

---

# **Policy Highlights from Tennessee's Race to the Top Application**

Significant Reforms Found

By

J. E. Stone, Ed.D.  
Education Consumers Foundation

February 15, 2010



**Education Consumers Foundation**

---

# Introduction

Tennessee can take justifiable pride in its Race to the Top (RTTT) application. It is a bold plan and it succeeds by ensuring that the key elements of schooling enterprise—governance, hiring, compensation, and training—all treat student achievement gains as schooling's top priority. Even retention for tenured teachers is subject to job performance requirements.

In years of looking at similar proposals, I see the Tennessee plan as one that goes to the heart of schooling's seeming intractable problems: A lack of clear priorities. Going forward, good schooling in Tennessee will be known by the student achievement gains that it produces. It may produce additional benefits—as good schooling almost always does—but it must enhance student knowledge and skills.

Under the plan, virtually all organizational decisions must be sensitive to their impact on student learning. If fully embraced and implemented, Tennessee's plan will both advance the state educationally and serve as model for educational improvement nationally. Its reliance on the Sanders-model value-added data is especially important.

Despite its many virtues, the RTTT plan may not be well received by all—especially those teachers, administrators, and professors whose approach to education will have to become far more results-oriented and accountable. For nearly three decades, Tennessee (and most states) has been working to convince the education community that improved student achievement must be schooling's top priority. Far too often, however, that message has been ignored.

Tennessee's Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) was created in the late eighties by Dr. William Sanders, then of the University of Tennessee. Yet as of January 1, 2010, eighteen years after TVAAS was adopted, only 14% of Tennessee teachers had opened the online account necessary for teachers to access their students' data. Unfortunately, many school districts and the great majority of teacher training institutions have simply acted as though TVAAS did not exist.

Now that the mandate has been made clear and TVAAS data is being made still more accessible, Tennesseans can expect to see a much clearer alignment between public policy and classroom-level practice.

J.E. Stone, Ed.D.

President, Education Consumers Foundation

# Significant Reforms Found in Tennessee's Race to the Top Application

Tennessee's Race to the Top (RTTT) document is available online at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/recovery.shtml>. With appendices, it is over 1,100 pages and covers everything from theories of action to budgets.

The present document summarizes selected policy highlights and lists them in the order in which they appear in the application. Most are reforms not found in Tennessee policy or in that of any other state.

Each highlight is supported by the relevant passage(s) from the RTTT application package and references to the application page number(s) from which it was taken.

## 1. Local control over salary schedules and evaluations

In place of the traditional state-mandated teacher salary schedule, school districts will now be permitted to create salary schedules and annual evaluations based on student learning gains as measured by TVAAS. Local boards will now be able to compensate, promote, and dismiss teachers and principals on the basis of annual evaluations of student learning gains.

From page 12 of the application:

We now allow local school systems to create local salary schedules for teachers and principals that permit us to compensate, promote, and terminate teachers as a result of rigorous annual evaluations that are based on student learning.

Most notably, we have fully unlocked our TVAAS data by removing statutory barriers to using it in key employment decisions for teachers. We now require annual evaluations for teachers and principals. Not less than 50% of these evaluations will be based on student achievement measures including at least 35% based on TVAAS data where available.

## 2. Full participation by all districts

Unlike most states, all Tennessee school districts have signed an agreement to fully participate in the reform package. Full participation means that the district has committed to teacher and principal evaluations that are primarily based on student achievement gains—gains measured by TVAAS or by another objective measurement where TVAAS is unavailable.

From page 17 of the application:

Section A(1)(ii)(a): Tennessee gave its districts a choice: They could either participate in all of our reform agenda as participating districts, as defined in the application, or they could decline to participate entirely. There was no middle ground of involved status. We gave this choice because we wanted to demonstrate full statewide commitment and because we feel this application should not be thought of as a buffet. All parts are woven together to create a coherent plan. We also used the U.S. Department of Education's sample MOU because our goals were aligned with it and because our districts asked for an MOU as soon as possible so they could have discussions with their unions and school boards. The MOU, reflecting the terms and conditions of our application, is attached as Appendix A-1-2.

Section A(1)(ii)(b): Similarly, we sent the U.S. Department of Education's sample Scope of Work because we believed our goals were aligned with it. We are pleased that 100% of our 136 participating districts and 4 state special schools committed to each and every reform criterion, as the summary table demonstrates. We achieved this sign-on rate even though all participating LEAs will have to implement a bold set of policy and practice changes, including using student growth as one of multiple measures in evaluating and compensating teachers and leaders; denying tenure to teachers who are deemed ineffective as gauged partly by student growth; relinquishing control over their persistently lowest-achieving schools; increasing the number of students who are taught by effective teachers; and, in many cases, opening their doors to more charter schools.

