



New School Year, New Lessons: Education Policies That Deserve a Closer Look

Several bills passed last year that are set to take effect in classrooms throughout the 2025 school year and we're keeping a close eye on how they'll impact students, educators, and families. These policies will shape learning environments and access to opportunities across Tennessee, and it's critical to ensure their implementation supports all students' ability to thrive.

Public Dollars, Private Schools: State Voucher Program Puts Public School Funding at Risk

Public Chapter 7

The "Education Freedom Scholarship," establishes a universal school voucher program that began this school year with 20,000 vouchers initially awarded. Public dollars should support public schools, and with the program expected to expand in subsequent years, EdTrust-Tennessee remains committed to monitoring the financial implications of the initiative.



[For more information check out EdTrust-Tennessee's Vouchers: What Now & Important Things for Students and Families to Know.](#)

Removal of DEI Programs that Help Students Succeed

DEI Departments Act Public Chapter 458 | Dismantle DEI Act Public Chapter 494 | Cause of Action Higher Education Institutes Public Chapter 245

There were multiple laws that passed this session that threatened Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). These laws reduced crucial programs, resources, and opportunities like eliminating Tennessee's educator diversity policy, and removing multicultural offices on higher education campuses. These programs have been critical to educational success for marginalized communities in K-12 schools and higher education institutions.



[For more information check out EdTrust-Tennessee's Coalition for Truth in Our Classroom's DEI advocacy toolkit and the ACLU of Tennessee's FAQ: Attacks on DEI in Tennessee's Schools and Government.](#)

New Policy Could Penalize Educators for Respecting LGBTQ+ Students

Public Chapter 453

This law prohibits certain employers, public school staff, faculty at higher education institutions, and students from being required to use an individual's preferred pronouns or name. With the new law

employers and public schools can face legal consequences if they use preferred pronouns and names without parental consent. It also states an individual — whether a teacher or staff member — may face legal action if the preferred name or pronoun is inconsistent with the person’s legal name or gender.

New Processes for Struggling Schools

Public Chapter 464

This law introduces a new system for dealing with Tennessee’s lowest-performing schools. Struggling schools are put into one of three tiers by the state, with each tier bringing additional levels of intervention to the school. With this law the state now has the authority to close schools that don’t improve. It is critical that low-performing schools get support and resources to improve, and that state officials ensure interventions are responsive to the needs of local communities.

Turnaround Pilot Program Made Permanent to Boost Support for Schools

Public Chapter 525

This law makes Tennessee’s school turnaround program permanent and replaces the pilot model with stricter rules for how struggling schools are selected, improved, and reviewed over a 4-year cycle. This law gives the state a more hands-on, structured way to help struggling schools improve, with local voices and outside experts leading the work. There is a cap on how many schools can be enrolled in the program at once; qualifying schools that aren’t enrolled in this program may then have to resort to other interventions.

Future Teacher Scholarship Expanded to Support More Teachers

Public Chapter 488

This new law enables the Future Teacher Scholarship to support more future Tennessee teachers by expanding eligibility, changing the award to an exact dollar amount, and decreasing the required teaching commitment to 2 years.

New Licensure Changes Allows Non-Traditional Teachers in Hard-to-Fill Subjects

Public Chapter 328

This law tries to help with Tennessee’s teacher shortage by letting schools bring in people with a bachelor’s degree, in any field, or those still finishing teacher training to temporarily fill teaching spots. It’s especially aimed at hard-to-fill subjects like career and technical education making it easier for industry experts to teach classes like engineering, nursing, cybersecurity, food science, and cosmetology. While it gives schools flexibility, it also means some students might be taught by adults who’ve never been in a classroom before.

Student Voices Matter: Nonvoting Student Representatives Join TN School Boards

Public Chapter 359

This new law requires that every Tennessee school district with at least one high school create a policy allowing one junior or senior student to serve as a nonvoting student representative on the school board. While they can't vote, these students can share their perspectives and help school leaders make decisions that center students' needs and experiences. **Be sure to check out your district's policy for how to apply and get involved.**

Religious Books Protected Under Age Appropriate Materials Act

Public Chapter 270

This new law amends the Age Appropriate Materials Act to include protections for religious books, stating that an LEA or public charter school governing body cannot remove material from a library collection solely because it is religious. While we are excited to see steps being taken towards protection for books, educators and librarians will need to consider how they are going to implement this new law given some religious materials are not necessarily age appropriate.

Voluntary Pre-K Now Available to Additional Students

Public Chapter 225 and Public Chapter 192

Multiple laws were passed this session that expanded eligibility requirements for the voluntary Pre-K program, allowing enrollment beyond children who are considered at-risk. This means that children who are not considered at-risk, including those who live in the LEA's school zone and children of LEA employees, may be able to enroll in the program if there's space available after all eligible at-risk students are enrolled. The Tennessee Department of Education will set the initial eligibility cutoff date to determine whether space is available for children not classified as at-risk. While expanded access to early childhood education is critical, prioritizing at-risk students remains an important priority as they often face the greatest barriers to education and risk being left behind even as access grows for others.

Schools Must Notify Parents of Threats, But Vague Language Raises Implementation Concerns

Public Chapter 215

This new law requires schools to notify parents within 48 hours if they report a serious threat or disruption to law enforcement. It also requires school boards to regularly share how many threats were reported quarterly. However, key terms like "disruptive behavior," "credible threat," and "major disruptions" are not defined in the law, leaving it up to each district's interpretation which could lead to inconsistent notifications, overreporting, and potentially discriminatory enforcement depending on how districts apply the rules.

Working Group Formed to Strengthen Supports for English Learners

Public Chapter 419

This law sets up a 21-member group of educators, experts, and lawmakers to find better ways to support English Learner students and their teachers. The group will study successful strategies and gather input from those with lived experience. These efforts support English Learners and other students by giving teachers better tools and increasing family engagement by involving them in the learning process

Administrative Clean Up Law Brings Changes to Reporting, TISA, and More

Public Chapter 235

The Tennessee Department of Education introduced this bill as an administrative clean-up bill; the new law covers a range of topics from changes to what the department must report on certain topics to regulations for TISA funding. Notably, it:

- Removes the requirement for schools to submit annual corporal punishment reports to the department
- Eliminates the requirement for the department to post on their website the number of corporal punishment cases involving a student on an IEP or 504 plan
- Repeals a school's obligation to request proof of immunizations to be enrolled in a school



Have questions? Email edtrusttn@edtrust.org for more information.