models to meet local needs.



## 2019 EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENTS IN TENNESSEE

- The state budget invests \$71 million into the instructional component of Tennessee's school funding formula toward teacher salaries. SBE raises minimum salary from \$35,000 to \$36,000 to continue Tennessee's recent investments in teacher pay.
- The SBE produces a new report, *Tennessee's Educator Preparation Report Card: Progress Over Time*, to highlight EPP practices driving improvement.
- Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and SCORE announce a partnership to develop a strategic plan for the MTSU College of Education to continue to improve and evolve to create a national model for excellence in teacher preparation.
- The state creates the Occupational Educator Scholarship program, which will provide a scholarship for the cost of the educator preparation program to prospective educators who agree to teach for four years in an occupational CTE course.
- SBE requires every candidate seeking initial educator licensure in Tennessee to submit qualifying scores on the edTPA assessment, a content-focused assessment of pedagogy, in addition to subject-specific content knowledge exams.<sup>50</sup>

# How Tennessee Can Strengthen Teacher Preparation And Improve Teacher Pay

Tennessee's work over the previous decade to increase student access to effective teachers and high-quality instruction has set the stage for a fundamentally student-focused and dynamic vision of the teaching profession. For

Tennessee to become the best state to be a teacher, we must lead the nation in preparing and supporting effective teachers.



### Innovate In Teacher Preparation

**Demand excellence and foster innovation in educator preparation – at traditional, alternative, and district-based programs – to ensure strong preparation, increase racial diversity, and meet local needs.**

Tennessee must develop teacher preparation programs and early-career support systems that respond to a complex set of demands for our classrooms.<sup>51</sup> EPPs must ensure effective preparation experiences and recruit and enroll a more diverse pool of candidates. They must provide better and longer clinical experiences that place teacher candidates in classrooms sooner and for more time, as well as provide intentional mentoring support upon transitioning to the classroom.

School districts should be authentic partners to EPPs, influencing the design and relevance of programs to ensure completers are ready to meet local needs. The SBE's approval of Rutherford County Schools' CTE educator program provides one model of district-driven innovation. The partnership between Austin Peay State University and the Clarksville Montgomery School System to grow their own educators with a focus on developing effective teachers of color provides a promising model of district-EPP collaboration.

TDOE should offer resources and policy flexibility for districts interested in developing high-quality "grow your own" programs. The state should also consider how to make teacher preparation debt-free at the state's highest-



quality programs. And it should publish teacher vacancy data that helps the state understand its teacher preparation needs.

Schools in rural communities, where the loss of a single educator is greatly felt, need specialized strategies to attract and retain teachers to address well-documented issues around access to excellent educators.<sup>52</sup> Financial incentives to place and keep high-quality teacher talent in rural areas and the expansion of high-performing alternative certification programs to serve rural areas are some of the strategies Tennessee should employ to ensure our rural schools are not left behind.

These innovations build upon existing teacher quality efforts, such as SBE's educator preparation report card and the statewide teacher evaluation system. SBE also should work to ensure that EPPs are held to the highest standards by reviewing the benchmarks used to define the most effective programs. This work should lead to meaningful accountability to ensure EPPs are preparing teachers to be effective in key areas of focus for the state, including teaching literacy.

## **Improve Teacher Pay**

**Make Tennessee No. 1 in the Southeast for teacher compensation.**

Tennessee must continue its multiyear effort to invest in teacher pay and become a regional leader to attract and retain high-quality teacher talent for our students.

All states that border Tennessee are below the national average in teacher pay, and Tennessee's average teacher salary falls in the middle of that pack. This puts Tennessee at a competitive disadvantage, especially in communities near the state's borders. Tennessee's work over the last decade to improve educator quality via accountability and support, as well as growing efforts to elevate the profession and improve racial diversity of the teaching profession, creates the environment to confidently invest in our teachers over the longer term – one of the largest and most important costs for Tennessee's public education system.

With a return to assessment implementation stability, we should reinvigorate district-level strategic compensation work. While school





districts are required to have differentiated pay plans, these compensation practices should improve equitable access to excellent teachers and help elevate the profession. Tennessee-specific research shows that strategic compensation has a positive impact on keeping the best teachers in high-needs schools.<sup>53</sup>

To supplement data already available to districts, TDOE should provide rich human capital data to help with long-term planning for innovative compensation models and to ensure that compensation discussions can move beyond the single salary schedule. The department also should provide districts more support and technical assistance to create compensation strategies that incentivize highly effective teachers and teaching in high-needs subjects and schools.

