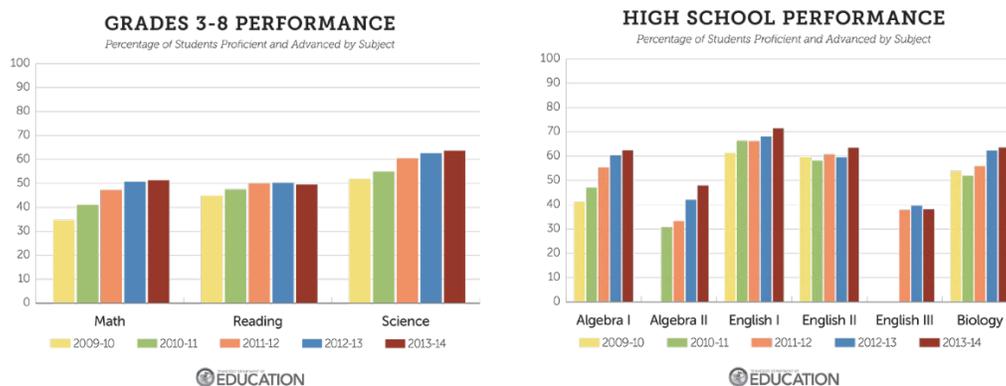


Tennessee’s application for Race to the Top articulated a compelling vision for education in Tennessee. This vision brought together all districts from across the state and created policy conditions favorable to executing a robust reform strategy. As the state and districts began launching comprehensive reform and support initiatives, Tennessee set the goal to become the fastest improving state in the nation by 2015, and to continue to close achievement gaps as we grew overall student achievement.

With the hard work of students, educators, and leaders, Tennessee’s ambitious growth goal became a reality. The release of the 2013 NAEP results exhibited the great potential of education in Tennessee as students’ scores improved by more than 21 points—the strongest state improvement in the nation. The achievement gains were reflected across national and state assessments. Tennessee scored above the national norm for the first time on the 2013 PLAN and EXPLORE assessments, marking substantial growth over prior years and serving as an indicator of the progress the state hopes to see on ACT results in the coming years. The state also demonstrated consistent improvements on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) math, reading, science, and high school end-of-course exams. More than 100,000 additional Tennessee students are on grade level in math compared to 2010, and 57,000 additional students are on grade level in science. Achievement gaps for minority students narrowed in math and reading at both the 3-8 grades and high school levels. These successes provide both a reason to celebrate and a further call to action. Tennessee now knows its ability to improve and to achieve, and it must continue to do so for students across the state.



Tennessee’s Race to the Top initiatives continue to be a foundational component of our strategy to reach the ambitious goals already achieved and those toward which the state continues to strive. With the opportunity to invest in meaningful changes for students, Tennessee raised expectations with higher standards and assessments, improved data systems to support instruction, supported teachers and leaders with strategies to increase effectiveness, broadened its turnaround efforts, and launched an innovative STEM plan across the state. Through these projects, the state recognized that successful outcomes depended on the state evolving into the right support system for the students, educators, leaders, and districts that engage in these efforts in classrooms every day. To do so, the state prioritized key strategies in all of its initiatives:

- *Invest in Strong Partnerships:* Improving educational outcomes for students demands investment and collaboration from a whole community of supports. The partnership of districts, school leaders, and teachers was absolutely central in achieving results. Whether through locally driven initiatives

such as the LEA Scope of Work Fund or through statewide efforts using highly effective teachers to lead their peers such as the Reward School Ambassador Program and Core Coaches, the experience, needs, strategies, and talents of Tennessee’s educators set the stage for successful policies and implementation. The state also partnered with nationally recognized organizations that brought experience and expertise to the state’s educational reforms. For example, the National Institute on Excellence in Teaching created the state’s first evaluation data system and the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation developed college and career-ready standards and professional development resources for teacher preparation programs. The state relied on these strategic partnerships to ensure that the reform efforts were both effective and sustainable.

