

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN TENNESSEE

## A GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ESSA

## A STRONG ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Strong accountability systems set high expectations for all students and prompt action when any school or group of students struggles to meet goals and or make meaningful progress. The goal of our K-12 public education system is success for all students, and we have a shared responsibility to expect improvement in schools that are not meeting targets. Schools and districts in Tennessee must implement a school improvement process that ensures schools and students receive the requisite supports, resources, and access to effective teachers as early as possible. For far too long the students who attend Priority Schools in Tennessee are those who are historically underserved, including students of color, English Learners, those living in poverty or with a disability. We must strive together to ensure that every student succeeds in Tennessee.

## THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA): THE FEDERAL LAW & THE TENNESSEE STATE PLAN

### ESSA: Federal Overview

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law by former President Barack Obama, in December of 2015. ESSA is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the federal K-12 education law whose primary function is to provide funding to and oversight of public schools across the country. Beginning in December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to create a system with new measures of school success, and to identify schools that are in need of improvement according to those measures. As part of this system, states must also ensure that there are clear actions for schools identified as needing improvement.

### ESSA IN TENNESSEE

Tennessee crafted a new plan, the *Tennessee Succeeds ESSA State Plan*, that lays out the State's vision for success under the new federal ESSA law. This plan established new measures that define student and school success, and it incorporates a 2016 state law that calls for all schools to receive an A-F letter grade as part of school accountability. According to ESSA, Tennessee must identify schools in need of improvement, and in particular the schools in the bottom 5 percent in performance in the state. The *Tennessee Succeeds* plan gives power to local districts to develop improvement plans, and to decide how to use instructional time, resources, and staffing to positively impact student success.

Due to testing challenges in the spring of 2017, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the 2017-2018 TNReady Misadministration Bill (HB1981/SB1623) | Public Chapter 881. This law made several key changes to our accountability system:

- It prohibits student performance and student growth data from the TNReady assessments administered in the 2017-18 school year from being used to assign an A-F letter grade to a school.
- It also prohibits 2017-2018 TNReady data from being used to identify Priority schools or to assign a school to the Achievement School District.

### Tennessee Succeeds ESSA State Plan: School Improvement Components Overview

The Tennessee ESSA plan outlines three guiding principles for school improvement: Empowering Districts, Investing in What Works, and Students Can't Wait. The state's plan redefines the role of the Achievement School District, relies heavily on local district-led turnaround initiatives, and gives schools more time, resources, and autonomy to customize efforts to positively impact their students. In accordance with federal and state guidelines the Tennessee Department of Education released four different school designations in the fall of 2018.

These designations include the following: Reward, Priority, Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI).

## SCHOOL DESIGNATIONS

REWARD | PRIORITY | CSI | ATSI

# REWARD SCHOOLS

## WHAT IS A REWARD SCHOOL?

There are 318 Reward Schools in Tennessee in 2018. Schools that have an overall accountability score of 3 or higher are designated as Reward schools. The overall accountability score is based on performance of all students on each indicator (60 percent) and performance of historically underserved student groups on each indicator (40 percent). Reward schools demonstrate excellence in achievement and growth for all students, as well as all student groups.

Schools are not eligible for Reward status if they have any student group that performs in the bottom 5 percent in the state for that particular group. They will be designated as "Reward exempt".

# PRIORITY SCHOOLS

## WHAT IS A PRIORITY SCHOOL?

There are 82 Priority schools in Tennessee in 2018. Priority schools are in the bottom 5% of Title I schools, or are high schools with a graduation rate of 67% or lower, and they have been identified as in need of comprehensive support. Per the *Tennessee Succeeds ESSA State Plan*, there will be a "safe harbor" provision for schools in the bottom 5% that have a TVAAS level of 4 or 5. These schools will not be identified as Priority Schools. Under the *Tennessee Succeeds ESSA Plan*, Priority schools are identified every three years, beginning in 2018.

In April 2018, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 881 and Public Chapter 1026 prohibiting the use of 2017-18 student achievement data to label a school Priority, as such, no school is identified as a Priority school using 2017-18 TNReady data.