### **3. Key elements will go forward regardless of federal funding**

Key statutory components of Tennessee's plan were enacted during a January 2010 session of the Tennessee General Assembly. Tennessee is now committed to following the policies laid out in the RTTT application regardless of whether its proposal is selected for federal funding. RTTT funding would, however, substantially accelerate the process.

From page 21 of the application:

The application asks what our goals would be if we do not receive a Race to the Top award. Our goals remain the same: increased rates of proficiency on state and national assessments, decreased achievement gaps, improved teacher effectiveness, increased graduation rates, and higher rates of college enrollment and success. We set ambitious yet achievable achievement and attainment targets as part of our participation in CCRPI, before Race to the Top was included in the Recovery Act. These are Tennessee's goals because they are the right goals, not because we are submitting a grant application. Not winning Race to the Top funds might

slow us down, but we will find other sources of funds, and we will not deviate from implementing the policies that matter and achieving the results we know are imperative for our states children. That said, Race to the Top dollars would be a huge boost to our reform efforts.

#### **4. TVAAS training now required for all teachers**

Teacher preparation programs will now be required to train new teachers in the use of TVAAS. An eight hour training module on the use of TVAAS will be included in a research methods course required of all pre-service teachers. Competencies in the use of TVAAS will become part of the requirements for teacher licensure.

Excerpts from pages 61-62 of the application:

Approximately 69% of Tennessees graduates enroll in public higher education institutions in the state, and state institutions prepare approximately 70% of K-12 public school teachers...

Through our Race to the Top application, Tennessee proposes that initial preparation programs be responsible for training pre-service teachers in the use of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). Through TVAAS, teachers will be trained in using predictive data to modify their classroom instruction and enhance student learning of the states new standards...

Tennessee will issue a request for proposals for a training module to be developed that can be disbursed to initial preparation programs. The training module will focus on the use of TVAAS data in modifying and improving classroom instruction. This module will be an 8-hour component of a research methods course in all teacher preparation programs...

During the development of the training module, the state policies governing licensure requirements will also be amended. This change will require teachers seeking initial licensure to receive training in the use of TVAAS data to modify and improve classroom instruction...

Under a Race to the Top award, Tennessee's higher education institutions will assist with standards training and professional development specifically for our schools that have entered our accountability continuum. This proposal is detailed in Appendix E-2-8.

Please see Appendix B-3-2 for the goals, activities, timelines, and responsible parties for higher educations role in training teachers to use data for review of student achievement against our new standards, as required in Section B(3).

## 5. All teachers will have ongoing access to TVAAS data

As of January 1, 2010, only 14% of Tennessee's teachers had opened an account enabling access to the TVAAS data for their students. With the passage of the RTTT legislation, TVAAS data became the centerpiece of Tennessee's data-driven efforts to improve student learning. All teachers now have a personal account and will be given extensive training in the use of a new, user-friendly data dashboard.

From pages 68-69 of the application:

But as rich as the data set is, and as powerful as the current data system has grown to be, Tennessee has only scratched the surface in how we use that data to enhance learning, improve teaching, make policy and investment decisions, and pinpoint best practices for scaling across the state. This rich asset is only as powerful as it is accessible, user-friendly, and put into action by educators on a daily basis. In this proposal, Tennessee commits to the following:

- Statewide access to TVAAS: Until this month, only 14% of teachers in Tennessee had their own accounts for directly accessing the TVAAS system. During the week of January 4, 2010, however, all that changed. Every educator now has a TVAAS access account and temporary password. The opportunity for data access is now live and available to every school building. Proper access connections (largely through T1 lines) are in place as are hardware and software necessary for access. In 2010-11, all teachers and principals will be trained on how to access the TVAAS system and how best to use the data to inform instruction and improve learning. This training will be repeated as new teachers and leaders come into our schools, and as individual teachers and principals ask for refresher or enhancement courses.
- A data dashboard that integrates SLDS data to further expand the predictive power of TVAAS and create a 360-degree view of a child: Progressive districts in Tennessee already are working with the SAS Institute (which has an existing contract with the state) to develop a user-friendly data dashboard. Metro Nashville Public Schools and Memphis City Schools use this tool so teachers can see the academic growth pattern of individual students over time and determine whether they are consistently progressing academically. In addition, teachers can use the dashboard to see predictions of how well students will do in the future on state assessments or ACT exams. With these kinds of diagnostic tools, teachers will be able to differentiate instruction and measure its effects. And on the same dashboard, a teacher will have links to information and professional development available to help address the needs of students. We will take this teacher-focused dashboard statewide and make it viewable in every

teacher's classroom by 2010, and launch a comprehensive training effort in the 2010-11 school year. Please see Appendix C-2-1 for an explanation of the SAS dashboard.

