

## Tennessee Department of Education: Major Successes and Celebrations

### Big Ticket Items

- **State Test:** TNReady (state test) ran almost perfectly in Spring 2019 and Fall 2019 after 5 years of problems and unusable data, previously wasting tens of millions of dollars.
- **Testing Contract:** Assessment contract was negotiated down by over \$20M over 5 years even with more services included in the scope.
- **Partnerships:** Statewide partnership with PBS (first in the country) to show ELA and math lessons statewide daily for 1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders who did not have internet access.
- **School Reopening:** One of the strongest school reopenings in the country with a **99.4%** open rate for schools opting for in-person learning.
- **National Recognition:** Only state chief to be invited to comment and testify to the U.S. President, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House of Representatives on school reopening, in addition to a call with the First Lady of the United States.
- **Grow Your Own:** Launched statewide to allow for districts to partner with colleges to identify local folks to become teachers in high-need areas, remain in their communities/hometowns, and receive a college education for free while maintaining full-time employment in schools.
- **Public Engagement:** Commissioner averaged 50+ public engagements per month, compared to 10-15 per month averaged by the entire TDOE Cabinet in 2018. The Commissioner has also visited every county and will have traveled to every one of the 147 districts by the end of the year (already 100+ school visits in first 18 months, even with a pandemic).
- **Strategic Planning Process:** Over 30,000 overall responses to the state strategic planning process that was representative of the state population, and included over 50 presentations and over 100 school visits in each region of the state.
- **National Press:** Appeared on or in Fox News, CBS This Morning, the *New York Times*, several *EdWeek* articles, and *the74* as it relates to innovative strategic plan initiatives and the education response to the pandemic. TDOE was also highlighted in the CDC's school reopening highlights as well as multiple times by the White House.

### Finance and HR

2-Year Objective: Streamline financial and staffing practices to be efficient and legal, while maximizing taxpayer dollars and driving towards an outcomes-oriented operational model.

- **Clean Budget:** TDOE budget in the black for first time in 5+ years. Previous budgets have borrowed or moved funding from a state-funded special education program (TEIS) to falsely reflect a balanced TDOE programmatic budget, essentially using money tagged for children with disabilities to be used for other programs.
- **Office Supplies:** The department was spending over \$500,000 per year on office supplies for ~500 people, significantly higher than the \$200 per year provided to

teachers for classroom supplies. Operational changes were made to how supplies were purchased and distributed, removing purchases of expensive pens and materials, and lowering the overall office supply spend to less than \$75,000 per year.

- **Staffing:** The legislature approves staffing numbers for each agency. TDOE was routinely staffing 40-50 positions over that allocation by putting multiple people into one position number (called “overlapping”). High vacancy levels hid the practice. Overlapping is no longer permitted unless it is temporary due to a resignation and the need to cross-train for less than 6 weeks and the department is staffed within the legislative allocation.
- **Salaries:** Overall, salaries are more streamlined between classifications, including offer letters. Staff salary inequities have largely been eliminated (issues had existed based on education, gender, race, etc.)
- **Leaner Salary Budget:** Senior leadership is salaried at lower average salary than the last administration (\$15-20k on average), with stronger performance goals linked to outcomes.
- **Performance Goals:** Staff have outcomes-oriented performance goals for the first time that are linked to outcomes of performance and not inputs. (Differentiating your job as what you are paid to do, like come to work or give presentations, with your goals, which are how well you do that work).
- **Grant Maximization:** 99.94% of federal grant funds were drawn down before the expiration of funds (one of the lowest ever).
- **BEP Allocation:** TDOE ran the most accurate allocation of the BEP (school funding formula) since the Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) in the Comptroller’s office began validating BEP calculations four years ago.
- **Codified Systems:** The following systems did not previously exist, but do now: an employee handbook; job descriptions; performance-driven and outcomes-oriented SMART goals; onboarding system and process for new staff; a staffing pattern to accurately identify every employee and their basic staff information/assignment/salary/etc.; checks and balances between HR, Finance, and the Commissioner’s Office; and weekly trackers on vacancy, objectivity/fairness checks on salary and hiring practices

### **Assessment, Accountability and Data**

2-Year Objective: Execute on a functional assessment system and administration, provide an accurate set of accountability ratings, and create a clear plan for a data governance structure.

