

# AAUW-TN Endorses Tennessee Academic Standards

## Tennessee Academic Standards Are Working

According to the Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress), Tennessee is the fastest academically improving state in the country. From 2011 to 2013 in Tennessee, fourth-graders had moved from 46th to 37th in math and 41st to 31st in reading.<sup>1</sup> This accomplishment reflects a statewide effort to train over 70,000 teachers statewide and invest over \$500 million in this process.

## Preparing Tennessee's Future Workforce & Attracting Employers

These standards are necessary for Tennessee students to be college and career ready by the time they graduate high school. Having a better educated workforce means that Tennessee can continue to be a destination state for national and international employers like Nissan and Volkswagen.

## Closing the Achievement Gap(s)

AAUW has a history of supporting closing the achievement gaps that all girls experience in math and science. Although girls are more likely to receive a college degree, they are also more likely to take remedial coursework on entering college and less likely to do well in math and the sciences. This trend holds true for students of color.

Tennessee Academic Standards clarify what students need to know and know how to do by the end of each grade. This skills-based approach, coupled with new teaching strategies, identifies what a student knows and what a student needs to improve on, which build the foundation for greater proficiency.

Recent analysis by the Education Trust of national tests (National Educational Assessment Program, NAEP) shows that, over the period of 2003 and 2013, Tennessee 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores have improved on average by twelve points in the scale score and stand at 240. In comparison, on average, the test scores of African American students have experienced a thirteen point gain and stand at 221.<sup>2</sup>

## What You Can Do to Ensure that Tennessee Students Are College and Career Ready

1. Have both you and your organization endorse [Expect More, Achieve More](#).
2. Share this information and the [EMAM website](#) with individuals that have questions
3. Ask your State Representative and Senator to **stay on track and improve and enhance the existing Tennessee Standards**. We have come a long way to strengthen academic achievement in Tennessee. After all, this is about the future opportunity for our children and students, as well as the State of Tennessee.
4. Provide feedback to Governor Haslam on the state standards: [Tennessee Education Standards Review](#).

## What are Academic Standards?

Academic standards determine what students need to know by the end of each grade in order to demonstrate proficiency and be on track to be college and career ready by the time they graduate high school.

The Tennessee academic standards implemented in the 2011 – 2012 school year clarify and improve what kids need to know by each grade so that Tennessee students are prepared for college, an entry level job and life no matter the city or neighborhood where they live. These standards focus specifically on math and English language arts skills, as well as literacy in history, social studies, sciences and technical fields.

In Tennessee, the Education Commissioner determines what these standards will be. The local school district chooses the curriculum to meet those standards, and the teachers develop their own lesson plans for that curriculum.

An example of a math standard is that by the end of third grade, each student must know multiplication and division. For language arts, a second grader must know how to identify the characters, plot and setting of a story. *How* students learn these skills is determined by the curriculum that a local school district selects and by the teacher's lesson plan.

These academic standards ensure that reliable, consistent comparisons of student achievement can be made on the basis of measuring student to student and skill to skill across the state. Ultimately, it is the hope that implementing these standards will eliminate the need to spend \$3 billion annually on remediation of students who enter college or university without basic math and reading skills, for these are precisely the students who have difficulty in attaining a degree.

## Where Tennessee Stands Today

There is good news: According to the Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress), Tennessee is the fastest academically improving state in the country. From 2011 to 2013 in Tennessee, fourth-graders had moved from 46th to 37th in math and 41st to 31st in reading.<sup>3</sup>

However, Tennessee must stay the course on its academic standards as there is still work to be done to improve academic achievement for its students. This year 60% of entering freshmen at public colleges and universities in Tennessee required some form of remediation.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, only 15% of Tennessee students graduated at levels that are college-ready.<sup>5</sup> Nationally, only 25% of students that take the ACT in preparation for college demonstrate that they have mastered skills in all subjects to be college-ready.<sup>6</sup> The truth of the matter is that most high school graduates have not yet acquired basic math and English language skills, let alone critical thinking skills, to prepare them for post-secondary education. This gap between education achievement and preparedness continues to fuel the professional education community and business community in Tennessee to remain committed to the Tennessee academic standards.