With this early-warning data in hand, we believe schools and teachers will be able to have better-informed conversations with parents and families about their children's progress, thus making the data more accessible and engaging to parents. It would be of great interest to parents to know, for example, what academic warning signs their children may exhibit and what their predicted performance will be if assistance is not given. Our goal through the dashboard is to make those conversations easier to facilitate. We are committed to refining our system in demonstrable ways as use of the data system spreads for purposes of informing instruction and engaging policymakers and key stakeholders including parents, community members, unions, and others. Our proposal will significantly increase teacher, school, and district-level use of previously inaccessible, underused information.

## **6. Student achievement gains will be central to the assessment of teacher and principal job performance**

Student achievement gains will now be weighted at least 50% in teacher and principal evaluations. The new evaluations will be the basis for decisions regarding tenure, professional development, retention, and dismissal.

From page 71 of the application:

Throughout 2010, districts not only will gain access to the tools and training necessary to begin work in this area, but the recently passed legislation, the First to The Top Act, mandates the development and use of an annual multiple-measure teacher and principal effectiveness evaluation. The First to The Top Act mandates 50% of a teacher's or principal's evaluation be based on student achievement data: 35% as represented by TVAAS where available, and 15% based on other measures of student achievement. The legislative mandate of the significant student growth component in evaluations provides an impetus for engaging with the TVAAS system more deeply on a regular basis. Because the new evaluations are meant to inform human capital decisionmaking – including but not limited to tenure, professional development, retention, and dismissal – understanding how data can be used to both inform, improve, and reflect effectiveness will be of key concern to each and every teacher and leader.

And from pages 84-86 of the application:

Tennessee is embarking on an aggressive, collaborative effort to redesign its evaluation systems, with student achievement data as a required significant component. The First to The Top Act calls for the creation of a Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee: a 15-member, multi-stakeholder group that will include the commissioner of education; the executive director of the State Board of Education; chairpersons of the Education Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives; as well as individuals representing the interests of parents, teachers, principals, school boards, superintendents/directors, students, and others deemed appropriate. The group also will reflect the racial and geographic diversity of Tennessee.

The Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee is charged with developing and recommending to the State Board of Education guidelines and criteria for a multiple-measures teacher and principal effectiveness evaluation system, which will be administered annually to all teachers and principals in the state. The commissioner of education will provide professional staff support to the Committee that assists with research, facilitation, written documentation, and summaries needed to inform discussion and advance decision-making. In addition, local, state and national experts will be engaged to further inform the process and provide technical support for the detailed discussion, options considerations, and exploration of best practices and design of final recommendations.

The Committee shall deliver recommended guidelines and criteria to the State Board. The State Board shall then adopt guidelines and criteria to be effective no later than July 1, 2011, allowing implementation of the new evaluation system prior to the 2011-12 academic year.

While the Committee will recommend the design of the full evaluation system for teachers and principals, the First to The Top Act mandates that annual evaluations include at least the following components:

- Objective student achievement data will comprise 50% of the evaluation.
- For teachers and principals, 35% of the evaluation will be based on student growth (TVAAS where it is available, or some other comparable measure of student growth). Please see Appendix D-2-3 for an explanation of teacher effect rating system developed by SAS.
- 15% of the evaluation shall be based on other measures of student achievement selected from a list of such measures developed by the Committee.
- Review of prior evaluations.

- Personal conferences to include discussion of strengths, weaknesses and remediation.
- Relative to teachers, classroom or position observation followed by written assessment.

In addition to the above, Tennessee law mandates principals are also subject to a performance contract that may specify other benchmarks such as graduation rates, ACT scores where applicable, and student attendance. Contracts may provide both for bonuses for meeting or exceeding expectations, as well as for non-renewal of the contract based upon inadequate performance as determined by evaluations.

Four to five summative rating categories will describe teacher and principal effectiveness with clear benchmarks defining each category. Many teachers and leaders in the top category will take on critical roles as coaches and mentors and can be compensated at considerably higher levels than ever before. Teachers or leaders in the lower categories will be provided with focused support.

In designing an effective and coherent evaluation system, the state will seek alignment among multiple measures. For example, high scores on classroom observations rubrics and content knowledge assessments should be correlated with high value-added scores, so the overall evaluation system provides a valid and reliable tool for measuring effective teaching. The state anticipates the evaluation system will need refinement over time as we learn more about how different measures of the system support high student achievement gains. We will track, analyze, and report on the alignment of these measures annually.

Once the new evaluation system is fully implemented, the First to The Top Act requires it to serve as a factor in employment decisions in our state's education system including, but not limited to: promotion, retention, termination, compensation and the attainment of tenure status. It also will be a useful tool in scheduling professional development.

