

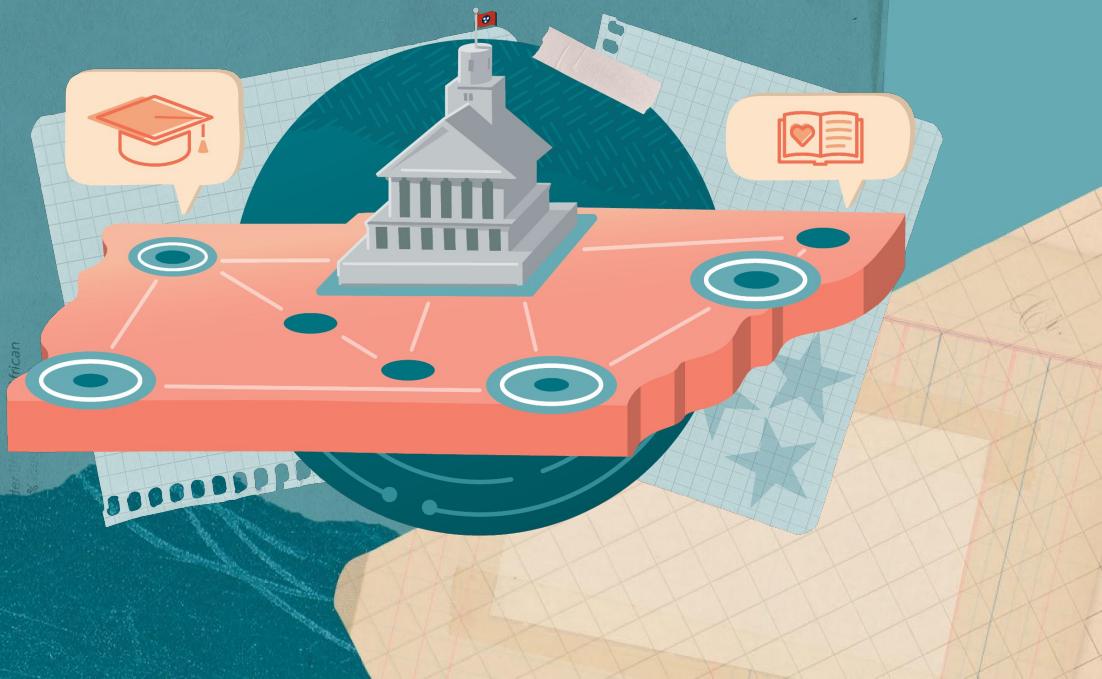


TENNESSEE ALLIANCE FOR  
**EQUITY IN  
EDUCATION**  
Powered by EdTrust-Tennessee

**edtrust**  
TENNESSEE

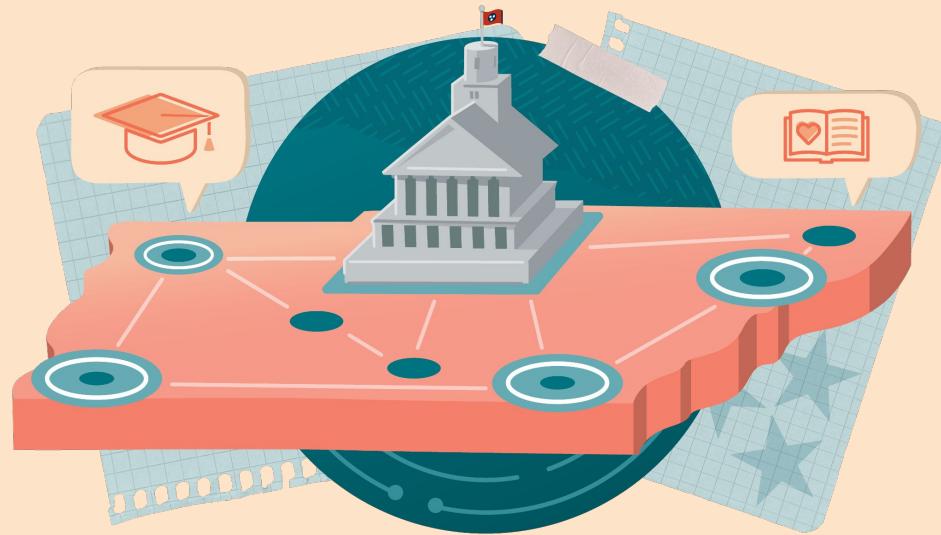
# Memphis Regional Roundtable

December 2, 2025



# Welcome!

- Sit at a table with someone new
- Introduce yourself:
  - *Organization or School?*
  - *What is one thing you're working on right now?*
  - *What is one thing giving you hope in this moment?*