In the longer term, we need better insights on the types of incentives and compensation that will help keep excellent teachers in the state's classrooms. Organizations such as the Tennessee Education Research Alliance should evaluate the impact of Tennessee's investments in teacher compensation on retention and recruitment, particularly as Tennessee meets, and hopefully exceeds, the regional average in teacher pay. This research will also help guide Tennessee's long-term work to close salary gaps between excellent teachers and other professionals who have comparable levels of education.<sup>54</sup>

## **Support Teachers' Professional Growth**

### **Refresh Tennessee's strategies to support and grow excellent teachers.**

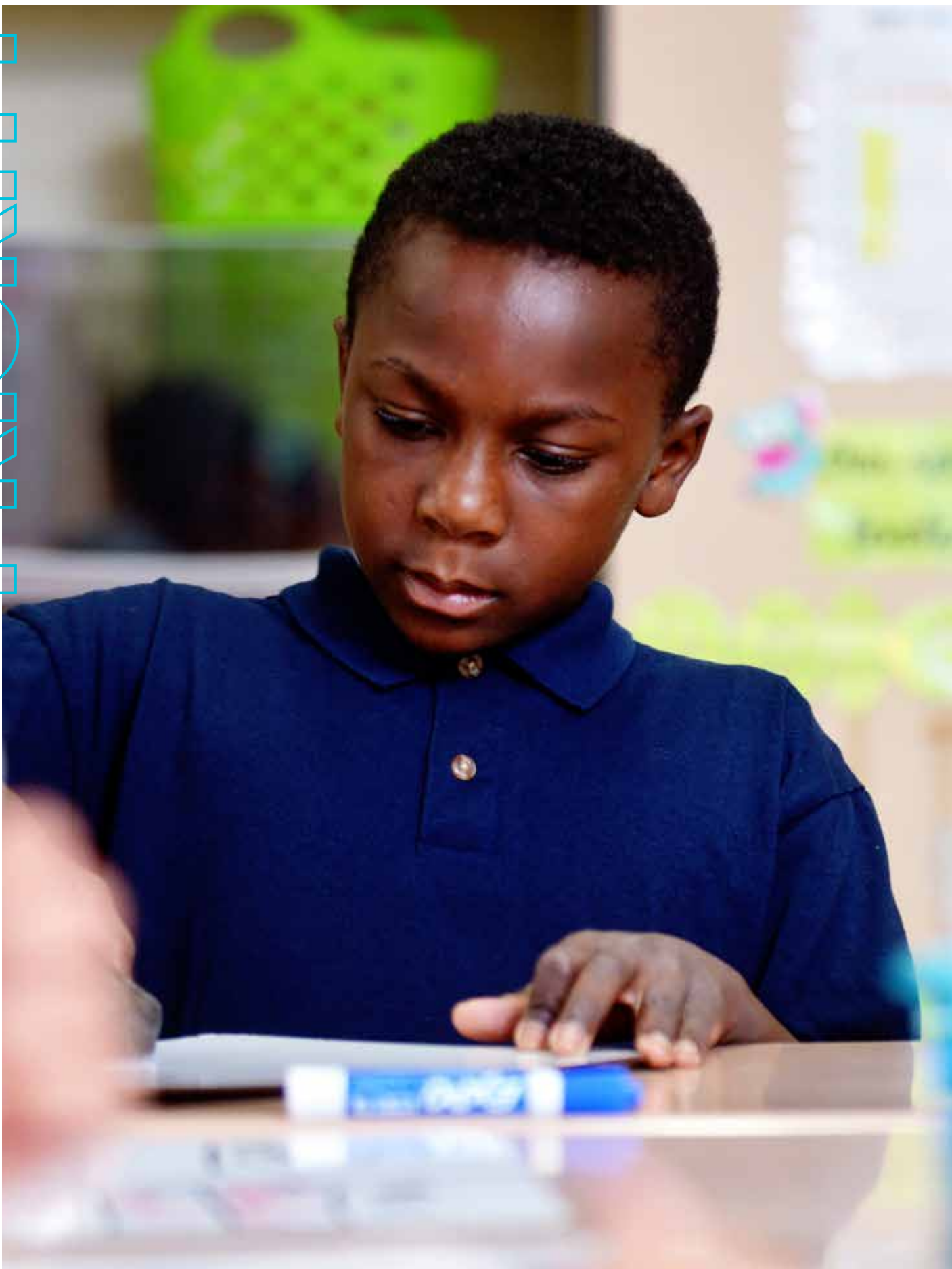
Student learning and educator effectiveness improved when Tennessee invested in growing excellent teachers and encouraging effective practices. We can reignite growth by creating state initiatives and investments that help schools and districts prioritize better systems of learning, enabling teachers to grow as professionals.