## **7. New teacher training materials will emphasize the role of TVAAS in data-driven instruction**

Educators statewide will be trained to make TVAAS data an integral part of classroom instruction. Vendors such as SAS and Battelle for Kids will create training modules for this purpose. Teacher preparation programs will be expected to integrate these materials into their curricula.

From pages 72-73 of the application:

Specifically, SAS and a non-profit training partner [like Battelle] will collaborate to deliver statewide supports in the following areas:

- Building the capacity of teachers and school leaders in the area of balanced assessment.
- Enhancing educators' capacity to maximize the robust value-added information at their disposal.
- Ensuring quality, transparency, and utility in data systems.
- Providing research and innovation expertise in identifying the impact of specific interventions and determine potential for replication statewide.
- Supporting districts as they research, develop, implement, and enhance systems of differentiated compensation.
- Supporting educators in the Coalition of Large School Systems (CLASS) districts that comprise 34% of the students in our state.
- Supporting a select number of schools in a newly formed Rural School Improvement Collaborative.
- Supporting Tennessee Department of Education in developing long-term capacity to deliver the innovative outcomes outlined in the Race to the Top proposal.

With this work, courses delivered face-to-face will also be available online through the Electronic Learning Center for ongoing access and reference, Electronic Learning iPod™ sessions will be created and available, and live interactive WebEx™ training will be utilized as well.

This work will also extend to higher education so teacher and principal preparation programs will be supported in integrating specific training modules for TVAAS, data dashboard use, and instructional improvement systems into their required learning experiences and course work. This will help districts hit the ground running with new teachers and principals who already have knowledge of the concepts, systems, and data options they are expected to use on a daily basis in the state.

In addition, the teacher and principal evaluation system will be linked to the instructional data system, allowing for alignment and decision-making in crafting individualized supports for improving practice. Significant investments in all the work described in this section will be made using Race to the Top funding from the state share, and provided to all our districts.

And from pages 82-83:

- Tennessee's public teacher preparation institutions will train their students on use of value-added in their classrooms, as part of a new eight-hour module to an existing methods course starting in 2011. Please see Appendix B-3-2. This means future generations of teachers will have a solid value-added foundation before they ever step foot into a Tennessee classroom.

Tennessee will not rest on its laurels when it comes to use of value-added assessment and analysis. Our state was a pioneer in this methodology, and moving forward, we plan to break new ground by expanding its use. Please see Appendix D-2-1 for an explanation of TVAAS and examples of how the data can be displayed. Please also note that the goals, activities, timelines, and responsible parties for Reform Plan Criterion D(2) can be found in Appendix D-2-2.

### **8. Renewal of alternative certification programs will depend on performance data**

The State Board of Education will use the teacher performance data contained in Tennessee's teacher training report card to determine the renewal or closure of alternative teacher education programs.

From page 76 of the application:

State law gives the State Board of Education complete jurisdiction over issuance and administration of licenses for supervisors, principals, and teachers. Under this law, Tenn. Code Ann. §49-5-108(a), the Board of Education has promulgated rules (which have the force of law) for alternative license paths for teacher and principal preparation programs. Please see Appendix D-1- 1 for the full language of the state law and Appendix D-1-2 for Board of Education rules on the Transitional Licensure Policy.

Under these rules, these programs must be approved and go through future renewals by the Board, and be included in the program report card required of all institutions that prepare teachers. The report card is made public and the data used by the Board to determine program renewal or closure.

### **9. District-by-district summaries of annual teacher and principal performance reviews will be publicly reported**

School districts statewide will be required to conduct annual reviews of teachers and principals and to report the percentages of each qualifying for each performance category. Also to be reported are the percentages of compensation based on instructional effectiveness. Furthermore, districts are encouraged to set district-wide performance goals with a minimum of 15% annual improvement in

the number of teachers moving up in each rating category. All of this data will be available online.

From pages 86-87 of the application:

All participating LEAs in the state will be required under the First to The Top Act to use the new multiple-measures evaluation system (with some degree of district innovation) to conduct annual reviews of its teachers and principals. The evaluation system may be used to publicly report data that includes, but is not limited to, differentiation of teacher and principal performance (percentage in each rating category), the LEA's ability to increase the percentage of effective teachers and principals, and percentage of compensation based on instructional effectiveness. To ensure accountability on improving performance of teachers and principals, the state will encourage LEAs to set annual improvement goals, with a minimum of 15% improvement in terms of the number of educators moving up in each rating category. The state will also develop reporting mechanisms to disseminate data on performance of LEAs and schools in developing more effective teachers and principals (reflected in the percentage of teachers and principals moving up in the rating categories).