- **Assessment Worked:** As noted above, the assessment was executed well two times in a row after 8+ failed attempts, along with a negotiated contract that saved \$20M+.
- **Customer Service:** Assessment customer service wait times averaged 10 seconds in 2019, compared to 5 minutes in 2018.
- **Negotiations to Save Money:** On top of the major assessment contract negotiations, TDOE also negotiated one of the lowest contracts in the country with ACT.

- **Accountability Corrections:** Identified and corrected 2018 TDOE mistake where they put out the incorrect accountability results
- **Internal Accountability:** Requested two independent reviews of the accountability system that was developed in 2017/18 (prior TDOE leadership), which showed a weak and problematic system that we will take steps to correct. The win here is that the TDOE is taking responsibility for producing high-quality work in all areas, inclusive of correcting issues, and holding ourselves accountable through third-party review.
- **Free Resources to Save Districts Money:** TDOE provided free assessment bank items, formative assessments, and interim assessments in 2020 after years of promising to do this work, which can save districts time and money in excess of \$10M if used.
- **On-Time Delivery:** 100% of major milestones related to assessment were met on-time with the new vendor.
- **Increasing Assessment Transparency:** TDOE corrected, updated, and/or released assessment questions to the general public, including annotations to help educators and families understand why questions were right or wrong and also to be able to see the test questions used. By spring 2022, all available questions will be released annually.
- **Assessment Peer Review:** After multiple years of failed attempts to have our assessment approved by the US Department of Education, the TDOE finally has the assessment content approved. We were only 1 of 6 states whose general reading/math assessments were not meeting expectations, and we have made changes under this administration to meet those expectations. We were also the only one of the remaining 6 states who missed areas like “cognitive alignment” for being wrong (rather than incomplete), and have been able to make those changes as well.
- **Research Grant:** Received a \$3.5M SLDS grant that supports research and work related to career readiness as it connects to programmatic efforts and making the data more accurate, readily available and actionable.

## Department Operations

2-Year Objective: Streamline department internal to best identify areas of strength and areas for growth, maximizing the use of tax-payer funds towards work with high impact and strong, measurable outcomes for students.

- **Performance Dashboard:** Designed an in-house performance dashboard that is updated on a weekly basis to track formative and summative outcomes of every internal workstream that has funding or staff capacity assigned. Dashboard quickly communicates what is on/off track for milestones and the level of outcomes-driven performance for each initiative.
  - **Majority of state dollars now tied to initiatives with metrics related to student achievement and support for school outcomes, not inputs.**
- **Performance Management:** Implemented a performance management system that requires a project plan or a process plan for any internal activity that has funding attached or that requires significant staff time. Plans require information on strategy,

measurable metrics, theory of action and strategy justification, a budget and talent strategy plan, major milestones, risk mitigation and a delivery chain.

- Over 100 process plans completed to improve how we do operational work
- Over 200 project plans completed to improve how we do programmatic work
- Performance management system reduced low-impact/high-cost work in the department, leading to a 40% reduction in overall projects and a maximization of work streams
- **School Safety:** School Resource Officer (SRO) placement increased by 17%, leading to 73% of schools with an SRO. Done through grants to 54+ districts, resulting in 205 additional officers protecting our schools
- **School Nutrition:** Applied for and/or received more or were first to receive nutritional waivers to keep students fed than any other state in the country during the Spring 2020 closure period.

### **Academics and Programs**

2-Year Objective: Provide high-quality resources, technical assistance, and grant opportunities to execute aligned, high-leverage academic programs for students and teachers.