Despite Tennessee's groundbreaking advances in teacher evaluation, a disconnect has emerged between teachers' observation ratings and student growth measures. In 2018, nearly 80 percent of Tennessee teachers were rated as highly effective.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, a large majority of our students are below grade-level expectations in most tested subjects. However, teacher effectiveness data is no longer publicly shared, creating a lack of transparency around the state of teacher effectiveness in Tennessee. The department should return to annually sharing state-level distributions of teacher effectiveness to help us ensure that our system continues to provide meaningful feedback to teachers that is reflective of students' learning.

We must re-examine how teacher evaluation is being implemented beginning with a dispassionate examination of the ratings patterns. Based on those findings, TDOE should propose improved tools that give educators better, individualized feedback. The state also should invest resources in its CORE (Centers Of Regional Excellence) offices to make improved evaluation implementation part of a system of professional learning.

We also must take steps to improve the teaching experience by creating more robust teacher leadership pathways that extend beyond Tennessee's efforts over the last five years. Ensuring that teachers can build leadership capacity in instructional improvement, mentoring of early-career teachers, and taking on duties that add value to school communities – particularly work that creates inclusive school environments – elevates excellent teachers. Tennessee should learn from states around the country who are recommitting to teacher leadership and career growth that creates a dynamic teaching profession.<sup>56</sup>

# PRIORITY





# Demand, Support, And Expand Strong Schools

Tennessee saw its fastest gains in K-12 public education when it committed to creating the conditions for continuous improvement and innovation throughout the state. Raising academic standards, providing feedback and professional learning based on those standards, and creating a statewide school improvement strategy was part of a coordinated and multifaceted effort to give all our students a strong K-12 public education. Based on recent data and results, however, there are opportunities to reinvigorate the future of school improvement and innovation.

## School And District Accountability

Tennessee has come a long way in providing data and insights into how our schools and districts are serving all students. The state's school and district accountability systems were designed to recognize both growth and achievement and allow Tennesseans to assess whether all students are reaching the high expectations outlined in Tennessee's academic standards. While supporting students to a high bar of achievement creates urgency for improvement, recognizing growth helps educators and schools understand the practices that are working. As Tennessee continues to improve school and district accountability, both of these concepts must form the core of the accountability system.

Through Tennessee's plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act, schools and districts must work to ensure that all students – including students of color, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who are English Learners, and with disabilities – are not overlooked. These accountability data and systems are key to understanding which schools are delivering results for students and which schools need more support from the state.

## School Improvement In Need Of Improvement

One key element of an effective accountability system is helping identify schools that need more support and communicating a clear system of interventions to improve student learning.

The Achievement School District (ASD), created through the First to the Top Act of 2010, provides the state with a clear mechanism for intervening in priority schools and serves as an important signal of the commitment to support our highest-need schools. Innovation Zones (iZones) have also served as a district-based school improvement strategy. In recent years, the state has also launched the Hamilton County Partnership Network to encourage shared ownership of school improvement work between the state and the district.

Despite the creation of these improvement mechanisms, too many students are still underserved, and it is unclear what the future of these interventions is. After more than seven years of implementation and unsatisfying results, Tennessee needs to rethink our school turnaround and school improvement work.

