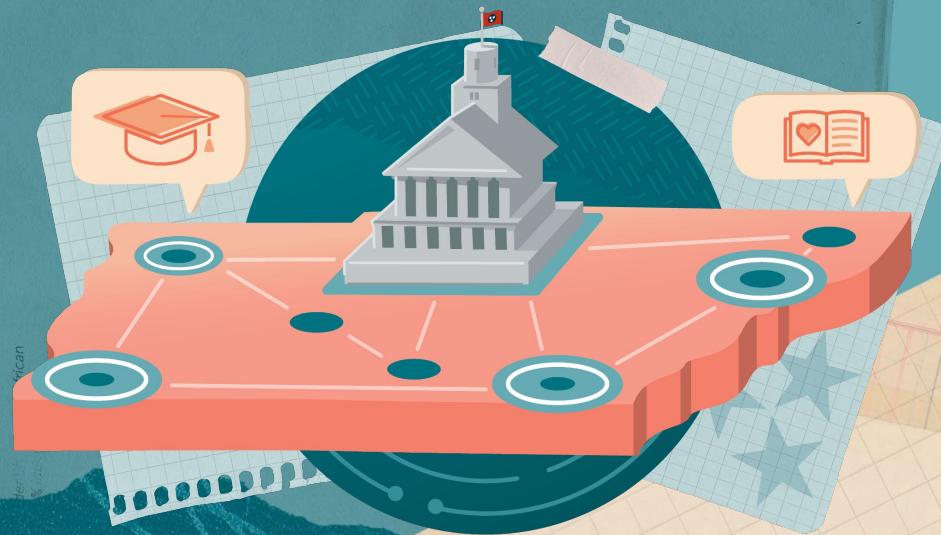


Chattanooga Regional Roundtable

Nov 18, 2025



Welcome!

Meili Powell

EdTrust-TN Assistant Director of
Advocacy & Engagement



Meet the Regional Roundtable Chattanooga Co-Hosts



Meet the Regional Roundtable Statewide Co-Hosts



Bridging Policy & Community





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Federal Focus, Tennessee Lens



Jeff Strand
Assistant Director of Government Relations



Jenny Mills McFerron
Assistant Director of Policy and Research

Where are we?

2026 is a **massive** year for public education - the ground is shifting constantly, and it will be imperative that public school advocates are prepared to meet the moment

What's happening this year:

- 2026 election - Governor's race, all 99 House members, and 17 Senate members
 - Local elections - mayoral races, commissions, school boards
- The role of the federal Department of Education, and its relationship with Tennessee, is changing profoundly
 - This includes potential changes to our federal accountability and funding system
- Budgets across the country are getting tight, including here in Tennessee
- An opportunity: who will build the education system we want to see in Tennessee and across the country?



EDUCATION

Trump administration grant cuts hit UT agriculture projects hardest

The university faces a multi-million-dollar loss after the Trump administration cut federal grants.

WSMV 4

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TN lawmakers prepare for potential loss of federal education funding

State leaders established the Federal Education Deregulation Cooperation Task Force during the most recent legislative session.



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EDUCATION

What schools stand to lose in the battle over the next federal education budget

SEPTEMBER 26, 2025 · 5:00 AM ET


 Cory Turner


 K-12 DIVE

Deep Dive Opinion Library Events Press Releases

Leadership School Models Technology Curriculum Pre-K & Early Childhood Professional

Education Department tells states to seek waivers from ESEA

Some states have already requested flexibility through block grants, giving a glimpse into what more state autonomy might entail.

Published July 30, 2025


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EQUITY IN
EDUCATION
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TENNESSEE