While the state is establishing the evaluation framework, participating LEAs will have the ability to solicit teacher and principal input on the evaluation system. LEAs – with support from the state – will be expected to provide training to their educators on the evaluation tools; ensure timely evaluations occur and feedback loops are created to support teacher and principal development; and design differentiated professional development to accommodate each educator's skill level.

In addition to being a means for identifying effective or ineffective teachers and principals, the new evaluation system will be a critical tool for helping teachers differentiate instruction to ensure all student groups are making strong achievement gains. It also will provide information to guide allocation of teaching resources and interventions strategically to support struggling students. Tennessee's data also has rich predictive power, providing detailed and reliable projections about the probability of each student's success at important academic milestones (algebra I, ACT and SAT scores, and college readiness in core subject areas).

By making student growth data a cornerstone of our accountability framework at all levels, Tennessee is creating a culture focused squarely on academic achievement. Today, too few of our educators are using Tennessee's data in a way that will accelerate results. The state intends to create a collaborative relationship with its LEAs to help educators across the state have timely access to key student data, understand how to interpret the data effectively, and how to use the data to drive instructional practices.

## **10. Professional development will be customized to individual evaluations and employ only proven vendors**

Professional development will no longer be comprised of a haphazard menu of generic content. Instead, the annual assessments of individual teacher and principal strengths and weaknesses will be used to guide individualized coaching and professional development. Professional development outcomes will be tracked from one annual evaluation to the next and used as a guide to the selection of professional development experiences. The results produced by professional development programs and activities will be publicly reported and only those producing successful outcomes will be eligible for state funding.

From page 88 of the application:

Because the new evaluation system will provide a more comprehensive, nuanced view of each teacher and principals strengths and weaknesses, a more frequent, customized approach to coaching and professional development can and will be developed. Teacher and principal professional development will be informed by annual evaluation results. From one evaluation to the next, teacher and principal evaluations will be used to guide the choice and manner of professional development that will best assist in improving effectiveness. The state will provide financial support for significant statewide training that forms the foundation of good practice in Tennessee. This includes training related to TVAAS data and use of data dashboards as well as advanced training on using data to differentiate instruction; support to educators in the Renewal Schools and Achievement School District through Race to the Top (referenced in Section E(2)), Title I and Title IIA funds and other existing resources; and School Improvement Grants, which will require schools to match their own funds as necessary in their Race to the Top scopes of work. For a complete explanation of this approach, please see Section D(5) of this proposal.

Tennessee will use its data system to measure and publicly report on the efficacy of professional development activities, mapping participants improvement back to the source of their training and only funding or recommending those activities and programs that demonstrate results. This is similar to the report card released annually on teacher preparation programs, in which the state tracks the effectiveness of its preparation programs in producing high-performing teachers, and similar to the report card on principal preparation programs we propose in this application.

And from pages 113-115:

Section D(5)(i): Tennessee will demand high levels of performance from our educators. Our robust and highly developed data sets, which contain nearly 20 years' worth of data on teacher effectiveness – tell us how teachers are performing so

that we will know by how much they need to improve to help their students exceed our new higher standards. To assist teachers in improving their practice, we will use our teacher effect data to provide targeted and individualized support. We also will be able to measure the value of our investment in professional development by mapping the various approaches back to specific teacher improvements. Teacher effect data and the new annual teacher and principal evaluation data will drive all professional development investments made in the state of Tennessee, leading to unprecedented and targeted support for our teachers.

About 30% of Tennessee teachers and leaders fail to produce a year's growth with their students. We will move a set percentage of practicing teachers and leaders each year over four years to the level of producing at least one year's growth with our students to ensure less than 10% of our educator force is ineffective four years from now. Practically, this will entail annual targets that provide sufficient time for our new evaluation system and professional development to take effect such that the percentage of teachers or leaders in the lowest category will move from 30% in Year One, to 25% in Year Two, to 19% in Year Three, and 10% in Year Four.

Tennessee's new multiple-measures teacher and principal effectiveness evaluation system will enhance our current ability to identify performance levels of educators and be a much more strategic tool for supporting them. As we fundamentally shift how we measure and hold teachers and principals accountable for performance, we must increase our support for their success. The state will invest significant Race to the Top funding as well as funding from other recurring sources such as the Teacher Incentive Fund.

