



TN

Department of  
**Education**

# Every Student Succeeds Act: Building on Success in Tennessee

## Status Report

Tennessee Department of Education | October 2016

# Introduction

Tennessee is uniquely positioned to take full advantage of the opportunities under the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act. For the past several years, Tennessee has made education a top priority and continues to be the fastest improving state in the nation, with a clear vision and comprehensive strategic plan, called *Tennessee Succeeds*. Public feedback and support has been critical in Tennessee's success, and as the state has drafted its transition plan to the new law, building on existing relationships and developing new connections has been a focal point. The following report summarizes the stakeholder input received so far from over 2,000 Tennesseans, the areas of consensus in education policy, and the most challenging decisions still to be made.

## Background

Tennessee has been on a pathway of rapid change—one that started after Tennessee had a call to action moment in 2007, when the U.S. Chamber of Commerce gave Tennessee an “F” in “Truth in Advertising” when comparing proficiency on state assessments to Tennessee’s performance on Nation’s Report Card and a second “F” in postsecondary and workforce readiness. This sparked a series of actions, including multiple standards revisions and transitions to higher expectations, moving to a state assessment that will provide better information about whether students are on track, and greater accountability to ensure that we meet our responsibilities to provide all students with a world-class education.

The *Tennessee Succeeds* strategic plan was released in October 2015 to build on this foundation and outline a unifying vision of success for all students upon graduation from high school. The Tennessee Department of Education has set four ambitious goals to guide our work through the next five years:

- Tennessee will rank in the **top half** of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (**NAEP**), or the Nation’s Report Card, by 2019
- 75 percent of Tennessee third graders will be **proficient in reading** by 2025
- The average **ACT composite** score in Tennessee will be a **21** by 2020
- The **majority of high school graduates** from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree

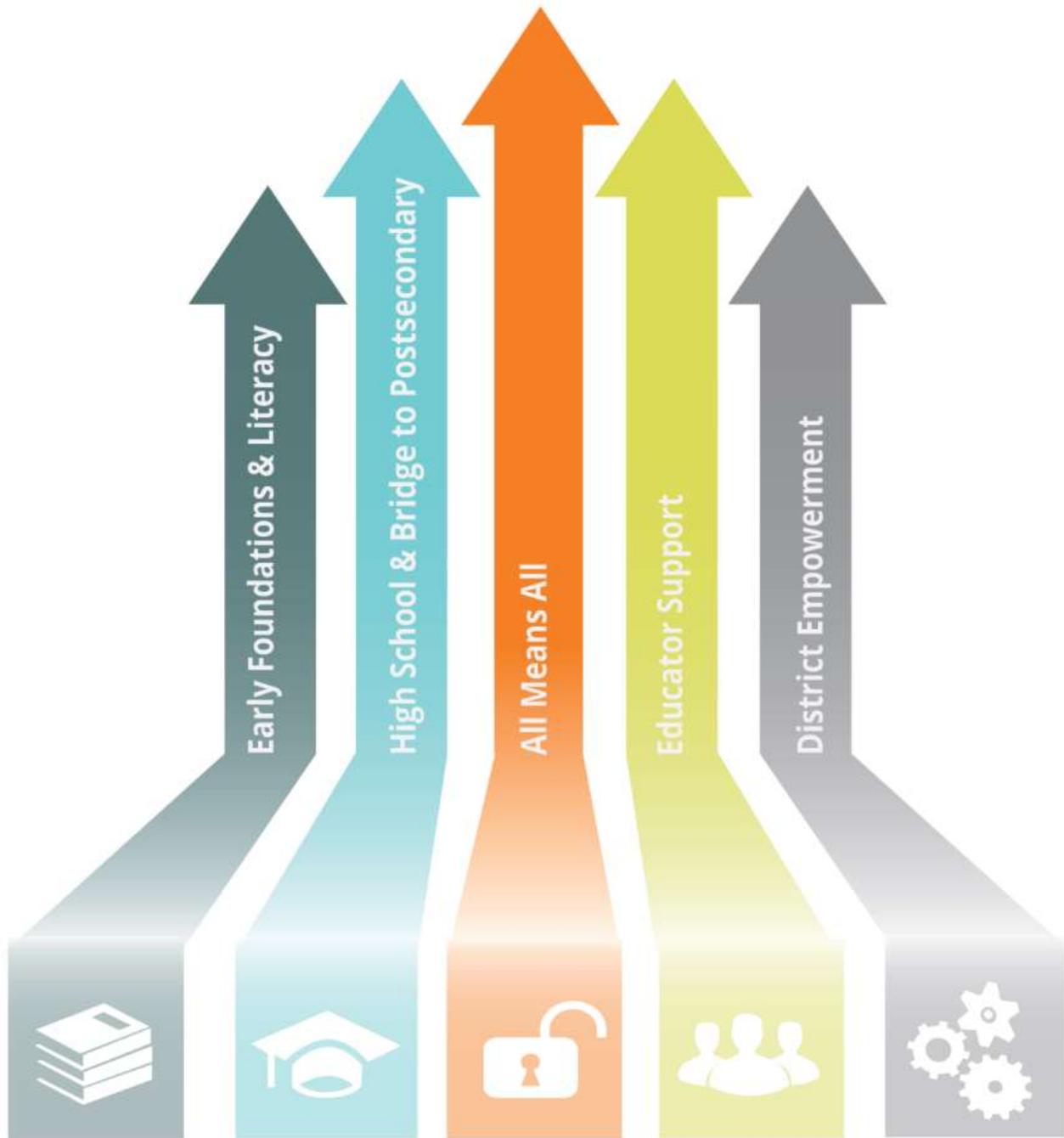
These goals will be accomplished by maintaining the department’s emphasis on rigorous standards, aligned assessment, and strong accountability, and by focusing on five priority areas: early foundations and literacy, high school and bridge to postsecondary, all means all, educator support, and district empowerment.