On the whole, schools in the ASD performed no better or worse than the state's other

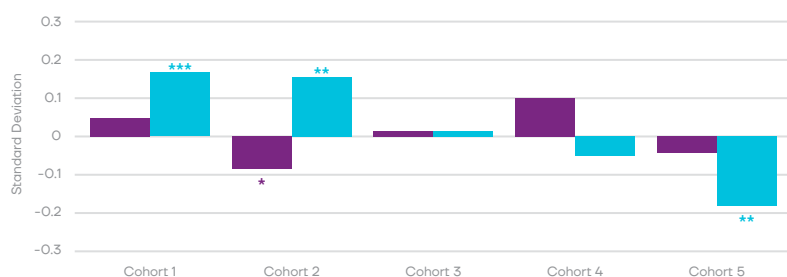
priority schools that received no turnaround intervention. Despite early success in the iZone schools in Shelby County through a focus on educator quality and extended learning time, iZone student growth has slowed in recent years.<sup>57</sup> As Tennessee Education Research Alliance researchers note in their analysis, "Turnaround efforts which rely on restaffing schools with more effective educators may not be sustainable after multiple years, which raises the possibility that there is a limited supply of teachers who are willing to transfer to low-performing schools."<sup>58</sup>

Tennessee needs a new school improvement strategy that is transparent and urgent. Any future strategy must be informed by the lessons learned from the last decade of school improvement – the essential value of deep community engagement, clear governance and operational structures, and strong practices in educator talent and instructional support.

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, Tennessee expanded the data used to determine school quality and to trigger school improvement action by the state, but the timeline for ASD intervention remained long. That step can take more than six years, or more than half the time a student spends in K-12. With a goal of creating increasingly aggressive

### TENNESSEE'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES SHOW LIMITED GAINS

As a whole, iZone schools saw strong early gains in student achievement, but schools that joined the iZone later did not perform as well. ASD schools have seen limited to no gains in student achievement.



Note: Only bars marked with asterisks are statistically significant. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Effect estimates for test scores across all subjects for ASD and iZone schools by cohort, 2011–2017. Each cohort represents schools that entered the ASD or iZone in a given year. Effects measures are reported in standard deviation units to create a common metric across years and are based off of student assessment scores in TNReady for grades 3–8 and end-of-course exams in high school for English language arts, mathematics, and science.

Source: TERA, 2019



state support for struggling schools, the state must develop its school improvement plan with deep community engagement, urgent support for priority schools, and clear triggers and processes for entering and exiting the ASD.

## Public Charter Schools

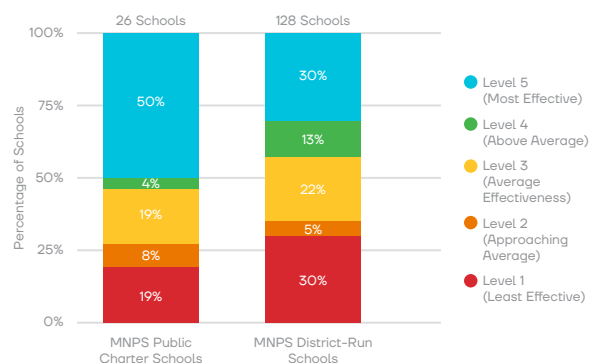
Tennessee's school accountability systems and expectations of student learning apply to all public schools, including the state's public charter schools, which operate in Tennessee's urban centers and serve approximately 40,000 students. Ninety percent of the students in Tennessee's public charter schools are students of color, and Tennessee public charter schools serve students who are economically disadvantaged at a rate more than 50 percent higher than Tennessee's overall student population.<sup>59</sup>

Tennessee has adopted a charter authorization process that incorporates national best practices, empowering communities and educators to develop schools that meet local needs. Only about a third of charter school applications have been approved by local districts since 2002, and the State Board of Education has reaffirmed local decisions in 70 percent of charter school application appeals cases.<sup>60</sup> After charter schools open their doors to students, they are subject to additional accountability measures and more immediate interventions than their traditional school counterparts. This suggests that charter schools serving Tennessee students must meet rigorous bars both before and during their operational life.

There are indications, however, that some local charter authorization processes are not adequately meeting student need. In 2019, some districts have adopted overly broad charter school moratorium policies, overridden district staff recommendations to expand high-quality charter schools, and threatened to displace hundreds of students currently enrolled in charter schools.<sup>61</sup> Many of these schools then

## MNPS CHARTER STUDENT GROWTH OUTPERFORMS COUNTERPARTS

In Metro Nashville Public Schools, half of the charter schools have the highest rating for student growth, compared to less than a third of traditional schools.