# Welcome!

## Alexza Barajas Clark, Ph.D.

### Executive Director, EdTrust-TN



# Meet the Memphis Co-Hosts



# Meet the Statewide Co-Hosts



# Bridging Policy & Community





Dr. Russell Wigginton  
President  
National Civil Rights Museum



**Meili Powell**  
Assistant Director of Advocacy & Engagement

# Federal Focus, Tennessee Lens

# Education Department outsources program management to other agencies

The interagency agreements will shift management of six of the department's programs, including elementary and secondary education, to other agencies.

Published Nov. 18, 2025

# 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

## 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.



### 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.

### EDUCATION

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

SEPTEMBER 26, 2025 · 5:00 AM ET



Cory Turner

# 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?

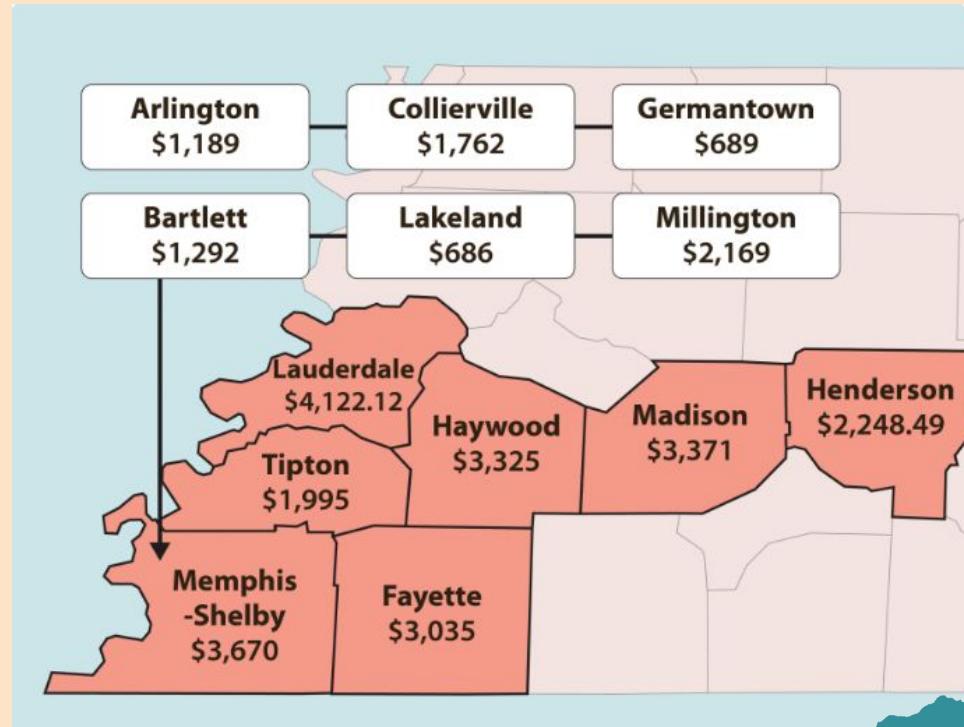
# Audience Poll



**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

## Opportunities for advocates:

- Stay ready to engage on which organizations can receive the federal voucher
- Mitigate harm from Tennessee's new voucher program by advocating for improved transparency and limits to future expansion



Jenny Mills McFerron  
Assistant Director of Policy and Research

# 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

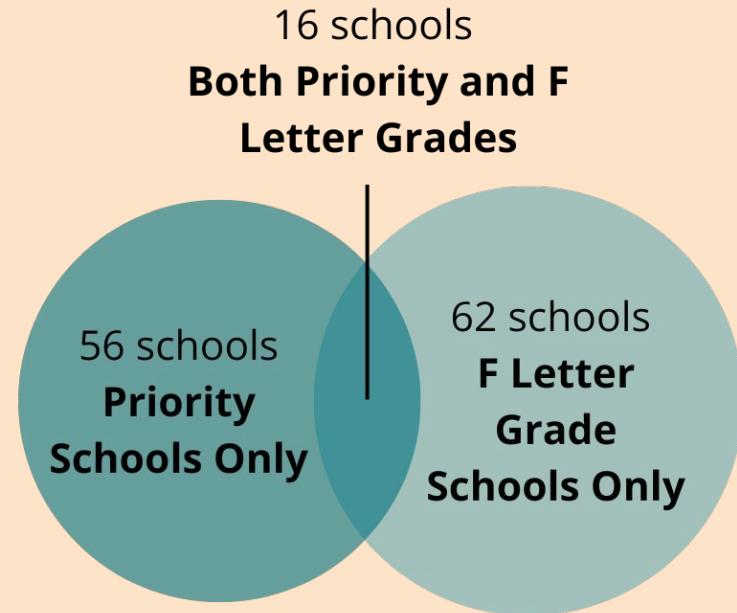
# Audience Poll



**YES or I'M NOT SURE**

I'm pretty familiar with the way Tennessee holds K-12 schools accountable for student outcomes