# TENNESSEE SUCCEEDS.

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**2** The average ACT score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.

**3** The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree.



**STANDARDS | ASSESSMENT | ACCOUNTABILITY**

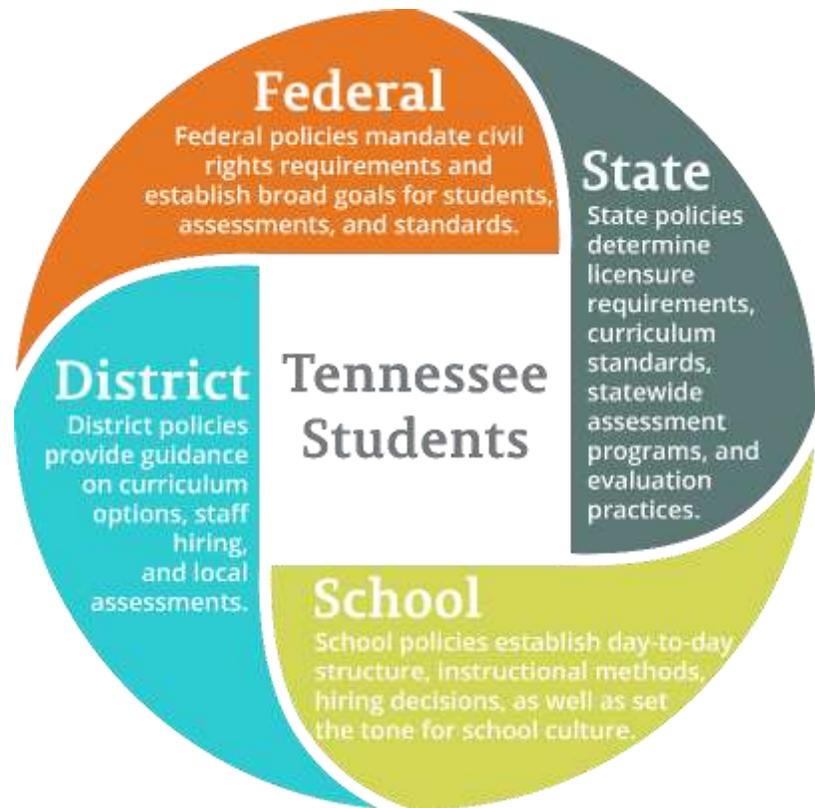
## ESSA State Plan

In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law. ESSA replaces the former federal education law, commonly referenced as No Child Left Behind, and reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The majority of Tennessee’s existing policies and statutes are in line with the new law, which went into effect in August 2016 and will be fully implemented in the 2017-18 school year, but there are opportunities for Tennessee to revisit existing systems and structures, particularly regarding assessment, accountability, school improvement, and education for English learners. All states have been asked to develop plans for how they will transition to the new law and take advantages of the flexibilities it offers. The Tennessee Department of Education will submit Tennessee’s ESSA state plan to the U.S. Department of Education by March 5, 2017.

Tennessee wants to craft an ESSA plan that builds on what is working and takes the best ideas from the field about how to move forward in key policy areas. In order to continue to build on the firm foundation of the *Tennessee Succeeds* strategic plan and the broad stakeholder input and support for the waiver received in 2015 under No Child Left Behind, this summer Commissioner McQueen launched a series of opportunities for statewide stakeholder input on ESSA. The overarching goal is to develop a state plan through robust stakeholder engagement that reflects the great gains made in Tennessee and outlines the path forward.

There are also other components of Tennessee’s educational landscape that can be woven into the ESSA state plan. Last year, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a law requiring the annual state Report Card to include an A-F grading system for schools. This new measure will give parents, educators, and stakeholders a summative overview of their schools and a baseline comparison across schools and districts. Although this is not required under ESSA, beginning in school year 2017-18 every school will receive a summative letter grade that is aligned to the Tennessee accountability framework, so it makes sense that the work on the A-F grading system aligns with other ESSA efforts.

The ESSA plan, like all the decisions made at the department, must keep students at the center. All leaders and policymakers—federal, state, and local—have different, yet integral roles in supporting students.



## ESSA Working Groups

To help craft the ESSA state plan, the department established six working groups that are focusing on key topics.



Each working group is led by two senior state education officials and consists of 10 to 12 leaders from different education communities and school districts, including district leaders and teachers, as well as civil rights, business, and advocacy groups across the state. The working groups are charged with providing recommendations on what the ESSA plan should include within the six key areas.

Members of the working groups have met in person at least twice and have had several follow-up calls and virtual exchanges to discuss key areas. Additionally, all working group members were encouraged to go back to their communities and individual constituencies to continue to gather feedback and ideas within their topic areas to inform their discussions and decisions. Through this process dozens of additional educators and stakeholders were engaged by working group members. The educator support and effectiveness working group conducted several additional meetings with their constituents and shared survey results from their own districts and organizations.

All working group members will continue to provide input during the drafting process and be convened for feedback on the draft plan.

## Timeline

Currently, the department has concluded its first phase of stakeholder input and, based on recommendations from the working groups and feedback from the past several months, is beginning to draft the state plan, which will be available for public comment by the end of the calendar year.



# Input from Across Tennessee

In May 2016, the department launched its statewide feedback tour, and since then, Commissioner Candice McQueen and department leaders have hosted dozens of in-person and virtual feedback sessions across the state. More than 2,000 Tennesseans, representing 83 counties and 132 school districts, have participated in the discussion so far.