2019 Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System results by school type, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Source: TDOE, 2019

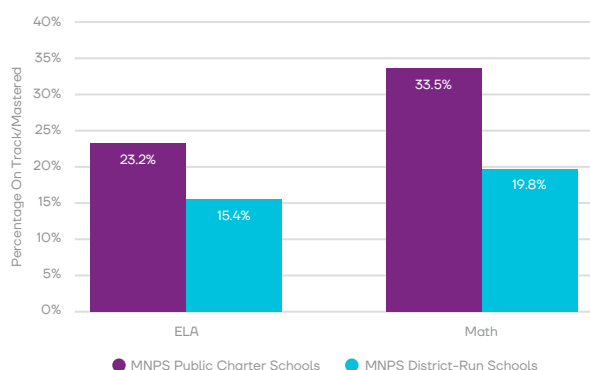
have to go through an appeals process with the State Board of Education, lengthening the time it takes before they can serve students.

Charter schools are an important tool for improving education outcomes for students, especially for students attending low-performing traditional schools. In instances where local politics disproportionately impact the charter authorization process, the state has a role to play in ensuring student needs are prioritized and that high-quality charter schools can thrive. In 2019, the state created the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission to further improve the charter authorization process by creating a robust statewide appellate authority and focusing authorization deliberations on student need.

While student achievement in the state's public charter schools varies by school operator and location, Tennessee's public charter schools play a role in creating academic programs

## MNPS CHARTER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OUTPERFORMS COUNTERPARTS

In Metro Nashville Public Schools, greater percentages of charter school students who are economically disadvantaged are on or above grade level than in traditional schools.



2019 TNReady Grades 3-8 ELA and math achievement for economically disadvantaged students by school type, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Source: TDOE, 2019

that can better meet the needs of the students they serve. There is also some evidence that, in particular, Nashville's public charter schools are seeing success at higher rates relative to their traditional district school counterparts, particularly with students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Recognizing that large numbers of traditional school students are not meeting grade-level expectations and that most will not go on to earn a postsecondary credential, it is clear that students need more opportunity within the public education system.<sup>62</sup> Tennessee's students need more high-quality public schools that are innovatively addressing persistent challenges.

## 2019 DEVELOPMENTS IN SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY, IMPROVEMENT, AND INNOVATION

- The Tennessee Department of Education conducts statewide school turnaround town halls in communities with priority schools to gather feedback from other stakeholders.
- The state establishes the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission to serve as an independent statewide appellate authorizer for charter schools. In 2021, State Board of Education will transfer its appellate authorizing duties to the commission.
- The state invests \$12 million in public charter school facilities funds. Each of Tennessee's public charter schools receives per-pupil allocations, while half of the funds are reserved for a competitive grant.



# How Tennessee Can Demand, Support, And Expand Strong Schools

Tennessee's embrace of student-focused policies creates an environment where improvement and innovation are more clearly oriented around advancing outcomes for all students. Through a continued commitment to high-quality data and higher expectations for all, the state can better meet the needs of all students.



## Improve School Improvement

**Rethink Tennessee's strategies to improve our schools with the greatest needs.**

Tennessee needs a refined, clear school improvement strategy. As Tennessee reshapes its school improvement strategy in 2020 and beyond, it must maintain a transparent and urgent state lever for intervention, such as the ASD, while increasing support for schools before they are identified as priority schools.<sup>63</sup> Any future strategy must maintain the ASD as an intervention of last resort, provide increasing state-level support for schools before they are identified as priority schools, and be developed in deep partnership with the community. Considering current mechanisms like the Partnership Zones in Hamilton County, we must develop a unified strategy that addresses the operational role of the ASD in directly running schools, how schools exit the ASD and return to their local school district, and the role of the new Charter School Commission in school improvement. As of mid-January, the process for schools to exit the ASD and the role of the ASD beginning in 2022 were not clear. These two issues will require immediate definition and clarity for the schools and students involved and for policymakers committed to a meaningful state school improvement strategy.

We can learn from the work of Louisiana, where a broader range of schools are identified for improvement and incentivized through a competitive grant process to focus that school improvement work on key areas, such as educator talent, core academic instruction, and

meeting diverse student needs. Many of these priorities reflect what Tennessee has learned from its own school turnaround experience, such as the need to address student chronic absenteeism, focus on equipping effective teachers with high-quality materials, and retain

effective leaders.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the future turnaround strategy must be guided by robust community input and engagement on the specific approach the state proposes, as well as clear governance structures for the Achievement School District.

