

Summary of State ESEA Flexibility Request

STATE: Tennessee

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of key aspects of state waiver requests made under the U.S. Department of Education's ESEA Flexibility initiative. This summary recognizes that states continue to work to refine and enhance these systems which will continue to evolve and improve over time.

Introduction. This section summarizes some overarching issues important to the state's overall NCLB waiver request.

1. What is the state's **clear vision and comprehensive integrated plan** to raise the bar on college and career-readiness? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Overall, Tennessee presents a clear and comprehensive high-level vision. In its request, the state outlines plans to fully implement math and ELA standards in grades 3-12 by 2013-14 through an LEA-driven process, with the TDOE playing a support and monitoring role. The state proposes a new model of accountability that focuses on: transparency around student data through accountability report cards that disaggregate student data, absolute performance accountability that includes proficient/advanced targets as well as targets for annual reduction in gaps, and relative performance accountability identifying the state's lowest and highest performing schools. Beginning this school year, the state has already begun implementing new systems of educator evaluation based on student achievement.

2. How does the state **define college and career-readiness**? [See Overview; full request]

Tennessee defines college and career-readiness as the ability to succeed at the post-secondary level. Specifically, the state's goal is that "All students will have access to a rigorous curriculum that includes challenging subject matter, emphasizes depth rather than breadth of coverage, emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving, and promotes responsible citizenship and lifelong learning" (p. 17). This goal is explicitly focused on both knowledge and application of higher order skills. Additionally, the state request indicates its plans to provide educators with access to professional development materials and a crosswalk of current state standards against Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in order to highlight areas of higher order thinking. TDOE is

also working to gradually shift state assessment items to emphasize constructed responses that require higher order thinking skills.

3. How does the state's request articulate a commitment to **innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement**? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Tennessee is committed to evaluating implementation of new programs and initiatives and using feedback to continuously improve. To ensure this process of ongoing improvement, the request indicates the TDOE will establish a new office to oversee the implementation of CCSS and PARCC to monitor effectiveness at each stage of implementation, including teacher professional development, assessment development, access to technology, etc. The state's request also includes a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan to provide ongoing feedback from the field on CCSS implementation and to ensure all stakeholders understand the benefits of CCSS. The state has also expressly committed to developing local innovation zones to provide an opportunity to foster new ideas to improve student achievement.

4. How does the state's request provide evidence to indicate the state has the **capacity to implement** its proposed policies within the given timelines? [See Overview; 2A-Summary of Accountability System; full request]

Tennessee demonstrates the capacity to implement its request through building off its existing RTTT initiatives. Tennessee's request outlines a reasonable timeline and plan for implementation and indicates its intention to align these reforms with current RTTT activities and funds at the state and district levels. The plan also includes a strong emphasis on district capacity.

Principle 1: Standards and Assessments

1. Describe the state's plan for transitioning to and implementing **college and career-ready standards and assessments**. [See Section 1B]

The state's request outlines a high-quality plan for transitioning to and implementing CCR. The state's request includes a phased implementation plan for CCSS, which began in K-2 this school year. By 2013-14, the state will fully implement math and ELA standards in grades 3-12. The state will implement PARCC assessments in 2014-15.

The state has focused on analyzing the alignment of existing state standards with CCSS and providing professional development on identified areas of difference including a greater focus on non-fiction texts, spiraled math standards, and a greater focus on depth than breadth.

The state has been working to increase the rigor of its standards and in 2009-10 reset cut scores on end-of-course exams and state assessments in math, reading and language arts, and science for grades 3-8 to more closely align with NAEP. (The old proficient cut score closely aligned with a GPA of D-, while the new cut aligns with a B.) To prepare students and teachers for new PARCC assessments, the state is developing a comprehensive plan to drive a gradual transition to CCSS-aligned assessment formats. TDOE is working with Achieve and ETS to identify gaps and develop new CCSS-aligned test items, and over the next two years, state tests will shift from an emphasis on low-level multiple choice questions to constructed response items that require higher-order thinking skills. The state will begin field testing these new test items this school year.