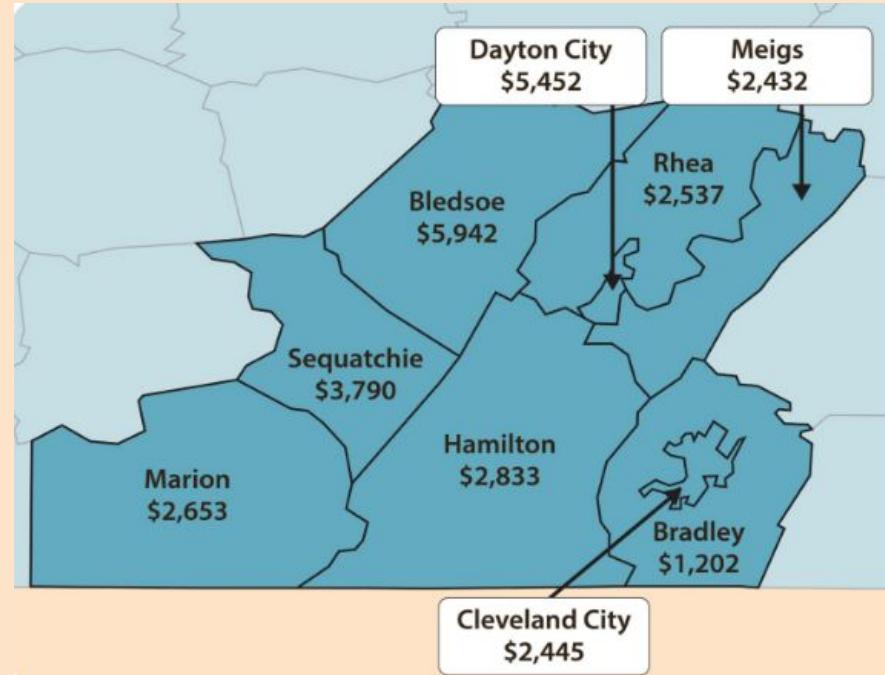
Audience Poll



TRUE or FALSE

Federal education funding is a smaller amount of funding than K-12 school districts get from state and local funding sources.

Federal Education Funding Provides Critical Resources and Specific Support



Source: TN Dept. of Education, 2023-24

Public Funds Should Fund Public Schools Exclusively

The new federal tax credit voucher program will likely limit future federal education funding. Tennessee's new statewide voucher program is disproportionately serving large, wealthy counties.

Opportunities for advocates:

- Stay ready to engage on which organizations, called Scholarship-Granting Organizations, can receive the federal voucher
- Mitigate harm from Tennessee's new voucher program by advocating for improved data collection and transparency and limiting future expansion

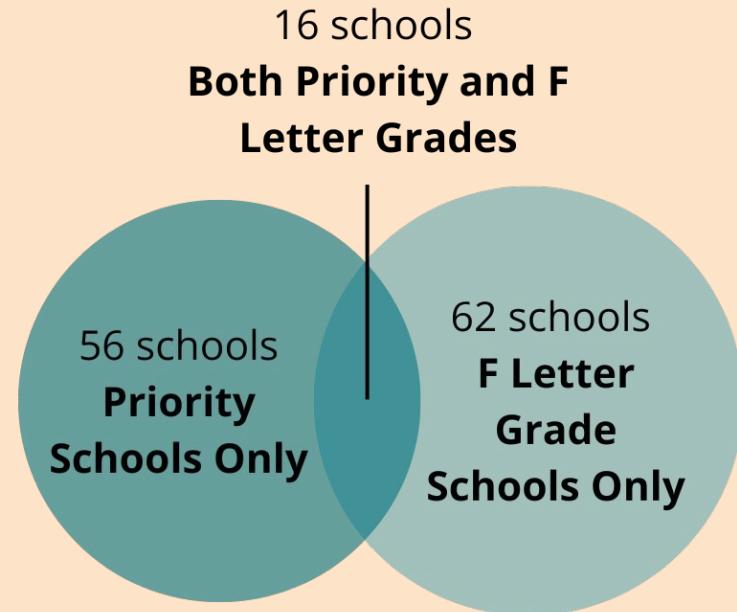
Audience Poll



YES or I'M NOT SURE

The way Tennessee is holding K-12 schools accountable for student outcomes is working well in my school or community

Tennessee Has Two Different School Accountability Systems



Source: EdTrust analysis of TN Dept. of Education data, 2023-24 school year

Tennessee Should Have One Accountability System Aligned to Our Values and Goals

As Tennessee pursues an Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) waiver, it's essential that our accountability system is strong, transparent, and fair.

Opportunities for advocates:

- Learn more about what ESSA is and why accountability matters
- Participate in the public comment process to shape what Tennessee's future accountability system will look like

Audience Poll



YES or I'M NOT SURE

The way postsecondary is held accountable for student outcomes is working well in my school or community

Postsecondary Accountability at a More Granular Level

A new Earnings Premium framework will impact if students can access federal student loans based on their program or major.