# 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

## 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.

	<b>Which Programs</b>	<b>Earning Requirement</b>
<b>Undergraduate Programs</b>	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
<b>Graduate Programs</b>	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

## Opportunities for advocates:

- Help connect students to high-quality advising and navigation supports
- Advocate for high-quality experiences like work-based learning that lead to better career and wage outcomes
- Advocate for stronger public state data access

# Audience Poll



**YES or I'M NOT SURE**

I have seen stories recently 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):

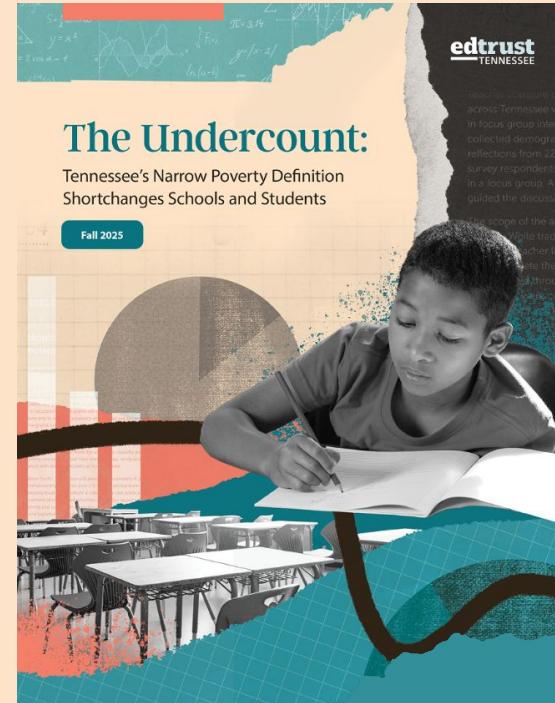
- About one in ten Tennesseans overall
- Almost one in four Tennessee children
- Almost 183,000 Tennesseans in the Memphis region

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

# Who We Count Determines Who Gets Support

## Opportunities for advocates:

- Learn more about this issue 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





## Jeff Strand

### Assistant Director of Government Relations

# 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 a great, well-paid and well-resourced teacher
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
- TISA 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
- Reducing the achievement gaps in higher education
- 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

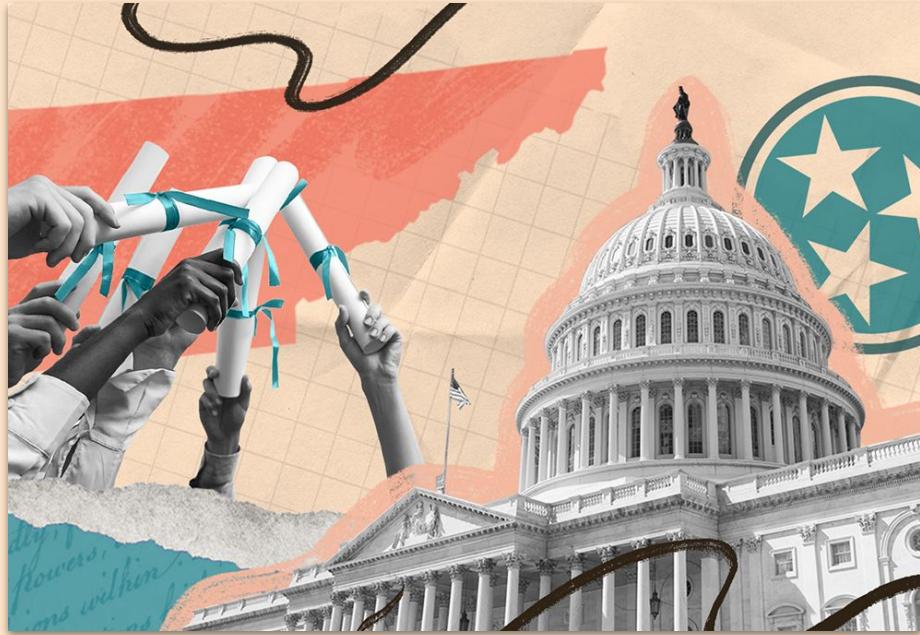
**\*\*Raise a  if state financial aid has helped you get a post-secondary education\*\***