- *Continuously Improve Service:* As Tennessee boldly implemented policies and supports designed to improve student achievement, the state remained dedicated to evaluating its work and seeking opportunities to improve its service delivery. The state developed an internal research team, the Office of Research and Policy, to provide ongoing analysis of the state’s implementation efforts. By using data and strong analyses to drive decisions, program teams were able to make adjustments and to scale up successful strategies based on this feedback. The state also partnered with an external evaluation group, Vanderbilt University’s Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development, to capture the long-term impacts of the state’s reform agenda through in-depth research studies and educator feedback collected through the First to the Top Survey. The state used these findings from these teams to make improvements to policy and implementation, such as adjusting evaluation components and the observation rubric based in part on stakeholder feedback from the First to the Top Survey. The findings surfaced by both of these teams allow the state to improve the quality of the supports in place and to inform policy moving forward.
- *Align Resources to Priorities:* Recognizing that Race to the Top provided a unique opportunity to create, to explore, and to scale strategies to improve education in Tennessee, the state also knew that this resource would not sustain these efforts moving forward. The state strategically reorganized its internal capacity to embed these initiatives within the state’s structures. Divisions for Teachers & Leaders and Curriculum & Instruction were created and took ownership of efforts in human capital strategy and the transition to more rigorous standards and assessments. To better serve districts, the compliance-driven regional service centers were realigned into Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE), dedicated to providing tailored support to districts in improving student outcomes. As a result, the state is not experiencing a cliff with the end of the grant period, but is instead well-positioned to continue to support districts in implementing the key strategies to improve student achievement.

Ultimately, the state is dedicated to being a service-oriented agency, supporting districts and stakeholders in the delivery of a high-quality education to all Tennessee students.

The state, districts, and partners have put in a tremendous amount of work in executing our plan under the assurance areas of Race to the Top, which has been a driving force behind the progress we are seeing. The sections below capture and highlight Tennessee’s strategy, key successes, reflections, and ongoing efforts in the Race to the Top assurance areas.

### **Standards & Assessments**

Tennessee recognizes the importance of setting high expectations for students and developing the necessary supports for educators to implement them effectively. After increasing the rigor through the



Tennessee Diploma Project and becoming an early adopter of college and career ready standards, the state focused its Race to the Top projects on creating aligned and transparent assessments, strong instructional materials and supports, high quality teacher trainings, and strategic support for schools, districts, and higher education institutions. By providing educators with valuable resources and guiding them through using them effectively, the state aimed to fully support teachers and leaders in the transition to higher standards and more rigorous assessments.

Over the course of the grant period, the state provided multiple opportunities for students and educators, including school leaders, to engage with new expectations in standards and assessments through department-led trainings, year-long leadership courses, and low-stake assessments aligned to the new standards. Key successes of this work include the following:

- Through three years of summer trainings, over 45,000 educators delved into the new standards and instructional strategies. A 2012 evaluation found that the trainings led to TVAAS gains equivalent to one extra week of instruction for each of the students in participating teachers' classrooms. The state also provided professional development and resources to higher education faculty, introducing the more rigorous standards to the programs charged with preparing teachers and leaders in Tennessee.
- Over 5,000 school and district leaders participated in Leadership Courses designed to support the implementation of higher standards and strategic statewide initiatives. After actively engaging with strategies, reviews of student work, and other leaders, these participants are better equipped to lead their schools in implementing strategic reforms.
- Among numerous optional resources, the state offered constructed response assessments that mirrored more rigorous assessments and online writing assessments, exposing roughly 500,000 students and their teachers to more advanced benchmark and summative assessments.

The broad array of supports and resources effectively supported Tennessee's educators in the transition to new standards and set them up for success on more rigorous assessments.