	Which Programs	Earning Requirement
Undergraduate Programs	Associate and Bachelor's Degree Programs	Higher than median earnings of 25-34 year olds in the state with only a high school diploma in 2 of the last 3 years
Graduate Programs	Master's, doctoral, professional programs, certificates	Higher than median earnings of 25-34 year olds with a bachelor's degree in the state in 2 of the last 3 years

Tennessee Should Ensure Students Are Protected and Supported

While we want student protections from predatory programs, we know unequal effects may impact some student groups and students pursuing low-wage but high-impact career fields.

Opportunities for advocates:

- Help connect students to high-quality advising and navigation supports and experiences like work-based learning that lead to better career and wage outcomes
- Advocate for stronger public state data access that can help students, families, and advisors understand post-college outcomes and earnings

Audience Poll



YES or I'M NOT SURE

I have seen stories within the last week about people not having access to food

Students Rely on Public Benefits to Meet Basic Needs

Changes made as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA) will limit access to public benefits programs and shift costs to states

How many Tennesseans participate in federal food assistance (SNAP):

- About one in ten Tennesseans overall
- Almost one in four Tennessee children
- Almost 59,000 Tennesseans in the Chattanooga region

Source: Sycamore Institute (Sept. 2025), Annie E. Casey Foundation KidsCount Data (2023)

Who We Count Determines Who Gets Support

We can make the way we identify and provide school funding for students from low-income backgrounds more accurate and more stable in the face of federal changes.

Opportunities for advocates:

- Learn more about how Tennessee identifies economically disadvantaged students and options we can pursue in light of federal changes in *The Undercount* report
- Follow along with the review committee for Tennessee's school funding formula when it convenes in January
- Stay ready to advocate for a new way to identify and allocate resources to students from low-income backgrounds

What Matters in this Moment

Things are changing rapidly - we MUST be ready to coalesce around protecting what matters while casting a vision of a better, more equitable public education system.

What matters:

- Knowing, and being knowledgeable about, what matters
- Being willing and able to work in coalition
- Understanding these times as both crisis AND opportunity

What Matters in this Moment

2026 Ed Trust-Tennessee Policy Agenda:

1. Every student has access to accessible, rigorous and affirming learning experiences in Tennessee public schools
2. Every student attends a school with robust, stable and fair funding that meets the needs of their community
3. Every student has great, well-paid and well-resourced teachers who can reflect the diversity of our state
4. Every student attends a school where they feel like they can belong and thrive
5. Every student has access to an affordable, high-quality postsecondary experience that sets them up for economic prosperity

Accessible, rigorous and affirming learning experiences

This looks like:

- Balancing growth and achievement in school accountability
- Students having access to a broad array of books and materials
- High-quality early childhood education being accessible and affordable
- Knowing which career pathways are producing for Tennessee students

****Raise a  if you ever read a book at school that made an impact on you****

Robust, stable and fair funding

This looks like:

- Ensuring that TISA is working for the students who need it most
- Knowing how school funds are being spent at the local level
- Funding each student at a rate at least equal to the national average
- Comprehensively and accurately identifying which students live in poverty



****Did you know the TISA Review Committee begins convening in January?****

Great, well-paid and well-resourced teachers

This looks like:

- Transparency around teacher retention, turnover and vacancies
- Building a low-cost, low-barrier teacher pipeline
- Providing resources to districts so they can keep their best teachers
- A teacher workforce that reflects the diversity of our state

****Raise a  if your local school currently has teacher vacancies****

Students can belong and thrive

This looks like:

- Eliminating our reliance on corporal punishment and exclusionary discipline
- Training our teachers to implement culturally competent behavior management in their classrooms
- Ensuring that every student has access to the types of holistic supports they need to show up to school every day
- Reflecting the voice and leadership of students in school- and state-level decision-making

****Raise a  if you ever had a great teacher give you a sense of belonging****

Affordable, high-quality postsecondary experiences

This looks like:

- Simplifying and streamlining access to the state's financial aid programs
- Supporting institutions to better serve students from low-income and diverse backgrounds
- Making sure that every student has access to great post-secondary counseling to help them enter and succeed in postsecondary education
- Keeping the door open for all students, regardless of who they are