## LOUISIANA: SETTING RESEARCH-BASED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

Louisiana has streamlined school improvement planning and incentivized a focus on areas that research suggests are key barriers to school success. Each year, every school district must develop, submit, and receive approval for improvement plans centered around education strategies proven to be successful. These plans not only outline steps to improve all schools but provide extra support for the 40 percent of schools identified by the state as struggling with student discipline or academic issues.

Each plan must demonstrate an emphasis on the following research-based priorities:

- Provide **excellent academic experiences** through high-quality curriculum and assessments, teacher development, and college and career planning.
- **Support students with diverse needs** through high-quality and aligned instruction, specialized supports, and coordinated transitions.
- Implement strategies to **identify, recruit, retain, and develop high-quality teachers.**
- Provide students with a **cohesive birth-to-grade-12 system** with increased access to high-performing schools, including public charters.<sup>65</sup>

This approach allows the state department to proactively support schools that may be struggling but are not yet identified for the most intensive level of state intervention.

## Expand High-Quality Public Schools

**Incentivize the creation and expansion of traditional public and public charter schools that our students deserve.**

Public charter schools serve as an important vehicle for school model innovation. With a rigorous authorization process in place and some demonstrable successes, Tennessee should incentivize the highest-performing public charter schools in the state, particularly those delivering outstanding outcomes for economically disadvantaged students, to expand and educate more students. Research from Massachusetts shows that high-quality public charter schools can effectively replicate and expand opportunity for students when there are strong authorizing processes and accountability, both of which exist in Tennessee.<sup>66</sup> Developing a process and funding for incubating and replicating high-quality public charter schools, including schools that serve rural communities, should be our focus for the next year.

Additionally, the state should develop a permanent solution to provide charter school facilities funding, including access to low-cost loans and a predictable, recurring source of annual facilities funding. On average, Tennessee's public charter schools spend 13.5 percent of their operating budgets, or approximately \$1,000 per student, on facilities.<sup>67</sup> These financial resources should go instead toward educators, instructional materials, and other essential resources.

We should also reduce the barriers preventing Tennessee's school districts from





building innovative schools – including funding, scheduling, course access, and governance structures. School districts can learn from the work in San Antonio, Texas, where the district leveraged the expertise of its most talented school leaders to create autonomous schools that partner with and are influenced deeply by community members. In addition to providing school leaders with autonomy for staffing, learning models, budgeting, and schedules in designing the schools, school district leaders ensure a high-quality authorizing process, select innovative school leaders, and remove district-level barriers for success.<sup>68</sup> In borrowing some of the practices employed by high-quality public charter schools, traditional school districts can leverage the leadership and potential of innovative school leaders to create the schools our students need.

### **Use Data To Drive Classroom To Career Success**

**Increase alignment between K-12, postsecondary education, and the workforce.**

At the end of a formal education, our students should have the opportunity for a high-quality career of their choosing that leads to economic independence. Creating these experiences requires cross-sector collaboration between K-12, postsecondary, and business partners, and their decisions must be grounded in better data insights at the community and statewide levels. These data can also illuminate students'

career outcomes across a range of education experiences and student groups so that communities can design the highest impact opportunities for students.

Tennessee should develop clear statewide goals for student success across the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce boundaries, such as the percentage of Tennesseans earning a family-sustaining wage within six years of completing high school, and maintain the existing systems that provide the necessary data.

These goals would in turn help the state develop a research agenda that leverages Tennessee's robust data systems and provides additional state and community-level insights that drive action. Potential research areas include understanding the education paths and career outcomes of the nearly 35 percent of high school graduates who do not enroll in any form of postsecondary education, career outcomes of both credentialed and non-credentialed postsecondary programs, and an exploration of school models and pathways that are leading to greater success for historically underserved students.

Tennessee has a history of systematically using data to inform and drive improvement. We must seize the opportunity to be a national leader in crossing traditional boundaries in education and workforce development to pioneer innovations that benefit all Tennesseans.



# ABOUT SCORE

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit education policy and advocacy organization based in Nashville, Tennessee. SCORE was founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate majority leader, and works to transform education in Tennessee so all students can achieve success in college, career, and life.

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