The state's implementation of these projects surfaced important lessons. First and foremost, effective communication with educators around timing, resources, and expectations was and remains essential. The state actively involved educators in communication planning through the Common Core Leadership Council, and quickly implemented TNCore update emails and a website with key dates, instructional resources, and practice assessments. These robust and frequent interactions with stakeholders helped to maintain their investment in these efforts through the transition period. Second, the state also adopted the model of relying on local talent to deliver its trainings. Highly effective teachers were selected and trained to be Core Coaches, tasked with delivering the state's intensive summer professional development sessions. Based on survey results, these peer leaders were widely accepted by participants who appreciated their active knowledge of Tennessee context and classrooms. By using educators to inform communication and to deliver content, the state created stronger relationships and a robust network of teacher leaders.

During the extension year, the state will complete the School Team Training Series and offer an additional Leadership Course. The School Team Training Series involves three rounds of train-the-trainer sessions delivered periodically throughout the year. The state will complete these offerings and determine how future iterations of state trainings may be delivered. The state will also offer a Leadership Course to support principals and district leaders to continue to deepen understanding of the



instructional shifts and practical strategies to support educators, likely focusing on some of the material offered in prior leadership courses as well as statewide strategies such as Response to Instruction and Intervention. These support offerings will provide a strong communication and training mechanism as the state continues to employ stronger interventions and transitions to new assessments.

Beyond Race to the Top, the state will look for opportunities to use the network of Core Coaches and Learning Team Leaders for disseminating curriculum and instructional supports, particularly with the onboarding of a new assessment in the 2015-16 school year. The state intentionally shifted to a new, more sustainable model of training delivery, the School Team Training Series, which relied less on direct training from the state and more on a turnkey model with Learning Leaders redelivering content to their school teams. The state will introduce a new assessment next year, TNReady, and will be eager to provide the support educators need to understand both the link between standards and assessments and general information regarding a new test. The state expects to continue to utilize the strong network of teacher leaders across the state to help carry these and new supports to their peers.

### **Data Systems to Support Instruction**

The state's strategy around data systems and supports aimed to increase access and usability to drive instructional practices. By improving existing data systems, creating new systems, and aligning reporting displays to educator needs and practice, the state sought to provide educators with efficient, accurate data that could be immediately used in the classroom and direct strategy. Professional development and supports would bolster educators' data skills, ultimately creating a more data-driven educational culture to respond to students' achievement trends and needs.

The state developed two key data systems through the grant period, partnering with stakeholders to ensure usability of each. Internally, the state launched a project to strengthen the data structures for collecting and displaying valuable student information, ultimately improving data governance, accuracy, and utility. For educators, this system will offer customizable Educator Dashboards that capture student information including contacts, special designations, achievement data, assessments, attendance, behavior, and historical data points. While the state completed most of the development of the base system and the dashboards, the links to local systems are still in progress. As a result, educators do not yet have access to these dashboards, but the state expects all elements to be completed by the end of the grant period. Externally, the state completed the development of a state longitudinal data system that connects K-12 data with higher education and workforce data from other state agencies. This system offers public transparency on state data trends, such as dashboards on school performance, high school completion trends, and wage data by educational attainment. The state is using the system both to track progress against strategic initiatives such as the Governor's Drive to 55 program to increase degree attainment and to inform policies within and across agency-provided services. Both of these data systems provide education stakeholders with valuable insights into the impact of instructional and programmatic strategies.

Beyond the data systems, the state instituted new supports for educators in using data to drive instruction. In terms of resources, Tennessee educators now have access to more user-friendly value-added reports, as well as training modules on understanding and using value-added data and other formative instructional practices. Over 300,000 educators have taken the online modules, building their data comfort and identifying specific strategies in instructional decision making. Districts also have the support of the CORE Data Analysts, regionally-placed specialists who assist school and district leaders in using data strategically. CORE offices also host data consortiums in which district leaders engage in data



discussions ranging from analysis to collaborative problem solving. As a result of these efforts, educators are better equipped and supported in using data, and from the teacher to the state level, data has become a central part of education conversations.