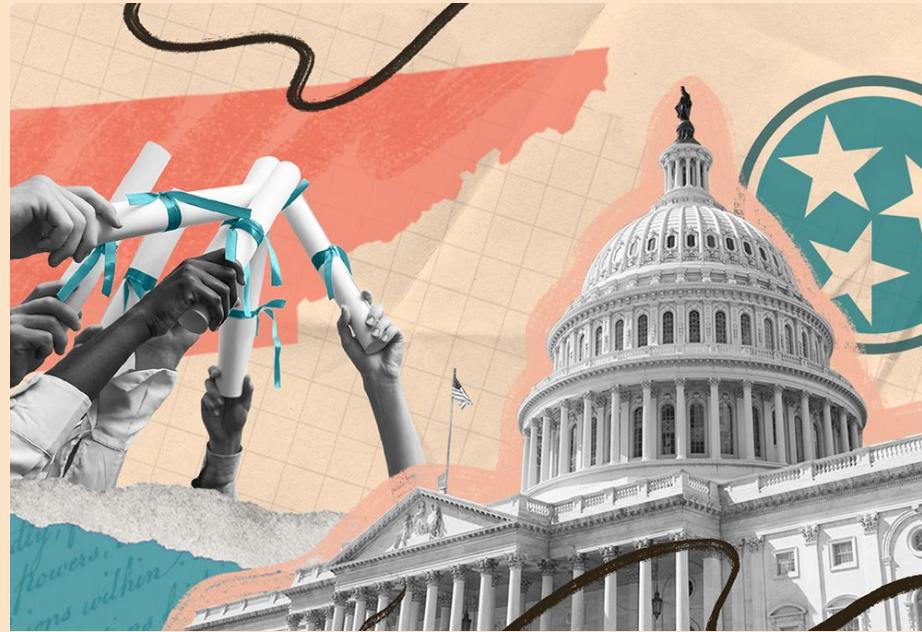
****Raise a  if state financial aid has helped you get a post-secondary education****

Turn and Talk

- What is resonating with you?
- What education issues are top of mind in your community?

Federal Focus, Tennessee Lens

A set of resources from partners and webinars from EdTrust-Tennessee equipping advocates with information on important federal shifts.





Meili Powell
Assistant Director of Advocacy & Engagement

What Now? Advancing Education Progress in a Shifting Landscape

Partner Spotlight



Dr. Reginald F. Smith
President & CEO
Urban League of
Greater Chattanooga



Dr. Caitlyne Steward
Chair Elect
TN Community Schools Network



Jennifer Andrews
*Director of Early Childhood
Strategies*
Chattanooga 2.0

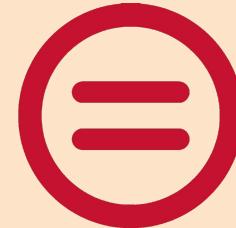
State of Black Chattanooga Report

Overview

- A high-quality, data-driven, accessible and localized report that depicts a holistic picture of the disparities faced by Black residents in the areas of economics, health, education and civic involvement.

Impact (Findings)

- Education Index Gap / Achievement Gap Independent of Income
- Chronic Absenteeism Gap
- Wide College- and Career-Readiness Divide



**Urban League of
Greater Chattanooga, Inc.**

Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Download State of Black Chattanooga
- Mobilize Around Issues in the State of Black Chattanooga
- Participate in Civic & Advocacy Events, Day on the Hill, webinars on voting led by ULGC and NUL , the MLK Youth Leadership Symposium

TN Community Schools Network Campaign

Overview HB 0225/SB0364

- Administered by the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK), the Full-Service Community Schools Grant Program creates a strong, statewide framework for schools that partner with local organizations to support students and families beyond academics.

Impact

- **Stronger student outcomes** through coordinated academic, health, and family supports that improve achievement, attendance, and behavior.
- **More stable and supportive school environments** by reducing non-instructional burdens on teachers and creating consistent systems for early intervention.
- **Deeper family and community involvement** with structured roles for partners and families, leading to better alignment between school needs and local resources.



TCSSN

TN Community Schools Network Campaign

Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Community members, parents, educators, and local organizations can contact Senate Education Committee members to share why stronger school-community partnerships matter in their area, using local stories and clear examples of unmet needs.
- Advocacy groups, nonprofits, and civic leaders can coordinate outreach efforts such as informational sessions, call-in days, joint letters of support, and social media campaigns to build broad visibility and momentum for SB 0364 before the committee vote.