Outreach efforts included:

- All of Tennessee's 146 school district leaders were asked to join one of three regional meetings in June, where they heard about ESSA and worked in small groups to make recommendations, particularly on the assessment and accountability components.
- The department heard from a variety of educators and teacher groups both in person and through webinars, including Tennessee's Hope Street Group fellows, SCORE fellows, the department's Teacher Advisory Council, Governor Haslam's Teacher Cabinet, the Tennessee Education Association, Professional Educators of Tennessee, the Tennessee Association of School Librarians, and the Tennessee Librarians Association.
- School board members have been convened via webinar, and the department has participated in more than a dozen regional meetings hosted by the Tennessee School Boards Association to both inform and gather input from school boards about ESSA.
- The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) co-convened several key stakeholder sessions with the department to hear from a variety of groups, including the LIFT superintendents, business leaders, school choice organizations, community groups, civil rights organizations, and other education advocates. Additionally, the department was able to gather feedback from the Tennessee Equity Coalition, and through Conexion Americas the department was able to hear from other key stakeholders.
- Existing advisory groups also had a chance to weigh in during their regular meetings, including the Assessment Task Force, the Career Forward Task Force, the Personalized Learning Task Force, the Consolidated Planning and Monitoring Advisory Council, the department's Parent Advisory Council, and the Superintendent Study Council.
- Conferences and events that convened district and school personnel, like ESEA directors, English Learner directors, and special education supervisors, were also asked for input.
- The department hosted internal sessions with peers at the state department to gather their ideas.
- Online, the department posted the questions that were being posed in these discussion groups for public feedback, and it created a supplemental form for parents and students with higher-level questions for them to share their ideas. The latter form was translated into Spanish to further extend outreach to more families.
- Commissioner McQueen launched her second Classroom Chronicles tour this fall, focused on hearing from students. So far, she has heard from dozens of students about supports and resources they need to reach their potential in high school and beyond.
- The department also shared feedback on social media over the summer to highlight common themes in the conversation.

## What we heard

After engaging with more than 2,000 stakeholders, there are some areas of consensus on what the Tennessee ESSA plan should include and address.

1. Align the ESSA state plan to the *Tennessee Succeeds* strategic plan in order to build on successes and continue to **raise expectations and reach goals**.
2. Start with our **current accountability framework** as the base for the system under ESSA. Tennessee should build the school-level accountability system and A-F grading system aligned to the current district accountability framework.
3. The **A-F grading system** must be meaningful and align to the state's accountability system under ESSA. It is important that this grade reflects the status of a school under the accountability framework.
4. A **well-rounded student** should have access to learning experiences outside the tested subjects and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Some of the areas specifically noted that stakeholders want to see include:
  - Broad curriculum including arts, civics, environmental science, music, physical education, and other subjects
  - Clubs, sports, internships, work-based learning (WBL), and other learning experiences outside of the classroom
  - Computer science, coding, robotics, and other high-tech coursework
  - Gifted/talented offerings



*A well-rounded education includes advanced academics and includes technology, art, music, and athletics. Educating the whole child and tailoring the instruction to take into consideration the student's strengths, talents, and interests is imperative. Education should prepare students to be problem solvers with critical thinking skills.*

--- Jennifer, parent in West Tennessee

5. Students must be prepared for college and career, and they should have access to more **career and technical education (CTE)** and **early postsecondary opportunities (EPSO) opportunities**. This includes, but not limited to:
  - CTE coursework and credentialing
  - Dual enrollment, dual credit
  - Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB)
  - Work-based Learning (WBL) and internships
6. Students need comprehensive support for **planning for college and careers**, and school counselors and other school personnel should prioritize this work with students to support their plans for high school and after graduation.
7. There is a need for additional services at schools to **promote health, wellbeing, and safety**. Students are much less likely to be successful if basic needs are not addressed. Schools and districts need more support in identifying and developing student service models, and we should build upon existing successful school and community services.
8. Include some additional data reporting through “**transparency metrics**” that are not captured in the formal accountability system but that provide more insight to the success of schools/districts. These measures could include:
  - Lagging indicators, such as students’ success and retention in postsecondary and the credentials they earned
  - Parent engagement
  - School climate through student surveys
  - Teacher absenteeism
  - Resource equity, such as library time, technology, and access to highly effective teachers

# Critical Decision Points

The most complex issues discussed by working groups and stakeholders fall into three areas: accountability, assessment, and preparing for postsecondary.