In its request, the TDOE also indicates that it will provide support to districts in meeting the technological demands of PARCC and will also facilitate a process to establish statewide curriculum aligned to CCSS for teacher and principal training programs.

Principle 2: Differentiated Accountability and Supports

1. Describe the **measures and metrics** the state proposes to use to make accountability determinations (including AMOs) to drive college and career-readiness. [See 2A and B]

Tennessee proposes an accountability system focusing on two types of measures: absolute proficiency for all students and achievement gap closure between groups of students. The state's request is somewhat unconventional in that it does not directly address proficiency measures for student subgroups; rather, it sets thresholds for improvement of subgroup achievement through gap closure measures. The request also includes an emphasis on transparency through accountability report cards that disaggregate student data.

Achievement targets will measure the increasing aggregate percentage of students who are proficient or advanced on state assessments (math and reading/language arts for 3rd and 7th grades, and aggregate measures for grades 3-8 in math and reading/language arts). Notably, the request focuses on school- and LEA-wide proficiency targets, indicating that subgroup level achievement targets are addressed through the achievement gap closure measures, which focus on a reduction of the percentage of students in key under-performing sub-groups (non-white students, economically

disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Learners). TDOE will engage with LEAs to determine LEA targets with the following general targets in mind: approximately 3-5% annual growth for all students using LEA-specific 2010-11 baselines and 6% annual gap closure across subgroups. LEAs will similarly engage with schools to establish school level AMOs.

The request indicates that proficiency measures and gap closure measures are treated as two distinct categories of AMOs, and every LEA and school will be evaluated based on its “achieve” or “miss” on each. To “achieve” in the proficiency category, an LEA/school must achieve more targets than it misses. To “achieve” in the gap closure category, an LEA/school must: achieve more targets than it misses, not widen achievement gaps because achievement within the same subgroup declined in three or more areas, or not decline in subgroup achievement on half or more targets. The request indicates schools will receive grades of A, B, C, D, or F, but does not specify how performance levels align with these ratings.

2. To what extent is **student growth** included in the accountability system? How is it used to advance college and career-readiness? [See 2A and B]

Student growth is primarily focused on closure of achievement gaps over time. The state's request also includes provisions for safe harbor using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), which aligns with the growth measurements used in educator evaluations. This is included to help protect against concerns of small districts of genuine differences in individual cohorts that could skew growth proficiency data.

3. How is the state including and advancing **subgroup accountability and closing achievement gaps**? [See 2A, B, and E]

The state's request focuses on school- and LEA-wide proficiency targets, indicating that subgroup level achievement targets are addressed through the achievement gap closure measures. Gap closure targets are based on reducing the percentage of students in key under-performing sub-groups (non-white students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Learners). (See Principle 2, Question 1 above). Report cards will also provide public accountability through disaggregated performance data for all subgroups.

4. Describe the state's general system of **supports and interventions** for all schools and those designated as priority, focus or reward schools. How does the state incorporate

deeper analysis of school performance such as through diagnostic review? [See 2A, D, E, F, G]

Tennessee will provide support to all schools through nine regional service centers whose staff serve as liaisons between the TDOE and LEAs. These staff members provide support including data analysis, training on implementation of state initiatives, professional development, and diagnosis and interventions based on root cause analysis.

The state request articulates a clear plan for Priority that revolves around four interventions, all of which include diagnostic review:

- TDOE-run Achievement School District (ASD), which provides autonomy on funding, facilities, personnel, and procurement;
- LEA-run “innovation zone”, which affords similar autonomies to those provided to the ASD;
- One of four SIG turnaround models (as approved by TDOE); and,
- LEA-led school improvement planning processes, subject to direct ASD intervention in the absence of improved results.

The request indicates the state's intention to ensure the lowest 5% of all schools be served through one of the first three strategies by 2014-15.