Early Childhood Collaboration



Overview

- Early Matters action team is 40 family & child serving organizations
- Serves as Hamilton Co.'s primary table for early childhood systems alignment
- Now turning to a neighborhood-level collaboration model

Impact

- **Early Childhood Neighborhood Council:** Piloting a place-based parent leadership model that builds family advocacy and strengthens neighborhood early learning ecosystems.
 - 32 orgs focusing collaboration in one zip code, without creating new programs.
- **Ready, Set, Kindergarten!** Campaign resources and materials

Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Spread the word about Ready, Set, Kindergarten!
- Contact us if you have specific collab ideas for Alton Park young children

Alliance Policy Agenda Activation



Meghan Gilbert
*Integrated Voter
Engagement Organizer*
CALEB



Wendy Reynoso
Student Success Consultant
La Paz Chattanooga



Robyn Stringfellow
Education Programs Coordinator
ArtsBuild



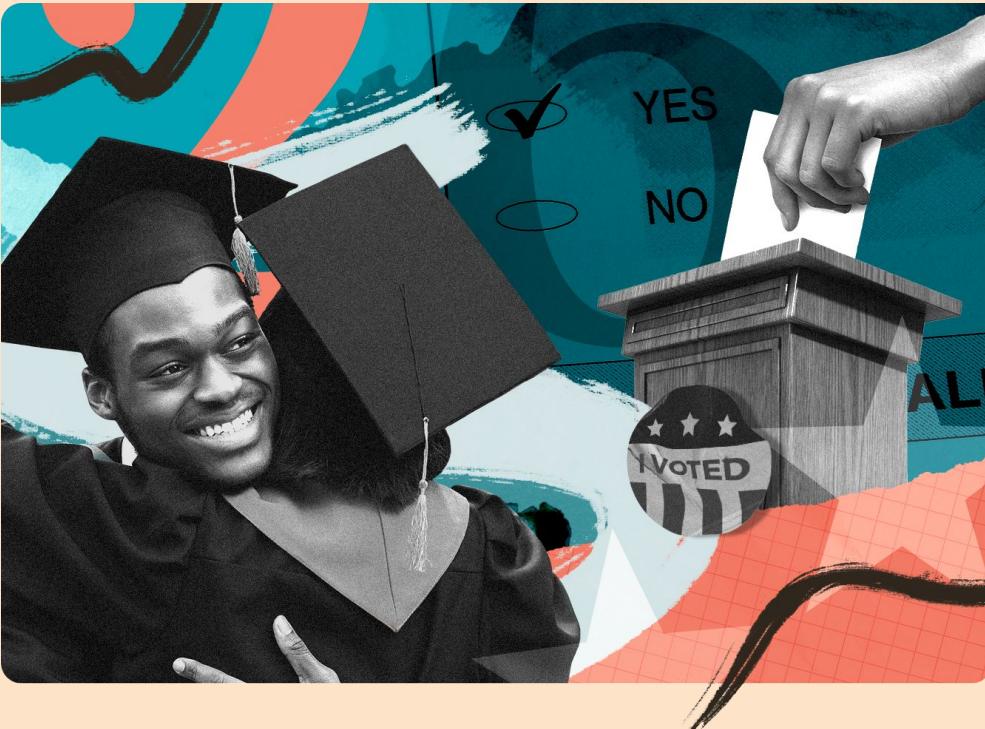
Breana Staten
Assistant Director of Communications

What's Next?

Things will move quickly, and here is what to keep on your radar.

- The 2026 General Assembly session gavels in on **January 13th, 2026**
- **EdTrust-Tennessee Legislative Engagement Opportunities:**
 - Legislative kick-off webinar
 - 2026 Ten for Tennessee Bills
 - 2027 Budget Breakdown
 - State of the State watch party
- **TISA Review Committee:** Quarterly meetings start in January
- **Changes to Accountability Systems:** Anticipated updates and opportunities for public comment begins in December.

Call to Action



Every Student Matters, Every Vote Counts

The decisions made at the ballot box in 2026 will shape our classrooms for years to come – from funding and resources to the policies that determine whether every child gets a fair shot at success.



Pledge to Commit to Education in 2026



Show Up



Spread the Word



Stay Informed



Put Students First



Advocate for Fair Education Policies



Survey: Our Vision for Public Education

Roundtable Resources Guide

- Regional PowerPoints
- Regional Data Walk Slides
- Report: The Undercount
- Federal Focus, TN Lens
- Advocacy Resource Hub
- Meet Our Co-hosts
 - Website, Social Media, Upcoming Events

Stay Connected: Weekly Legislative Updates



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Thank you!