## Accountability

### 1. Accountability framework and the **measure of school quality and student success**

Tennessee has the opportunity to take a holistic review of the accountability framework and ensure, not only federal compliance, but also continued alignment and improvement under *Tennessee Succeeds*. The new required indicator under ESSA—called “the measure of school quality and student success”—is designed to give schools and districts a way to demonstrate achievement outside of test scores. Tennessee has the ability to make a strong statement about what measures beyond state test data are prioritized and what we believe will ultimately contribute to student success after high school graduation.



*Key questions for the new accountability measure:*

1. What are the **requirements** for the new measure?

ESSA requires states to use at least one "indicator of school quality or student success" that "allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance" and "is valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide," alongside academic data in their accountability systems. Schools must also be able to disaggregate data related to that indicator to show how it affects students in different subpopulations: those from all racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, children from low-income families, and English-language learners.

2. What are Tennessee’s **guiding principles** for determining this new measure?

### Priorities for the measure of school quality and student success



3. What are the **potential indicators** under consideration?

In developing Tennessee’s new measure, we want to balance priorities and ensure it is aligned to our strategic plan goals, address opportunity and inequities, and highlight success and areas for growth within and across schools and districts. The majority of stakeholders strongly agree that multiple measures should be included to represent the measure of school quality and student success. It is equally important that this metric, and each component, can be understood by all stakeholders. This indicator must reflect Tennessee’s long-term goals and priority areas within the strategic plan.

While input to date on this metric has been varied, current input on the new measure can be categorized under two primary purposes: **opportunity** and **readiness**. The potential metrics noted below could be incorporated into two indexes that represent these purposes— *Opportunity to Learn* and *Readiness*— and represent the new measure of school quality and student success. There will likely be three or four metrics included in each indicator.

#### Opportunity to Learn

- **We know students are not learning if they are not in class. In order for every student to reach his/her potential, there must be high-quality learning in the classroom.**
- Potential measures: student absenteeism, student discipline data, teacher absenteeism, access to effective teachers, access to EPSOs

#### Readiness

- **A high school diploma must be the first step, not the end goal. All students should be prepared for options in college and career.**
- Potential measures: graduation rate, 21+ on ACT, credit and completion in EPSOs, industry credentials, extracurricular involvement

## 2. ***Student reporting threshold or N-Size for accountability purposes***

Tennessee must establish a minimum student reporting threshold or n-size. Tennessee currently uses the minimum n-size of 30, which is permissible under ESSA and statistically sound. There is continued discussion as to whether the n-size should be smaller to account for more students within subgroups, while also ensuring we do not compromise statistical validity. A related topic and critical decision point is how to ensure all metrics are disaggregated to ensure historically underserved student groups are highlighted as seek equity for all students.

## 3. ***Progress in achieving English language proficiency***

Tennessee must set long-term goal based on our English Language (EL) proficiency assessment. Tennessee must consider goals around progress in attaining and achieving proficiency. ESSA provides two options for including recently arrived EL students in accountability:

1. Exempt students from one year of testing in English language arts only, excluding results for all subjects from accountability for the first year.
2. Assess and report students' scores every year, excluding results in year one, including a measure of growth in year two, and including proficiency in year three.

*Key questions for continued discussion with internal and external stakeholders:*

- What other factors should Tennessee consider for setting goals around time to achieve English language proficiency and graduation?
- Which of the two models should Tennessee adopt for recently arrived EL students?

## 4. ***School improvement and school turnaround timeline and strategy***

ESSA requires the identification of comprehensive support schools—bottom 5 percent of Title I schools and schools with low graduation rates—at least once every three years. In Tennessee, we refer to these as *Priority schools*. ESSA also requires the identification of target schools, which are schools with underperforming student groups or subgroups, each year. We currently call these *Focus schools*. Priority schools are required to develop a district-led improvement plan. For any schools with continued low performance, or “chronically underperforming subgroups,” ESSA requires the state to intervene after no more than four years.