# 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.



# What Now?: Advancing Education Progress in a Shifting Landscape

# Partner Spotlight



**Ayzia Alexander**  
*Youth Action Center  
Specialist*  
BRIDGES USA



**Mahal Burr**  
*Senior Director of  
Youth Action Center*  
BRIDGES USA

# Youth Power Up Campaign

- When you were 15 did you feel like you could make a difference on issues that affected you?



<b>10</b>	We make decisions and can ensure they're implemented
<b>8</b>	Actively participate in decision making
<b>6</b>	Have major influence over decision making
<b>4</b>	Taken into account by decision makers
<b>2</b>	Can get the attention of decision makers
<b>0</b>	Not even on the radar



**The YAC Vision** is to create a more liberated world that values youth as the experts in their own experience and centers them in intergenerationally designing and implementing just & equitable solutions.

- **Nothing About Us Without Us!**

# What do we do?



**Shelby County  
Youth Council**

**Running Youth  
Leadership Groups**



**Youth Justice  
Action Coalition**



TRI-COUNTY  
CRADLE TO CAREER  
COLLABORATIVE

ImpactTulsa.

Nationa

StriveTogether®

Every child. Cradle to career.

MOASIC

The Education Trust

**Building Youth and  
Adult Partnership**



seeding success

BROOKS  
MEMPHIS BROOKS MUSEUM OF ART



BRIDGE  
BUILDERS  
COLLABORATE

YOUTH & FAMILY  
RESOURCE CENTER



Memphis Public  
Libraries



**Local**



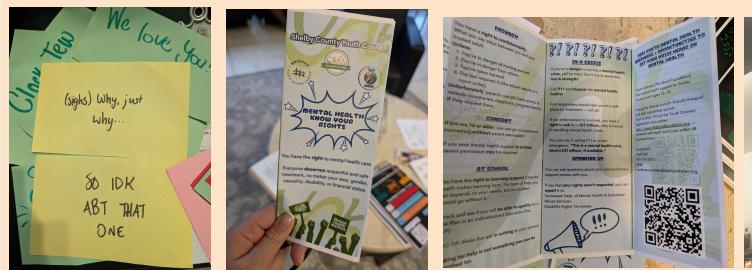
**National  
Toolkit  
Building**



Youth Minds United: An Interview with Ms. Jasmine Bernard  
Local & National News | November 25, 2025



BY ERIKA CAIN, MEMPHIS PARENT STAFF FEATURES



Most relevant Judy Kelley Why cut off and not hear whole response?  
by Like Reply Louellen House Mills Why does this get cutoff  
by Like Reply

# Youth Power Up Campaign

# Youth Power Up Campaign

## Opportunities for Community Engagement



Fill this out if you want to get involved in our Youth M.I.C. Events and Power Up events



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# Partner Spotlight



**Venita Doggett**  
*Executive Director*  
MICAH



**Dexter Britt**  
*Immigration &*  
*Inclusivity Committee*  
MICAH



# Immigration & Inclusivity Accountability Committee

## Overview

- MICAH - Equips people of faith and goodwill → organize communities → systemic change → collective action
- IIAC - ensures that immigration issues are interwoven into MICAH goals of inclusive justice and equity
  - Ensure our spaces & actions include those most impacted by our chosen issues, reflecting our city's diversity
  - Address immigrant and refugee needs by engaging with local, state, and national partners

## Impact

- Interpretation / translation for public-facing actions / partner with volunteer student interpreters
- Pushed for / helped implement equitable COVID resource and vaccine access / SC Voter Alliance canvassing
- Joining other orgs (V901, TIRRC, Latino Memphis, Free the 901) —> advocate for immigration rights & reform

## Opportunities for Community Engagement

- *Hear the Voices* inspires action on due process, family separations...“human dignity for all”
- Local law enforcement advocacy re: 287(g) agreements
- Transformational Justice / IIAC collaboration

# Free the 901

## Overview

- The Free the 901 Campaign is comprised of over 20 local Memphis advocacy and non-profit organizations.
- The collective goal is to end the Occupation of Memphis by State and Federal forces/agents.
- The campaign centers around protecting and uplifting communities most impacted by the occupation - out immigrant, Black and unhoused neighbors.