- **(Phonics) Foundational Skills Supplement:** Over 1/3 of districts using a TDOE-developed, free phonics-driven literacy program which was developed using NO state taxpayer dollars.
- **Instructional Materials:** Held the line on a process to ensure more high-quality, State Board-approved materials are being used in schools, as aligned to the current TN State Standards. This included a process to hold the department accountable for having a fair review process with a higher bar related to quality. Additionally, 90% of districts are adopting off of this list, which is the highest ever recorded.
- **Literacy Grants:** \$40M in literacy-related grants (the most in the country).
- **Civics Seal:** Implemented the first year of the civics seal, which provides grants to support schools looking to enhance and increase civics-based education and programming in schools.
- **Civics and Citizenship Materials:** In the process of managing an RFP to create a free set of instructional materials that would provide PK – 12<sup>th</sup> grade content for students related to civics and citizenship education, as well as career preparation.
- **STE(A)M:** Identified 61 STEM-designated schools in 2019-20, which was a 100% increase from the prior year.
- **Middle School CTE Grants:** Awarded middle school STEM/CTE and EPSO grants to 144 schools across the state.
- **TN Pathways Certification:** 74 high schools received additional certifications, which was a significant increase from last year.
- **Instructional Improvement:** 85 districts across the state (more than half) engaged in a 1:1 support partnership in the 2019-20 school year with our CORE offices focused on

some aspect of instructional improvement related to high quality materials and effective intervention. When districts closed in March 74% of those districts had either met already or were making progress towards meeting improvement goals.

### **Teachers and Leaders**

2-Year Objective: Develop a set of strategies to understand the gap in providing an effective educator in every classroom, developing policies and implementing programs to begin to close that gap, and provide resources to retain those already teaching students.

- **Grow Your Own:** Launched \$2M grant opportunity statewide to allow for districts to partner with colleges to identify local folks to become teachers in high-need areas, remain in their communities/hometowns, and receive a college education for free while maintaining full-time employment in schools.
- **Principal Supervisor Network:** One of two states in the country to launch this work that provides training for those district leaders who coach principals, which have been identified as the second most important role impacting student achievement. We have 25 participants from 16 districts, which is the largest program in the nation.
- **Rural Principal Network:** A successful network to support principals serving in rural communities, garnering over a 90% satisfaction rate with early signs of stronger student achievement results for participating principals when compared to peers. We will be launching our third cohort in January 2021, which will increase participation to over 100 rural principals.
- **Aspiring Assistant Principal Network:** Provided over 150 educators with a no-cost administrative credential and MA degree to increase the pool of staff who are qualified to be hired as principals, and who have had experience in the role. Every single district was eligible to nominate an educator to participate. Every participant has a residency model component to their experience.
- **Diverse Leaders Network:** Created a network to address a stated statewide problem around diversity in school leadership. This network provides for opportunities for under-represented groups to earn their no-cost administrative credential and MA degree which qualifies them to interview for leadership roles.
- **Special Education Endorsement Grants:** A program that allows for over 90 educators to receive their special education endorsement remotely for free, as a way to address the significant shortage of special education teachers in the state.
- **Licensure Processing:** The department improved licensure processes so that 90% of licenses are fully processed within 21 days (significant improvement) while also processing over 25,000 transactions (all-time high).
- **Licensure Policy:** Worked closely with the State Board to make it easier for out-of-state teachers too be licensed in Tennessee, eliminating teacher shortages in the state, especially in our rural border counties.

- **Data:** Collected statewide vacancy data for educators for the first time, allowing the state to realize we have 10,000 students without a credentialed math teacher (for example)
- **Continuation of the Turnaround Principal Cohort:** Created a cohort to support principals leading turnaround schools, which require specialized training and support.
- **Portfolios and Alternative to Portfolios:** Successfully launched alternatives to portfolios for Pre-K and K teacher evaluation and smoothly implemented portfolios, which had experienced logistical and operational issues previously.
- **LEA as EPP:** Launched the first district in Tennessee (Rutherford County) to be approved as an Education Preparation Provider (EPP) for occupational CTE. Another district, Knox County, is working on becoming the second district to become an EPP.
- **TASPA:** Developed strong relationship with the HR Directors association and launched a kitchen cabinet with HR leaders across the state, leading to clear policy adjustments and resource development that decreased teacher vacancies and increased district satisfaction.