In addition, the scopes of work submitted by the participating LEAs must demonstrate their use of funding in this manner. Annually, the Department of Education will use the teacher and principal evaluation data to determine the amount and focus of investments to drive toward meeting our teacher workforce improvement goal. Beyond our commitment to realigning investments and supporting teacher and principal effectiveness, however, the state and local districts must change how they are approaching this task:

- With the backing of the new evaluation system in 2011-12, developed pursuant to the First to the Top Act, professional development will no longer be menu-driven. The act gives districts the flexibility to no longer pay for meaningless education or professional development credits that do not demonstrate a link to improved teacher and student performance.
- Improved performance now will have a direct bearing on status, evaluation, pay and retention of our educator workforce, as described in Section D(2). Schools – particularly those that fall into the Renewal Schools category as

explained in Section E(2) – will have additional resources provided by the state to fund a variety of approaches to professional development aligned to their strategy for school reform. These include but are not limited to coaching, induction, common planning time, and extended learning time opportunities.

- LEAs also will be required to demonstrate how they will use the tools available to them through the data dashboard and training provided by the SAS Institute and a non-profit training partner to be responsive to the needs of educators in their districts. LEAs participating in Race to the Top will be required to show the alignment of local funding to improving teacher and principal effectiveness.
- For those LEAs who have Renewal Schools and schools eligible for the Achievement School District, they will also be required to demonstrate how their approach to this alignment serves both the individual educator and the school reform efforts in a consistent and cohesive manner. An explanation of the Renewal School and Achievement School District requirements and choice options is discussed in Section E(2) of this document.

## **11. Effective and ineffective teachers and principals will follow differentiated career paths**

The state will track and publish system-by-system promotion, compensation, and retention averages for high- and low-performing teachers and principals. Under terms of the \$90 million Gates grant in Memphis, the state may create differentiated career paths for teachers and principals. The categories of Beginning, Intermediate, Professional, and Master Teacher would be tied to job performance and underpinned by alternative salary schedules. A supplemental compensation fund of \$375,000 per year will be available to support compensation reform for teachers and principals.

From pages 89-91 of the application:

No longer will our teachers and principals be treated as interchangeable parts, because the data clearly tell us that teacher and principal effectiveness varies widely. For Tennessee to increase student achievement dramatically, the state not only has to consistently identify its most talented teachers and principals, but also has to be intentional in finding ways to compensate, promote, and retain them. That means doing things far differently than we have done in the past. As part of the school improvement planning process, districts will be required to differentiate their retention data of top performers, growth of teachers and leaders from lower levels of effectiveness to effective, and attrition of less effective teachers and leaders.

Tennessee will track and publicize differential retention rates of our districts, showing the ability of our districts to grow and retain top performers and effectively manage poor performers.

While Tennessee has experimented with career progression programs and differentiated pay plans in the past, we are proposing a bold, comprehensive strategy that builds upon the work already underway in the Memphis Teacher Effectiveness Initiative under a \$90 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This innovative partnership between the district, union, and community is implementing an entirely new teacher effectiveness paradigm that encompasses joint development of differentiated roles for teachers, evaluation that uses data as a significant factor and is used to make critical human capital decisions, and implements a compensation structure that rewards effective performance. Please see Appendix D-2-5 for a summary of the Memphis initiative.

Informed by the Memphis strategy, Tennessee will work with and provide support for its LEAs to create clear, differentiated career paths for teachers and principals, based on their performance levels using the new evaluation system. These may include categories such as Beginning, Intermediate, Professional, and Master, each of which would have a high bar for entry, as well as expanded roles and higher compensation. The state, with Race to the Top funding, will provide support to participating LEAs to design and implement new career paths.

Coupled with creating differentiated roles, the First to the Top Act permits LEAs to adopt alternative salary schedules to the current state salary schedule, which is based on education credits and experience. Research shows that a salary scale based on credentials and seniority does not necessarily lead to better student outcomes. Alternative salary schedules can be developed to reward teachers and principals for their abilities to increase student achievement levels. Compensation packages will be aligned with the new career paths and take the form of base salaries, as well as performance and retention bonuses. Race to the Top will provide Tennessee with the funding to help LEAs with design and implementation of new compensation structures that reward our highest performing educators. Tennessee will create a competitive Innovation Acceleration Fund to support the adoption and implementation of alternative compensation systems at the local level. With \$12 million from the Race to the Top award, the state and local communities will also aggressively seek private matching funding. Funds will be awarded to districts for the purposes of designing and/or implementing sustainable compensation systems based upon alternative salary schedules. Districts must have the agreement of their local teacher's union where one exists. If there is an ongoing additional funding burden at the local level, the district must have the full agreement of the local municipality in order to apply for an Innovation Acceleration Fund Award.

The state also will create a competitive supplemental fund of \$375,000 per year for innovation in those school districts whose share of funds is within the bottom 20% of the total share of the LEA funds under this application. These districts can apply for supplemental funding within their scopes of work to encourage compensation reform or turning around of low-performing schools.

Along with developing strategies to retain high performers, districts will be encouraged to design clear paths to dismiss those teachers and principals who after receiving ample opportunities to improve, continue to underperform as measured by the new evaluation.

