

## State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools



The federal No Child Left Behind legislation requires that states hold schools and districts accountable for performance, and Tennessee has revamped its school and district accountability system to follow suit. State law requires the Office of Education Accountability to review schools and districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress on state assessments for three years in a row. In 2005-06, Tennessee had 24 of these high priority schools in five districts – Metro Nashville, Memphis City, Knox County, Hamilton County, and Fayette County. This report defines state-level issues relevant to these schools and districts and highlights exceptional practices in school districts that attempt to address these issues.

### Report Findings:

- The BEP does not adequately fund the state's urban districts in part because it understates the cost of educating at-risk students and English language learners.
- The state does not require frequent teacher evaluations, which results in an evaluation tool that is not effective at making substantive changes to teaching staff.
- Tennessee lacks a strong or funded new teacher induction program.
- The state's tenure law appears to protect some poorly qualified teachers; firing an ineffective teacher remains an arduous, time-consuming, and costly task.
- Though Tennessee has one of the lowest graduation rates in the country, the state does not adequately assist districts with graduation rate data and lacks a comprehensive state dropout prevention plan.
- The quality of alternative schools varies greatly across districts; some schools are not adequately serving the needs of students suspended or expelled, while others show promising practices.
- Districts face challenges implementing the NCLB-required supplemental educational services to low-performing students. Student participation is low in every district and it is unclear whether these services will improve student achievement.

**The BEP formula generates substantially less state and local revenue for the four urban districts in the state.**

**District officials and principals did not think that teacher evaluations improved teacher accountability.**

### Recommendations:

- The General Assembly may wish to:
  - continue to enhance funding for at-risk and English language learning students
  - require an induction and mentoring program for new teachers and provide funds for such a program
  - consider strengthening teacher evaluation requirements
- The Tennessee Department of Education should:
  - Develop and seek federal and state funding for a statewide, comprehensive induction program for new teachers
  - Offer additional trainings for administrators in using the Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth, the state-mandated teacher evaluation tool
  - Ensure that the results of an evaluation of supplemental educational service providers be provided to parents prior to their choosing a provider
  - Develop a comprehensive plan to reduce dropouts and include an audit of district graduation rate data to ensure accuracy
- The State Board of Education should consider adding a teacher observations component to the Framework.

View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>

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