The Priority school calculation is based on a two-year success rate for high schools and a one-year success rate for K-8 schools that incorporates TCAP data from the 2015-16 (high school only) and 2016-17 school years. Additionally, schools that demonstrate high growth (represented by a TVAAS level 4 or 5) in 2016-17 and 2017-18 will not be identified as a Priority school.

### The Tennessee Department of Education will provide the following intervention options for Priority Schools:

- ✓ **School-level grants:** Districts can apply for school improvement and turnaround grants under §1003. Districts can apply for some or all of their Priority schools. The competitive application will support schools for three years, which will include one year of funding for planning, and two years for implementation of turnaround plans.
- ✓ **District-led interventions:** Districts will be able to support multiple Priority schools with evidence-based strategies and state oversight by means of flexible funds (i.e. Innovation Zones).
- ✓ **Shared Governance:** This option is open to districts with at least five Priority schools. States and districts will jointly govern and operate Priority schools in these districts. School leaders will hold decision making authority over staffing, budget, operations, and other district services but will be advised by a governing board of state and district stakeholders.
- ✓ **Achievement School District:** No schools will be assigned to the Achievement School District based on 2017-18 data.

### THE FOLLOWING DISTRICTS IN TENNESSEE HAVE PRIORITY SCHOOLS:

Achievement School District	Hamilton County
Campbell County	Madison County
Metro Nashville Public Schools	Maury County
Fayette County Public Schools	Shelby County

# PRIORITY SCHOOLS (CONT.)

## PRIORITY SCHOOL EXIT CRITERIA

All Priority schools, including ASD schools, will be evaluated annually through the school accountability framework and through monitoring and evaluation of school improvement plans. Based on the annual evaluation, a school may exit Priority status. Any Priority school that is not effectively implementing its school improvement plan and/or not making progress on leading indicators may face additional requirements and potential loss of grant funding.

### HOW CAN A SCHOOL EXIT PRIORITY STATUS?

Schools will exit Priority status by meeting one of the following exit criteria:

- The school is not identified on the next Priority school list.
- The school exceeds the 10th percentile in the state using a one-year success rate for two consecutive years.
- The school earns a level 4 or 5 TVAAS performance in all subject/grade content areas for two consecutive years.
- The school exceeds the 15th percentile in the state using a one-year success rate.
- If identified for consistently underperforming subgroups, schools may exit by meeting AMO targets for that specific subgroup for two consecutive years; and
- If identified for graduation rates below 67 percent, schools may exit by exceeding graduation rate of 67 percent for two consecutive years.

## COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS

### WHAT ARE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT (CSI) SCHOOLS?

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) law requires the Tennessee Department of Education to use data inclusive of 2017-18 to identify the bottom 5 percent of schools for “comprehensive support and improvement” (CSI). CSI schools include all Achievement School District schools.

## ADDITIONAL TARGETED SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS

### WHAT IS AN ATSI SCHOOL?

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) law requires states to identify those schools with the lowest performance across student groups using 2017-18 data. ATSI schools are schools with the lowest performance of one or more student subgroups (i.e. students who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American; economically disadvantaged; English Learners; or Students with disabilities).

### A NOTE ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS

In accordance with state law, a charter agreement must be revoked or denied renewal if a charter school is identified as a Priority school and charter schools that are identified as Priority schools must close in the school year immediately following the year it was identified.

# THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

## THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CONTINUUM IN TENNESSEE

- The School Improvement Continuum was implemented in the beginning in the 2017-18 school year and schools on the existing Priority school list were placed on designated intervention tracks.
- A new Office of School Improvement (OSI) will manage the performance of districts with Priority schools and use the School Improvement Continuum as their framework. The continuum outlines tracks for intervention based on factors such as; previous identification as a Priority school, length of time in current intervention, TVAAS composite scores, and graduation rates.
- The track approach provides different pathways and models for school turnaround. Schools can exit Priority status annually if they show improvement from the past academic year through increased graduation rate, TVAAS performance, or by meeting Annual Measurable Objectives for underperforming subgroups for consecutive years.