## **12. Only “effective” teachers will be tenured**

The granting and holding of tenure will primarily depend on the teacher’s demonstrated ability to increase student achievement. Only teachers who have reached the “effective” level of performance will be granted tenure. Only teachers who remain “effective” will retain tenure. The state will annually assess and publish for each district the correlation of tenure-granting rates with student outcomes such as attendance, test scores, and on-time graduation rates.

From pages 91-93 of the application:

Historically, tenure in Tennessee has largely been granted by default. Because past statutes dictated teacher effect data could only be used if a teacher had a three-year average to examine – and tenure may be granted at 27 months – most teachers were granted tenure without examination of perhaps the most powerful tool available. Once tenure was granted, little attention, except in the most progressive districts, was paid to teacher effect data for the vast majority of teachers. However, districts now have the ability and responsibility to use this data strategically, bringing only those who demonstrate effectiveness into a long-term opportunity to serve our children.

Given Tennessee’s new mandate to redesign the evaluation system using multiple measures, to incorporate a targeted use of data, and to collaborate with teachers and principals to arrive at a fair and transparent set of tools to use, the state is in an unprecedented position to ensure only teachers who have met an established performance threshold are granted tenure. It also will be recommended that local boards only grant tenure to teachers who achieve at least an “effective teacher” rating on the new multiple-measure teacher effectiveness evaluation, of which a significant portion will be based on student achievement data.

With the new evaluation system, districts will be able to, and will be expected to, identify tenured teachers whose performance, as measured by the evaluation system,

falls in the bottom tier of teachers. Principals will be able to notify these teachers and provide them with significant, targeted support. If after receiving support, the teacher has not moved into the “effective” category of performance, the evaluation results can provide documentation for the termination to occur. As part of the implementation of Race to the Top, and as part of their scopes of work, districts will be encouraged to examine those teachers who are consistently categorized in the lower levels of effectiveness for the possibility of termination. With the new flexibility afforded districts to submit an alternative salary schedule, they can also choose to reward teachers financially upon attaining tenure status as well as for continuing to maintain and/or grow in effectively helping students gain in their learning.

At the state level, we will collect and publicly disseminate data, by LEA and school, on tenure-granting rates. We will work with the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee developed pursuant to the First to The Top Act to include tenure-granting rates in principal evaluations. Additionally, we will annually assess and publish the correlation of tenure-granting rates with student outcomes (e.g., attendance, test scores, on-time graduation rates).

### **13. Rigorous workforce development goals will be met through retraining or, if necessary, dismissals**

Thirty percent of Tennessee’s current teacher and principal workforce is not producing a year’s worth of achievement growth per year. The goal of the present reform plan is to reduce that percentage to ten within four years and to zero thereafter. The primary route to change is to increase effectiveness through the use of training and supports, but present law permits dismissal for inefficiency and/or incompetence even during the course of the contract year.

From pages 93-94 of the application:

Tennessee students deserve professional educators and leaders who not only have their best interests at heart, but who have the skills and demonstrate the ability to affect student academic growth. Our goal is to ensure that in four years, we will have reduced the percentage of teachers and principals who are ineffective to below 10%, and thereafter we will strive to drive that percentage to zero. Currently, approximately 30% of our teacher and principal workforce is not able to achieve a year’s worth of growth for their students. Please see the performance measure chart for D(3)(i) for teachers and Appendix D-3-8 for principals. The state’s new evaluation system will serve to assist these teachers and principals, as well as all teachers and principals needing improvement, by providing an array of customized supports that includes coaching and professional development. Teachers and

principals who do not engage in this work, or are unable to improve their practice after it has been deemed to be ineffective over a period of time when they have been given opportunity to improve and the supports to do so, should be considered for termination.

Documentation for action will include the evaluation documents themselves and the data used to inform them. In this way, documenting performance – both positive and negative for every teacher and principal – becomes standard operating procedure. District and building leadership should be able to rely on the teacher and principal evaluation system to serve them and their students by supporting effective work as well as by easing pathways to dismissal if that becomes necessary. Please see process above in Section D(2)(iv)(c).

The first priority for increasing teacher effectiveness is to focus attention, resources and supports on what teachers need to improve their practice. It is expected for the vast majority of teachers this strategy will bear fruit for them and the children they teach. However, in the rare instance when poor performers have been unable to improve even after receiving adequate support and professional development, there must be policies and procedures for triggering termination proceedings. Using existing state law, Tenn. Code Ann. §49-5-501, which defines inefficient and/or incompetent, and Tenn. Code Ann. §49-5-511, which determines these reasons as among the causes for dismissal, the new multiple-measure teacher effectiveness evaluation will play a role in such decisions. This determination will be made at the local level and recommended to the board for approval when such an action is necessary.