### Which Organizations Endorse Tennessee Academic Standards?<sup>1</sup>

In Tennessee, a new coalition has formed called *Expect More, Achieve More: Raising the Bar in Tennessee Schools* in support of Tennessee state standards.<sup>1</sup> There are 23 advisory council member organizations that reflect representation from business, labor, school systems and rural areas. While the complete list of advisory council members is attached to this brief, key organizations serving on the advisory council to this coalition are:

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| Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents (TOSS) | State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) |
| Tennessee Education Association (TEA)                   | Tennessee School Board Association                 |
| Tennessee Business Roundtable                           | Tennessee Parent Teacher Association               |
| Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce                      |  |
| Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce                   |  |

*Expect More, Achieve More* has also secured the endorsement of a variety of local business, education and philanthropic organizations across Tennessee. For example, Metro Nashville Public Schools and Murfreesboro City Schools have endorsed the campaign, as have local chambers of commerce.<sup>1</sup>

After the work of the Tennessee Diploma Project, Tennessee adopted its academic standards as part of the First to the Top application for federal Race to the Top funds (offered under the Recovery Act). In the school year 2011-2012, Tennessee began to implement these standards, and by 2013-2014, these standards were fully implemented in all grades K-8 and high school. Throughout the implementation process, Tennessee has continued to use the Tennessee Comprehensive Achievement Program (TCAP) in order to test student achievement and will continue to do so through school year 2014-2015.<sup>7</sup>

Next year (2015-2016), Tennessee will implement a new assessment test, called [Tennessee Ready](#), or TNReady, which will replace TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) and align more closely with current academic standards. TN READY will

incorporate sections where students must write responses, as well as math sections that must be done without a calculator. Measurement, Inc. is the company that administers the assessment.

Initially, student test scores will make up 10% of teacher evaluations and eventually climb to 35%.<sup>8</sup> During the spring 2014 legislative session, the Tennessee Education Association (TEA) was successful in its bid to postpone the implementation of a new assessment and to reduce the proportional representation of student achievement tests on teacher evaluations from 35% to 25%. TEA has consistently sought to prevent student achievement tests to be tied to retaining the teacher licensure and to reduce the overall representation of student tests on teacher evaluations.<sup>9</sup>

## Tennessee's Process of Developing Standards

Tennessee began the process toward developing common standards in 2006 after the election of Governor Bredesen, when his administration sought to align Algebra 2 curriculum standards first before addressing other

aspects of a curriculum.<sup>10</sup> In Tennessee, the Education Commissioner has the role to establish curricular standards.<sup>11</sup> In 2007, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce delivered Tennessee an “F” in “Truth in Advertising” in student proficiency. That same year the Tennessee Alignment Committee launched the Tennessee Diploma Project, which sought to establish curricular standards that would prepare students for college and career readiness.

Many Tennessean students were proficient in state math and reading tests, but very few were proficient in scores on NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). For example, for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 87% were proficient in reading in state test and only 26% in NAEP; for math 87% were proficient in state tests and 21% in NAEP.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, occupational data revealed that over two-thirds of jobs in the 10-year horizon (2000 – 2010) would require some post-secondary education. By defining this gap between proficiency and career-readiness, the State of Tennessee galvanized the school system and business community to up the ante on education standards.