Unlike Priority schools, Focus schools capture a broader set of schools (representing over 60 districts) with varied challenges (e.g., some Focus schools will have large socioeconomic gaps whereas others may have large English language learner gaps). Tennessee has designed its Focus interventions on a school-by-school basis, managed by the LEA. All LEAs will:

- Submit a LEA-wide plan for how the LEA will manage achievement gap closure initiatives at the LEA level and for every identified Focus school
- Have the opportunity to apply for a competitive grant. In order to be competitive a LEA must develop plans to take on some of the following initiatives:
 - Time on Task
 - Extended school day
 - Cultural competency education
 - Co-teaching opportunities
 - Family support/community services
 - Root cause analysis
 - Feeder patterns within LEA
 - Inter-school strategic staffing of school leaders and teachers
 - Intra-school strategic staffing of teachers

Notably, Tennessee has expanded the mandate to identify 5% and 10% of Title I schools, respectively for Priority and Focus, to identify 5% and 10% of All schools. Tennessee's decision to do this is based on their philosophy that all schools should be held accountable to the same standards.

5. Describe how the state will address priority schools utilizing the USED **turnaround principles**. [See 2D]

In its request, Tennessee indicates its plans to develop an Achievement School District (ASD), a newly created division within the TDOE, which, using RTTT and I3 funding, will take over persistently low-performing schools using two strategies: 1) convert the school into a charter school, or 2) replace the LEA and manage the daily operations of the school. Schools absorbed by ASD will be determined by low student growth outcomes and feeder pattern analysis. Additionally, because the ASD will only be able to serve approximately 35 priority schools by 2014-15, the request also indicates plans to develop LEA-directed innovation zones, which will receive federal and state funding ear-marked for priority schools and autonomy over critical factors such as finances, staffing, program, and staffing.

6. How will the state build **capacity of schools and districts** to improve student achievement? [See 2G]

Tennessee's request has a major focus on building capacity of LEAs to support improved student achievement. The state intends to decrease its reliance on external vendors and focus on building capacity within regional service centers to in turn build school and district capacity. These regional service centers will provide data analysis, technical assistance, and support for instruction of special populations (i.e. ELLs and students with disabilities). The state's request also includes a plan to develop LEA-directed innovation zones to serve a broader population of priority schools than those supported through the ASD.

Principle 3: Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support

1. Describe the state's plan for development of **guidelines** or, if the state is further along in development, the state's **plan and system for educator evaluation** and the extent to which it advances student achievement. [See 3 A and B]

The state is currently in the process of implementing a statewide system of educator evaluation that exceeds ESEA Flexibility requirements. The state began full implementation of its educator evaluation system at the beginning of the 2011-12

school year. The evaluation system is administered annually for all teachers and principals, uses four summative ratings categories, and weights measures of student achievement as 50% of the overall evaluation. After field testing multiple options, the state adopted the Teacher Advancement Project (TAP) as their statewide rubric for teacher observation and developed an internal leadership rubric of professional practice, which make up the other 50% of the evaluation. Over the summer of 2011, TDOE partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching to train evaluators, dispatched implementation coaches, recruited full-time regional consultants to provide on-the-ground support for implementation of the system state wide, and trained nine field service centers to further assist LEAs in implementing the evaluation.

TDOE has developed a robust data management system that allows evaluators to enter observation scores and comments, allows educators to track their observation reports, calculates summative ratings, and gives LEA leaders and TDOE real-time access to data that will help determine where additional implementation support is needed.

State law requires that evaluation outcomes drive tenure attainment and revocation, but only for teachers who were not tenured prior to July 2011. Although not detailed in its requirements, state regulations require district leaders to make evaluation outcomes a factor in professional development, retention, promotion, and dismissal.

Principle 4: Administrative/Reporting Burden

1. Beyond an assurance, each state is required to examine and **reduce as appropriate administrative/reporting burdens** on LEAs. While it is not clearly included in USED's waiver application, does the state's request address this issue? [See full request]

Tennessee does not expressly address this issue in its request aside from providing an assurance in this area.