The success of the school improvement process depends on the will and the capacity of the people in the school, community, and the districts to do the hard work of school turnaround. Districts with designated schools must establish a coherent improvement process that supports schools and includes the following steps:



- **Identification:** Schools in Tennessee will be identified in September, 2018 and every three years thereafter.
- **Diagnose:** Districts and schools must develop a needs assessment for identifying causes of underperformance, and an effective needs assessment begins with student achievement information, then digs deeper to understand patterns in student progress over time — both overall and for individual student groups. The needs assessment must engage the full school community in examining information like school leadership, the quality of instruction, the health of the school climate, or inequities in resource allocation.
- **Plan:** Districts must create an appropriate timeline for improvement planning and use needs assessment results to pinpoint where to direct resources and support. Plans must utilize evidenced-based strategies to address the challenges and develop data systems to inform benchmarks for progress. Schools should provide concrete ways for teachers, families, community members and students to engage in the planning process.
- **Implement:** Districts and schools should implement strategies in the improvement plan with fidelity, utilizing regular feedback loops and communicating with stakeholders on progress. They should also leverage federal, state and local funding to support the plan to address problems that were identified in the needs assessment and improvement planning process.
- **Monitor:** The district and state should monitor and communicate progress on the benchmarks set out in the school's improvement plan.
- **Intensify Action:** If the school fails to improve within a reasonable timeframe, the state or district should require additional action and support and escalate interventions or modify governance models.
- **Improve:** Real improvement does takes time, but school and district leaders should be able to show gains on leading indicators within the first year if their plans are aligned to needs and are implemented well.

## SUPPORTS FOR DESIGNATED SCHOOLS

The Office of School Improvement at the Tennessee Department of Education will provide guidance and support for schools identified as Priority, CSI, and ATSI to revise their 2018-19 school plans. Additionally, schools will be eligible for:

- District level grants from the federal and state that fund strategies from the district improvement plans.
- Competitive school level grants that addresses specific, unique needs to the schools.
- Support in developing a monitoring tool to evaluate progress and provide feedback to district and schools.
- Informal and formal convenings to network and share learnings.
- Technical assistance via informal and formal visits.

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT...

- ESSA requires Priority schools to develop and implement comprehensive plans for school improvement **in partnership with** stakeholders (parents, teachers, principals, community leaders etc.) (Sec. 1111(d)(2)(B))
- The Tennessee ESSA state plan also requires schools to develop school improvement plans **in partnership with** parents, families, students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders (p. 127 Tennessee ESSA State Plan).
- Districts are required to notify school staff and parents if a school is identified as needing Comprehensive Support and Intervention (CSI). Additionally, districts must detail how parents can be involved in the school improvement planning process at their school.

## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Parents, advocates and community organizations can be important partners in improving schools.
- VOLUNTEER to serve on a needs assessment or school improvement planning team.
- INVITE other parents, community leaders and organizations to partner with the school and district.
- ASK the district to include family and community engagement as a key component in their improvement plans.
- SHARE your experience with the cultural and historical context of your school to help inform community and family engagement.
- HELP schools and districts reach parents with information and improvement plans by advising where and how are the best ways to reach parents at your school.
- MAKE SURE plans are available in relevant languages for parents and community members.
- OFFER any resources you have or know of that could help schools serve students and particular student sub-groups (i.e. military, EL, migrant, low-income, rural, foster, homeless, or specific racial, linguistic or ethnic groups).

### ABOUT THE TENNESSEE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY COALITION

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition is a group of diverse civil rights and education advocacy organizations that have built a shared policy agenda to address chronic disparities in achievement and opportunities for underrepresented students in the state of Tennessee. Visit our website to learn more about becoming a member or to sign-up for an event.

LEARN MORE AT [TNEDEQUITY.ORG/SCHOOLIMPROVEMENT](https://TNEDEQUITY.ORG/SCHOOLIMPROVEMENT)



FOLLOW US @CONEXIONED