

Suggestions for response to the state's ESSA questionnaire:

1. How should we continue strengthening ways to measure student progress toward meeting state academic standards?

- For subjects like visual art, music, theatre, dance, and physical education, where student understanding is demonstrated through complex performance tasks, implement key benchmark tasks where work may be shared and evaluated by collaborative peer review by qualified Tennessee educators.
- Provide rich professional learning experiences to prepare educators to participate in such an assessment process. Funds may be provided through Title IA, Title IIA, or Title IVA dollars (as described in section 2102: Local Education Agency – Plans and Applications).

2. How can we improve the current state assessment system?

- Include more practicing Tennessee educators' voices in the design and implementation of state assessments.
- Diversify assessments to include more performance task assessments that reveal deeper levels of student understanding. In particular, call on students to use understandings from multiple content areas to complete complex tasks or generate innovative solutions to problems.
- Assess student learning in tested areas (reading, math, science, etc.) through components of complex tasks rather than only through isolated test items that emphasize crystallized, fact-based knowledge.
- Less is more. Employ assessments strategically as a way of improving teaching and learning with educators rather than as a way of assigning blame to them.

3. Improving the state's district accountability system:

- Provide districts with content expertise that reflects the skills needed in a well-rounded education. That will include the usual tested disciplines, but also the arts and physical education. Such support is particularly needed for districts without their own content supervisors in disciplines like the arts.

4. What other system quality measures might you include in the district accountability framework?

- Federal legislation demands that students receive a well-rounded education that not only includes reading and math, but science, foreign languages, civics and government, career and technical education, health and physical education, and the arts – which include, according to the national core arts standards, dance, theatre, visual art, music, and media arts. If such subjects are a necessary component of what students receive from our schools, then any evaluation of a district must include a consideration of those areas.



- Students' access to high quality arts instruction should be regularly evaluated. This may be accomplished through:
 - Regular reports on the percentage of students taking arts classes in district schools
 - Reports on student progress in learning tasks and/or evaluation of teachers' work through peer reviewed portfolios of student work.

5. What measures of school quality or student success should be included in the school accountability framework?

- Students' access to high quality arts instruction should be regularly evaluated. This may be accomplished through:
 - Regular reports on the percentage of students taking arts classes in each district school
 - Reports on student progress in learning tasks and/or evaluation of teachers' work through peer reviewed portfolios of student work.

6. How can the department support the use of evidence-based strategies for school turnarounds in a way that both provides districts with structure and guidelines while providing them as much flexibility as possible?

- Draw upon available Tennessee resources (educators, organizations, and institutions of higher education) to build professional learning opportunities that focus on the needs identified in each district or region through analysis of performance measures.
- Engage the voices of district educators and leaders to build these opportunities. Build task forces of educators in each district that analyze district data related to each discipline and submit requests for professional learning experiences based on their analyses.

7. Tennessee also has the option to provide some or all turnaround services via a statewide system of support. What do district and schools most need from a statewide turnaround support system?

- Such services should be a set of clear expectations that reflect a well-rounded education and offer a flexible system of resources and support that may be drawn upon by local educators and leadership to support efforts toward change. Resources might include:
 - A searchable database of case studies/examples of school turnaround efforts (e.g., Turnaround Arts)
 - Vocal celebration of successful efforts through social media

8. How should the state’s accountability and education systems, particularly at the school level, factor in English language proficiency? For example, what should be the entry and exit criteria for English learners, supports that should be offered for English learners, and reporting requirements?

- English Language Learners often have a stronger understanding of content specific skills and knowledge than more traditional assessments show. When ELL students only demonstrate their understanding through verbal assessments, we do not fully capture everything they know. It’s important that ELL support helps students develop their full capacity to learn and engage. Access to arts education and integrating the arts into current curriculum greatly benefits ELL (as referenced in *Reinvesting in Arts Education*, the 2011 report by the President’s Council on the Arts and Humanities).
- Professional learning rooted in cultural responsive pedagogy would greatly benefit ELL, especially when curriculum embraces diverse backgrounds and experiences that ELL contributes to a rich learning environment. Many educators in arts and literacy have experience developing student centered curriculum, an important underpinning to cultural responsive pedagogy, and could work together to create learning experiences that engage students through works of art, literature, and media that reinforce essential skills and knowledge through a cultural context.