The Tennessee Alignment Committee was comprised of state and local government officials and business, postsecondary and K-12 leaders from across the state. In focus groups conducted in six cities across the state (e.g. Memphis, Jackson, Northeast Tennessee, Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Nashville) with local chambers and business roundtables, the Committee found that businesses required graduates to have mastered basic math and communications skills, as well as the ability to think critically, problem solve and to apply their skills in real world environments. The report summarized these requirements in the following way:

- stronger math and science skills, but especially have mastered basic math; in addition, post-secondary school or work requires that students be able to think critically toward a focused solution
- stronger communication skills, including both verbal skills and writing skills
- to be able to work in teams to solve real world problems
- to be able to think, apply, and use what they know
- to have a strong work ethic; be at work regularly and be on time<sup>13</sup>

Tennessee was one of 30 states to participate in the American Diploma Project Network. On July 30, 2010, Tennessee’s State Board of Education unanimously adopted the Tennessee State Academic Standards. In the subsequent Race to the Top application, the legislature also signed on to the adoption of these standards.<sup>14</sup> Race to the Top required that states adopt standards that aligned with evidence-based national requirements for education.

This brief was prepared by Dia Cirillo, public policy chair of AAUW-TN and the Murfreesboro Branch. For additional information, she can be reached at AAUWTNPolicy@gmail.com.

## Glossary of Terms

**Academic Standards** are a set of skills that a child must master in a given period of time, for example by the end of the school year. In other words, standards define what children should know and be able to do by the end of each grade year. By identifying the knowledge and skills that each grade level must master, states working with local school districts establish the basis by which students can be compared across districts and throughout the state. In Tennessee, the Education Commissioner has the role to establish state standards. Local school systems then develop the curricula guides that are used to teach those standards.

**A curriculum guide** is a structured document that delineates the philosophy, goals, objectives, learning experiences, instructional resources and assessments that comprise a specific educational program. Additionally, it represents an articulation of what students should know and be able to do and supports teachers in knowing how to achieve these goals.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Camera. *Tennessee’s Common Core Backtrack Strands Teachers, Students*. The Tennessean. November 22, 2014

<sup>2</sup> State Academic Performance and Improvement Tool. The Education Trust. [http://www.edtrust.org/naep\\_state\\_scores/scatterplot#4;Math;All Students;TN](http://www.edtrust.org/naep_state_scores/scatterplot#4;Math;All Students;TN)

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<sup>3</sup> Lauren Camera. *Tennessee's Common Core Backtrack Strands Teachers, Students*. The Tennessean. November 22, 2014

<sup>4</sup> John Morgan, Joe DiPietro and Richard Rhoda. *Tennessee Higher Education Officials Endorse Common Core Standards*. Cleveland Daily Banner. May 2014.

[http://www.clevelandbanner.com/view/full\\_story/24712023/article-Tennessee-higher-education-officials-endorse-the-Common-Core-Standards](http://www.clevelandbanner.com/view/full_story/24712023/article-Tennessee-higher-education-officials-endorse-the-Common-Core-Standards)

<sup>5</sup> ACT National and State Scores. 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2011/states.html>

<sup>6</sup> [expectmoretn.org](http://expectmoretn.org)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.tncore.org/about\\_tn\\_standards.aspx](http://www.tncore.org/about_tn_standards.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> Expect More Achieve More. *Weekly News Update*. December 15, 2014. <http://expectmoretn.org/tag/tnready/>

<sup>9</sup> [teateachers.org](http://teateachers.org)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Dr. Lana Seivers on June 11, 2014

<sup>11</sup> In education, there are distinct roles that each tier of government fulfills. State Chief Education Officers establish standardized testing guidelines, distribute state education funding and set broad goals. Local school districts guide the use of local funding and establish the curriculum, disciplinary policies and decisions regarding human resources. Principals also have a direct responsibility in these decisions. The Federal Government through the USDOE provides about 10% of education funding, a total of about \$79 billion. In addition, the USDOE directs the disbursement of Title 1 funds for low income school districts and grants, as well as monitors school data and requirements regarding standards for testing for each grade according to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind).

<sup>12</sup> State of Tennessee. *The Tennessee Diploma Project: Aligned Expectations*. PowerPoint. January 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> State of Tennessee. *Common Core State Standards: History and Fact Sheet*. 2013