In its data initiatives, the state was exposed to major lessons regarding data system development and producing actionable data. While systems may be built quickly if they operate in isolation, the benefit of integrating multiple systems with one another is a more seamless data environment and, in turn, more robust and accurate data for stakeholders. In both data systems, the state found that stakeholders truly value data being connected in one place for their consumption, a service delivery that requires a commitment to integrating systems. In terms of producing actionable data, the state's efforts on the educator dashboards and improving value-added reports reinforced the fact that visualization of data is almost as important to its usability as the data itself. Feedback collected from focus groups proposed new ways of aligning displays to the actual circumstances and decisions educators make on a daily basis. Based on these experiences, the state will continue to integrate its systems and engage stakeholders in feedback sessions to ensure data systems meet the needs of educators to drive their instruction.

In the extension year, the state will finalize the revamped state system by completing the links to local systems. With this data flowing between the two systems, districts and teachers will have the ability to access the dashboards as instructional tools. Additionally, the state longitudinal data system will complete public-facing dashboards while also expanding to include other state agencies. As these systems mature, the state will continue to offer the data supports through CORE offices and by improving reporting needed to ensure strategic use. The state anticipates that these projects will be completed and the supports sustained through other funding sources by the end of the extension period.

Moving forward, the state must maintain its focus on quality data access and usability. As the dashboards are launched, the state will continue to support districts in transitioning to the new system, refining its data practices and services as additional stakeholders begin using the system. As districts collect more data through evaluation and other systems, they will also need ongoing support in using this data strategically. The state will prioritize the user experience of the data systems, encouraging integration of systems when feasible to better connect and display data for educators. The impact of these improvements over time will largely depend on local implementation both in data collection and use, and the state must be proactive in offering support and guidance for data to be an effective tool for educators.

### **Great Teachers & Leaders**

With the fundamental belief that the educators serving in our schools are the primary lever for improving outcomes for students, the state continues to work towards the robust vision for a human capital strategy that better prepares educators, measures their effectiveness to improve practice, and provides recognition and opportunities for growth. Building from its rich history of value-added data and the launch of a statewide evaluation model in 2011, the state has pursued efforts to draw on effectiveness data to inform key decisions for preparation programs, educator support structures, and leadership models that couple recognition with strategic use of talent.

The state's initial and ongoing strategy leverages robust human capital data with the ideas and talent of preparation programs and districts to maximize the impact of each element of the educator pipeline. In



order to understand both the needs and existing assets of districts, the state has continued to place a priority on its evaluation work to gauge the effectiveness of both teachers and leaders through multiple measures, including student growth and observation data. While honing and improving the evaluation model throughout the grant period, the state also emphasized supporting stakeholders in using that data to drive improvements. Through grants supporting teacher residencies, strategic compensation, and teacher-leader models, the state has sought to partner with districts and preparation programs to explore tailored supports and systems that respond to the real needs of a district with the existing talent and pipelines determining its success.

Four years after launching the state's TEAM evaluation system, stakeholders have more information available to them than ever before on the effectiveness of educators. Through the Educator Preparation Program Report Card and the School Leader Study, preparation programs are using outcome data on completers' placement and classroom effectiveness to inform curriculum and program improvements, and state policymakers are using data to streamline and better support both licensing and program approval. Districts are better able to tailor their partnerships to provide the most effective supports to their educators, and in building out their strategic compensation models, they are using performance to inform salary and bonus structures. Within schools, educators are receiving feedback on practice multiple times throughout the year and have new opportunities to expand their leadership responsibilities based on their strengths. All of these improvements for teachers and leaders represent dramatic shifts in practice, and students are benefitting from having stronger educators with stronger supports in their classrooms. Ultimate proof of the state's progress has been seen through significant gains in student achievement each year over the grant period on state and national assessments.

During the extension year, the state's efforts within this assurance area are focused on finalizing sustainability and transition plans for some grantees and completing a new human capital data system for evaluation and licensure. The TNLEAD project that provided districts with the opportunity to explore leadership models includes four grantees with approved plans to scale their strategies during the 2014-15 school year, and similarly, partners providing targeted mathematics and literacy interventions will use the extension year to analyze their impact and to transition their programs off of Race to the Top funding. The state will also use the extension year to complete the new data system for evaluation and licensure, dedicated to delivering a more user-friendly tool that eases reporting, automates processes, and bolsters efficient interpretation and use of key human capital data points. The state anticipates that all of these initiatives will complete their respective scopes of work by the end of the extension period.