### School Systems

- **ASD:** Created strong systems to allow for tight operational processes, leading to an audit clear of major findings, a balanced budget, and effective systems. Further, the ASD had the lowest staff turnover rate ever in 2019-20.
- **ASD Charter Schools:** Finalized and implemented a school performance framework for the first time since the ASD started 8 years ago. Began a process to define exit procedures for the first time, as required in the law 9 years ago.
- **IEA Program:** More than doubled the size of the program to over 350 students (compared to less than 90 students in 2018), while maintaining a similar error rating.
- **ESA Program:** Designed and launched an ESA application, recruitment model, training and onboarding plan, and online application to begin a program in less than 12 months.
- **School Improvement:** Identified over \$20M in aging grant dollars to districts and ensured funding was spent in ways to support our most underserved schools.
- **Agency Partnerships:** Partnered with multiple agencies on supports for students statewide, including Mental Health, Children's Services, Higher Education, Human Services, Health, Labor and Workforce Development, Commerce and Insurance, Agriculture, and more. Lead and facilitate weekly calls with agencies to determine the best ways to support school reopening, utilizing full state resources.
- **Superintendent Engagement Group:** Met monthly with superintendents from each CORE region to discuss priority issues related to the strategic plan in each of the three areas. This is in addition to the monthly superintendent study council and monthly regional superintendent study sessions, open to all superintendents.
- **Legal:** The Office of General Counsel has worked to further build out school district resources on the legal page including adding a chart of trainings required by law, new FAQ documents, and a new resource on special education timelines.

## COVID Response

- **Guidance:** Over 100 guidance documents between school closures in the spring and reopening toolkits and resources over the summer. This includes 77+ Coronavirus school closure guidance documents and 25+ Reopening Toolkits and Templates.
- **Only State to Provide Free Professional Development for All Teachers:** Free professional development for all teachers on digital learning with Trevecca. Over 19,500 teachers registered.
- **Only State to Provide Free Professional Development for All Principals:** Partnered with the University of Tennessee-Knoxville to launch the Principal Professional Learning Series. More than 550 principals participated.
- **Significant Grant Funding:** Over \$200M in grants thus far to support school reopening and COVID response, including:
  - \$80M+ in PPE and disinfecting materials for nurses and school-site staff (only state in the country to do this for the full year)
  - \$50M in technology grants (pays for 1/3 of computers for 3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders)
  - \$15M in WiFi and support grants (provides internet access to over 100,000 families)
  - \$11M in school reopening grants
  - \$60M+ in grants to support academics
- **Free Online Resources for Families:** Ready Rosie (literacy and math)
- **Family Website for Remote Learning:** Launched website with Trevecca to support families' needs around remote learning.
- **Best for All Central:** Launched a new, comprehensive platform that provides free lesson plans, videos, professional development, standards mapping, family resources, etc.
- **STE(A)M Resource Hub:** Partnered with the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network to provide free at-home learning opportunities three times per week.
- **Nutrition Support:** Launched Tennessee data in SchoolMealFinder.com to help families find the closest location for school meal services and submitted waivers to allow for any child under the age of 18 to have access.
- **Tennessee Teacher Job Connection:** Provided over 1,000 interested educators seeking job opportunities directly to school districts for the 20-21 school year.
- **Tennessee Substitute Teacher Job Connection:** Provided districts with access to interested substitute teachers to supplement their recruitment efforts.
- **Tennessee Educator Job Board:** Launched the first ever statewide education job board for districts to post positions they are looking to fill.
- **Resources:** Developed a suite of online modules for teachers and school leaders around distance learning and launched them via TDOE's new virtual platform, Best for All Central.
- **Instructional Technology:** Negotiated low-cost rates for devices in February (ahead of other states), providing for statewide contracts and more expedited delivery for districts.