## Impact

- ACLU & FT901 temporary injunction granted to block the deployment of the National Guard in Memphis.
- MATA 90 Day Free Fare Pilot launched as part of the FT901 ask to minimize vehicle/traffic citations & interactions.
- Know Your Rights

## Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Democracy & Faith: intersection of immigrant rights, democratic & faith-based values
- FT901 Community Meetings, FT901 Orientations



# Keep Connected



# Partner Spotlight



**Gloria Sweet-Love**  
*President*  
TN State Conference NAACP

# EDUCATION FOR ALL TENNESSEE

## Overview

- HB 793 / SB 836 is a direct attack on the decades-long SCOTUS decision, *Plyler v. Doe*, to protect access to public education for immigrant students across the country.
- When this bill was filed, we knew we needed to organize with our communities and partners across the state!

## Impact

- **Over 65 organizational partners**, and worked with **over 1,300 volunteers** to drive over 3,000 calls and 6,000 emails to legislators to resist the passage of this bill.

## Opportunities for Community Engagement

- Join [educationforalltn.org](http://educationforalltn.org)



**THE TENNESSEAN**

**Keeping undocumented children out of schools is a civil rights violation | Opinion**

*The goal of Republican Tennessee legislators is to challenge the constitutional precedent that guarantees all children a free public education.*

Gloria Sweet-Love Guest Columnist



# Alliance Policy Agenda Activation



**Tomeka Hart  
Wigginton**  
President & CEO  
United Way of  
Midsouth



**Johnny Blount**  
*Director of  
Collaborative Action  
Literacy Midsouth*



**Dr. Kandace Thomas**  
*Executive Director  
First 8 Memphis*



**Mauricio Calvo**  
*President & CEO  
Latino Memphis*

## Turn and Talk

- What did you hear during this panel, or throughout tonight's event, that is sparking a new idea or action you hope to take?
- What is a takeaway from today that connects to your work and/or interests?



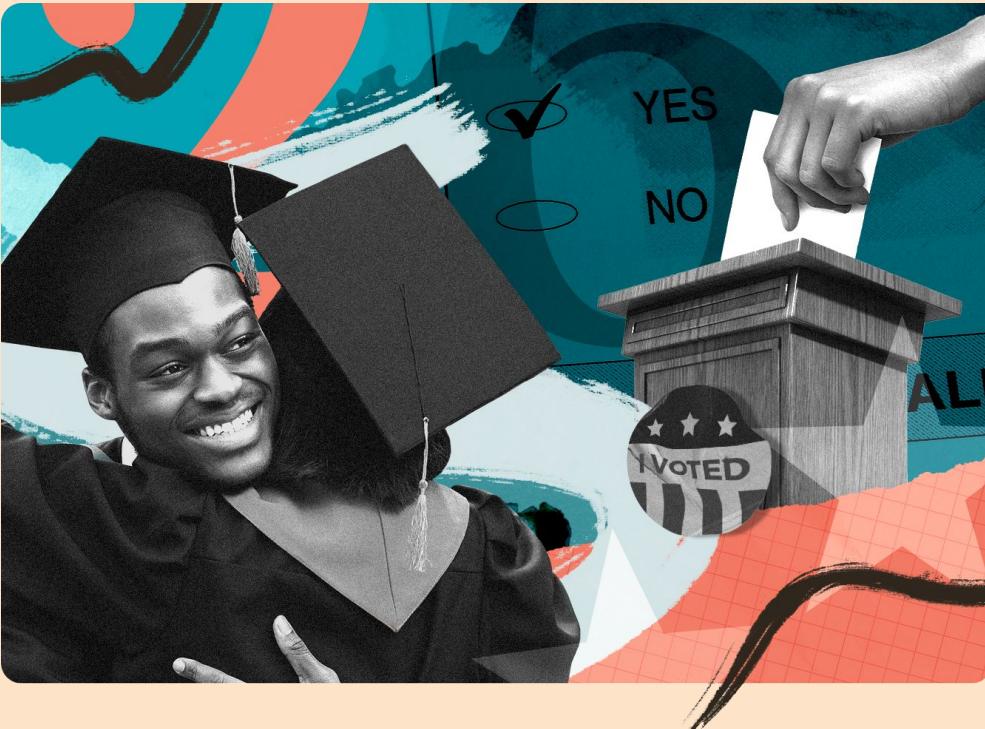
**Breana Staten**  
*Assistant Director of Communications*

# 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



<https://edtrusttn.org>



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# Thank you!