9. How can Tennessee best support a well-rounded education within the requirements of the law? For example, how should Tennessee’s accountability and education systems take into account providing a healthy and safe school environment or integration of technology?

- The Opportunity-to-Learn standards that currently exist in music and visual art have helped administrators and district leaders without a background in those disciplines understand and support their teachers and students. Opportunity-to-Learn standards need to be developed in all artistic disciplines (e.g., theatre, dance, and media arts). Educational Theatre Association is currently in the process of creating these for theatre. This resource will help cultivate a common understanding of what is required to support high quality arts education.

10. How should our state encourage equitable access to highly effective teachers for all students ?

- In order to sustain the quality of our teachers, we need to look beyond those currently in the classroom to those entering the field. There are many inconsistencies in teacher prep programs. Some schools of education provide ongoing fieldwork experiences for their students whereas others do not enter the classroom until their student teaching placement towards the end of the degree program. Developing stronger partnerships between schools of education and school districts that allow all pre-service teachers to participate in residencies of at least one year with highly effective teachers is needed.
- Efforts to encourage educators across all disciplines to become National Board Certified Teachers are needed. As many schools of education across the state of Tennessee employ the edTPA student teaching portfolio, conversations about NBCT need to be



happening. New teachers who completed the edTPA portfolio have already completed initial steps to becoming NBCT and this should be considered so that we not only hire effective teachers but also keep them.

11. Which, if any, innovative ESSA programs should Tennessee consider? (e.g. the innovative assessment pilot, student-based budgeting, teacher and school leader preparation academies or other)

- In order for anything “innovative” to be sustainable, we need to make sure content knowledge development is supported for all subject areas identified as part of a well-rounded education. If every district will receive a Title IIA allocation, we need to make sure this supports innovative teaching practices through relevant professional learning, especially in arts education, arts integration, STEAM, problem-based learning, etc. There are many provisions in ESSA that encourage an interdisciplinary approach to education (e.g. STEM to STEAM). The emphasis of content knowledge development under Title IIA presents a huge opportunity to provide professional development to educators who often get lost in the shuffle or provided district-wide opportunities that are not relevant to their discipline.
- Positions at the State DOE focused on supporting “innovative ESSA programs” need to be added. Title IV funds through Section 4104: State use of funds could be used to support needed positions. Currently the State DOE does not have dedicated positions to support innovative practices in well-rounded subject areas, such as arts and music.

12. What do you like most about Tennessee’s schools?

- Tennessee has at its disposal dedicated, qualified educators at all ages and in all disciplines. We need to do a better job of empowering these teachers to become leaders in our efforts toward the highest quality learning experiences possible for all of our students. Involve these passionate people who have dedicated their lives to the growth of our students and the field of education in identifying student and teacher needs and creating plans for professional learning to improve their efforts toward a brighter future for the state of Tennessee.
- Tennessee also has community partners who are willing and able to participate with educators in creating innovative programs that provide all students access to high quality learning experiences.

13. Do you have any additional input for Tennessee’s ESSA plan?

- ESSA provides a phenomenal opportunity to make real change in our education system. Our problems have been systemic and successful change will only occur with collaborative input from multiple voices. Students, parents, educators, community partners need to join with policy makers to develop solutions that meet the needs that are seen on the ground as well as those identified from above.



- The decisions we make will be as limited as the voices that contribute to the leadership process. Those who contribute to decision-making should reflect the well-rounded education we want our students to receive. We need supports in place at the state and district levels for every subject area that contributes to a well-rounded education for Tennessee students.