In looking ahead, the state sees two primary areas of focus to ensure the growth and continuous improvements of these human capital strategies. First, the state must continue to support all stakeholders in increasing the quality of implementation of the evaluation models. As districts explore linking decisions on human resources investment to evaluation data, accurately capturing the effectiveness of educators will continue to be paramount for developing effective supports and making strategic human capital decisions. The state is continuing and expanding supports such as TEAM Coaches and TEAM administrator coaches in improving the accuracy of observations and school leader evaluations; the Tennessee Higher Education Commission will continue to support preparation programs in understanding effectiveness data and program implications; and as districts design and implement additional human capital strategies in the areas of recruitment, support, recognition, retention, and compensation, the state will continue to provide technical assistance to share successful strategies and lessons learned from the grantees during Race to the Top. Second, a high emphasis will be placed on ensuring districts are supported in maximizing cohesiveness in their human capital initiatives, especially



as it relates to equitable access to effective teachers. The state must reinforce and support districts in the integration of these efforts with one another in order to achieve maximum impact. This will require ongoing work to highlight and draw upon the experiences of high performing schools and districts across the state.

### **Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools**

As the state's accountability system identified low-performing schools and schools with significant achievement gaps, the state's projects in this assurance area established a diverse set of supports to ignite and sustain the turnaround capacity of these schools. In establishing the Achievement School District (ASD), the state sought to create a district dedicated to turning the bottom 5 percent of schools into the top 25 percent of schools within five years by using a portfolio model of high-quality charter school partners. For other struggling schools, the state would launch initiative to provide targeted assistance, either through grants or direct services. Overall, the goal of these efforts would be to provide resources and supports to persistently low-performing schools to improve student outcomes and to learn lessons about how districts can intervene in struggling schools.

The turnaround work demonstrated high potential for sustained improvements in these schools, giving students new opportunities and trajectories. In the ASD, schools outpaced the state in reading and math gains last year, and six ASD schools are already out of the bottom 10 percent of schools statewide. These gains signal significant changes in the culture and instruction in these schools. The ASD is poised to include 30 schools serving more than 10,000 students in the 2015-16 school year, continuing to expand its reach and supports. For schools that received grants to invest in instructional or turnaround supports, leaders tailored their activities to the unique needs and challenges of their buildings. As a result of this flexibility, many of these schools successfully narrowed achievement gaps. Schools receiving Focus grants outperformed other schools in percent gains for Economically Disadvantaged students in almost every subject, and over 60% of the schools receiving Renewal grants achieved sustained improvements in most subjects. All of these schools are successfully turning themselves around, improving the outcomes for their students.

The state recognizes that turnaround schools require unique support, and these projects provided insights into successful strategies. First, opportunities to collaborate and to draw on the experiences of peers was extremely useful to turnaround leaders. In the ASD, this took the form of charter operators coming together in Practice Dialogues where they tackled common problems, identified best practices, and discussed scaling opportunities. For turnaround leaders, the state offered the Turnaround Principal Residency Program that combined professional development with peer learning to exchange ideas and practices. In both cases, turnaround leaders relied on one another as sounding boards for developing strong strategies in their schools. Second, the strongest supports tended to be those closest to the school itself. Beyond the school-driven grant activities, turnaround schools also received external support from teacher-leaders from high-performing schools and consulting firms. These partners were most successful when they spent substantive time in the schools, learning the context and building the relationships to support strong collaboration. The state must still further investigate the strategies used in many of these schools to identify scalable opportunities, but these lessons will inform the next set of state supports for turnaround schools.