The department wants to empower local leadership in turning around their lowest performing schools, but we also recognize that a four-year window means a student may go through their entire elementary, middle, or high school in a low-performing school and continue to fall behind their peers. As a result, the department must create a clear, rigorous, and time-limited pathway toward school improvement to ensure all students are growing. If schools are not improving on this pathway, ESSA requires that the state enact a rigorous intervention strategy. The state’s most rigorous intervention strategy is the Achievement School District (ASD).

*Key questions for continued discussion with internal and external stakeholders:*

- How should growth versus absolute achievement be balanced in identifying Priority, Focus, and Reward (currently the top 5 percent for growth and top 5 percent for achievement) schools?
- How many years should schools operate under a district-led turnaround plan before state-level intervention?
- What evidence-based strategies should districts and the state implement for school turnaround?

## *Assessment*

### *5. Number of assessments in **11th grade***

Tennessee is one of 18 states that requires all students to take the ACT or SAT. Students take the ACT in 11th grade, as well as state End of Course exams and possibly other exams like Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or industry certifications. Some stakeholders have shared specific concerns about overtesting of 11th grade students. There is continued discussion about ways to reduce testing, including a potential pilot option for select districts (based on current ACT scores and growth) to use ACT as the 11th grade ELA and math EOCs.

### *6. More opportunities for students to **show what they know***

Stakeholders have expressed that the statewide assessment program is an important annual measure of student progress, but have also expressed support for exploring multiple avenues of demonstrating success and creating more enhanced assessments. The department is beginning to explore these ideas and has taken some initial steps in response. Through a pilot of competency-based education sites, the state will provide professional development and ongoing support for select educators to understand competency-based models, to develop and implement units and assessments, to reflect and refine those activities and delivery over time, and to scale best practice models to interested districts and schools across Tennessee. Additionally, the state has applied for an Enhanced Assessment Grant that would provide Tennessee with an opportunity to measure students' academic achievement through multiple different sources.

## *Bridge to Postsecondary*

### *7. Incorporating industry credentials, early postsecondary credits, and other **career readiness** opportunities*

As Tennessee continues to work toward the long-term goals established through the *Tennessee Succeeds* strategic plan and for federal accountability, most stakeholders want to highlight the importance of career ready, as well as college ready. These terms should not

be mutually exclusive, but they together work to create a culture in Tennessee where every student graduating from high school is prepared for and has the choice of postsecondary opportunities, whether that be going to a four-year university, a two-year community college, a Tennessee College of Applied Technology, or straight into a skilled job in the workforce. This means that more students need greater access to early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs), and educators, parents, and employers need ways to discern whether a student is both “college and career ready.”

## Next Steps

The department will continue to engage with stakeholders during the next five months in preparation for submission of the Tennessee state plan to the U.S. Department of Education by March 5, 2017.

- **October–November 2016**  
Department leaders are drafting the Tennessee ESSA state plan based on input received from all stakeholders. Additional stakeholder meetings are being held.
- **November–December 2016**  
Working groups will continue to provide input through the drafting process prior to the public comment period. Additionally, the department will host regional opportunities to discuss the feedback we have received so far and provide updates on the draft plan.
- **December 2016**  
The draft plan will be released for public comment by the end of calendar year.
- **January–March 2017**  
The department will continue to present the draft of Tennessee’s ESSA state plan to various stakeholders including legislators. The department will address public feedback on the draft plan and revise for submission to the Tennessee State Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Education by March 5, 2017.

The feedback the department has received is a key driver in the first draft of the plan, but the entirety of the stakeholder input could not be captured in this report. Instead, this report aims to highlight many of the key themes and specific ideas that have emerged in an effort to update stakeholders and the public about the conversations that are informing the department. Additional feedback and suggestions are made daily, and the department is committed to continuing conversations—both specific to ESSA and about the work of the state more broadly—in our mission to continuously improve.

Updates on the ESSA outreach and development of the state plan will be posted at [www.tn.gov/education/essa](http://www.tn.gov/education/essa).