



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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Report finds weaknesses in state's assistance to high priority districts

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennessee does not provide enough funding for urban school districts, according to a new study by the Comptroller's Office. The study also finds that the state does not evaluate its teachers frequently enough, nor does it provide adequate support for new teachers.

The report, by the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability, is titled "State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools." It explores the state's response to low performing schools in the wake of the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The report also looks at the state's approach to assisting the five districts with schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress on state assessments for three years in a row – Fayette County, Hamilton County, Knox County, Memphis City, and Metro Nashville.

School funding – The state school funding formula does not meet the needs of the four largest school districts in the state in part because it understates the cost of educating English language learners and at-risk students. Therefore, Tennessee's urban districts must raise disproportionately more local funds than rural districts to educate their students.

Teacher quality – Tennessee trails many states in its teacher evaluation requirement; in Tennessee, schools are only required to evaluate a licensed teacher twice in a ten-year period. In addition, Tennessee does not have a strong new teacher induction program. New teacher support is integral to maintaining a high quality teaching force.

Graduation rate – Despite having one of the lowest graduation rates in the country, the state does not have a comprehensive dropout prevention plan. Moreover, though inaccuracies are common with graduation and dropout data, the state does not audit graduation data.

Recommendations – The Comptroller's Office recommends that the state continue to enhance funding for at-risk and English language learners. The state can also improve teacher quality by developing an induction program and by increasing the frequency of evaluations. Finally, the report recommends that the state develop a comprehensive dropout prevention strategy.

The Office of Education Accountability also released separate reports for each district, indicating that Fayette County, Hamilton County, Knox County, Memphis City, and Metro Nashville have similar issues with teaching quality, dropout rates, and supplemental services to low performing students.

All the reports are available on the Comptroller's web site at www.comptroller.state.tn.us.

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