In the extension year, the state will continue to support the expansion and quality implementation of the ASD, as well as the college access opportunities created through the Tennessee College Access and



Success Network (TCASN). The ASD has been cognizant to prioritize quality over scale, and the state is working with the ASD leadership to solidify its sustainability planning after the grant period. The TCASN, which provides grants to local districts to promote college access and is developing college coaching materials, will use the extension year to close out its grants and complete its last training modules. While these projects' grant funding will end, both will continue to operate and to serve the state's need for turnaround and college access supports after the grant period.

After Race to the Top, the state will continue to focus on the Achievement School District and the state's ability to support turnaround efforts. The ASD has an expansion plan in place for the next five years, and it has already identified enough charter partners to meet its growth trajectory. As it does so, the ASD will continue to focus on the quality of its partners and their ability to turnaround new schools. Apart from the ASD, the state is planning to draw on School Improvement Grants and other opportunities to continue to provide tailored supports to low-performing schools, both directly and through its CORE offices. Through a combination of initiatives, the state will continue to try to reach more and more of the schools in need of these services and supports.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)**

Aiming to meet the evolving demand for STEM skills, the state sought to establish a strong network of stakeholders to invest in and support improvements and opportunities in STEM education. In addition to providing more robust professional development opportunities, the state planned to create regional centers for STEM activity that facilitated partnerships and centralized resources. At the school level, the state would provide opportunities for educators and schools to engage with STEM in new and innovative ways, surfacing successful practices and sharing them through their regional partners. Overall, these initiatives sought to improve the quality of STEM education and experiences for students in Tennessee.

With Race to the Top support, Tennessee launched the STEM Innovation Network and a series of STEM professional development opportunities. The Tennessee STEM Innovation Network (TSIN) created six regional Innovation Hubs that fostered partnerships with local businesses and higher education institutions, linking classrooms to opportunities and resources to explore STEM in the classroom and beyond. These hubs have brought a new level of engagement with STEM to their districts through innovative initiatives such as the STEMmobile lab and partnerships with businesses like Eastman Chemical Company and the Tennessee Valley Authority. The state also partnered with higher education institutions across the state to deliver high-quality STEM professional development sessions for educators. While facilitating collaboration and new partnerships, the skills developed in these sessions resulted in stronger design, implementation, and content knowledge in STEM instruction as measured through observations. Over 700 teachers' students benefitted from this deeper engagement in STEM pedagogy and content support. Educators now have a support structure, partnerships, and resources to provide high-quality STEM education that builds from successful practices, industry experience, and content expertise.

Through these efforts, the state found the central importance of regional partners in building and sustaining a STEM community around their districts. Innovation Hubs that collaborate with local higher education institutions and establish strong rapport with businesses were able to both offer more resources to their districts and better ensure their sustainability. Considering the pipeline of their communities, these partners invested in schools and hubs to create new opportunities for students in the STEM fields.



In the extension year, the state will continue building its network of STEM hubs and schools and supporting innovative strategies in classrooms across the state. Due to late launches, one of the Innovation Hubs and two of the schools tasked with incubating strong STEM instructional strategies will continue under grant assistance for an additional year. By the end of the grant period, all of the hub will have shifted to their sustainability models and the schools' STEM initiatives will be absorbed back into their local districts. To further understand classroom best practices, the state will also continue to surface strategies from the Innovative Educator Network in which educators use mini-grants to invest in integrating technology into instruction and personalized learning. These projects will continue to both bolster the state's STEM network and enrich the available strategies and experiences in STEM instruction, providing Tennessee with a richer STEM landscape.

Moving forward, the state will seek to further integrate STEM into its efforts in increasing rigorous standards and opportunities to engage in career-building educational experiences. The state has launched a STEM Leadership Council to delve into existing resources and assets and to develop a strategy to streamline the pipeline from improved standards and instruction in core subjects to advanced course work in STEM-related fields. The state will continue to emphasize local and regional partnerships to create opportunities for students to engage with STEM in practice. As Tennessee's experience in strengthening STEM education deepens, students will continue to be better prepared for postsecondary and career opportunities.