Until a teacher attains tenure, he or she is only on a one-year contract. However, the teacher evaluation will provide a thoughtful tool for providing targeted coaching and professional development intended to improve teacher effectiveness. When necessary it will also provide useful data, analysis and documentation needed to determine what teachers shall be dismissed during the contract year.

#### **14. Teachers designated as “highly qualified” must also be “highly effective”**

Federal law and most states define a “highly qualified” teacher as one who possesses certain paper qualifications. Tennessee defines “highly qualified” as a teacher whose students gain at least 1.5 years of academic growth per school year, i.e., a “highly effective” teacher.

From pages 97-98 of the application:

Most states will answer this question simply by providing percentages or numbers of “highly qualified” teachers as defined under the No Child Left Behind Act. But with its vast data system and years of value-added assessment data, Tennessee

is able to track the actual effectiveness of teachers and principals as well as their distribution in every corner of the state – not simply their educational credentials and certification. Our definition of effectiveness is the same as the one in the Race to the Top guidelines – at least one year of academic growth, with “highly effective” meaning at least one and a half years of growth, as measured through our TVAAS system. Our state also has the ability to provide a baseline of principal effectiveness based on value-added data that will serve as a starting point for work in distribution of these talented professionals as well. Please see Appendix D-3-8.

### **15. Teacher and principal preparation programs will expand or retrench on the basis of their graduates' performance**

Tennessee's plan for improving teacher and principal preparation programs is “founded on competition and accountability.” Recent changes in the State Board of Education's teacher licensure policy put higher-education-based preparation programs into competition with independent organizations like Teach for America and the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence. The value-added achievement gains produced by the alumni of the various programs are tracked and reported in Tennessee's Teacher Training Report Card. The Report Card data will be used as a basis for rewarding successful programs and reducing or decertifying those that fail to produce effective teachers.

From pages 110-111 of the application:

Tennessee has a well-established plan and strategies for improving the effectiveness of our teacher and principal preparation programs. The cornerstones are competition and accountability. Our State Board of Education (SBE) has broken the monopoly on teacher preparation held by institutions of higher education to allow independent education organizations to certify teachers. Creating this competitive atmosphere to spur improvements is made all the more likely to succeed in that goal when coupled with our accountability framework.

Unlike most states, which likely are setting up their data systems in order to know which teacher preparation programs prepare the highest-achieving graduates, Tennessee can – and does already – perform this analysis considering teacher effect data, placement and retention, and Praxis scores. Our LEAs can, and do, optimize our new teacher supply by using these data to increase recruitment, selection and hiring from preparation programs whose teachers consistently achieve better outcomes. Tennessee already publicly reports this data for each credentialing program in the state.

Section D(4)(ii): A group including leadership from the SBE, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Department of Education, Tennessee Education

Association, Tennessee Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and other stakeholders will convene in 2010 to:

- Examine the three variables studied (noted above) and determine what other measurements accurately reflect effectiveness.
- Study report card redesign options, if any, so the data are clear and easily understood.
- Study and design report card options for principal preparation programs.
- Work on issues of report card usage, such as the renewal or non-renewal of state approval for teacher and principal preparation institutions that are shown to be ineffective. Issues to be discussed include using at least three years' worth of data to assess effectiveness.

Combined with other measures, the report card will inform program adjustments, policy changes, and funding for teacher education programs such that they will be rewarded not only for producing teachers, but for the quality of the teachers they produce. Successful programs will be expanded, while unsuccessful programs will be provided an opportunity to improve over a specified period of time. The SBE will use that data to reward programs that are successful and support or decertify those that fail to produce effective teachers.

The panel outlined above will create a work plan by 2011 for these tasks. A key function of the panel will be to determine how to hold principal preparation programs to similar standards, including creating a report card. For programs whose graduates disproportionately fall into the bottom level of the state distribution of teacher or principal effectiveness as measured by the teacher/principal effectiveness evaluation, the SBE may consider this in program renewal decisions. Tennessee will scale quality programs to the needs of the state while limiting support for those programs that produce less-effective results.

The clear overall message of Tennessee's RTTT application is that Tennessee is serious about educational improvement. Stung by national reports showing the state to be among the lowest in national rankings despite repeated efforts at reform, a concerted effort led by Democratic Governor Phil Bredesen and Republican former U. S. Senate Majority leader Dr. William Frist has resulted in an impressive blueprint for change. The Tennessee General Assembly and the State Board of Education made the critical changes in law and policy. Now the ball is rolling.





## Education Consumers Foundation

1655 North Fort Myer Drive, Suite 700  
Arlington, VA 22209

[www.education-consumers.org](http://www.education-consumers.org)