

Nashville Regional Roundtable

Nov 20, 2025



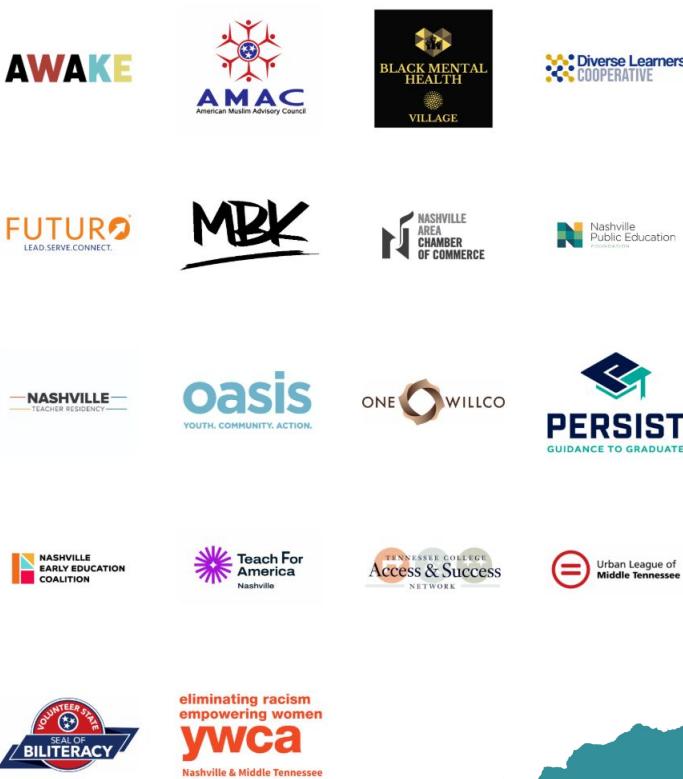
Welcome!

Alexza Barajas Clark

Executive Director, EdTrust-TN



Meet the Nashville Co-Hosts



Meet the Statewide Co-Hosts



Bridging Policy & Community





Scarritt
Bennett

Male

Participantes
femeninos

Latino

Blanco/African
American
y/o Latino



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?

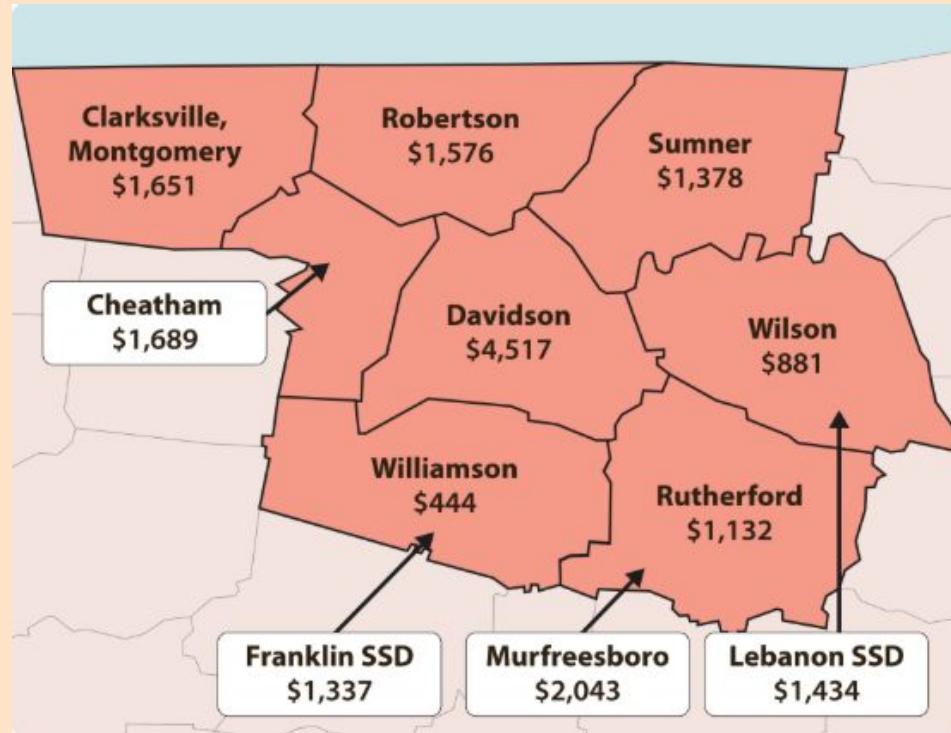
Audience Poll



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

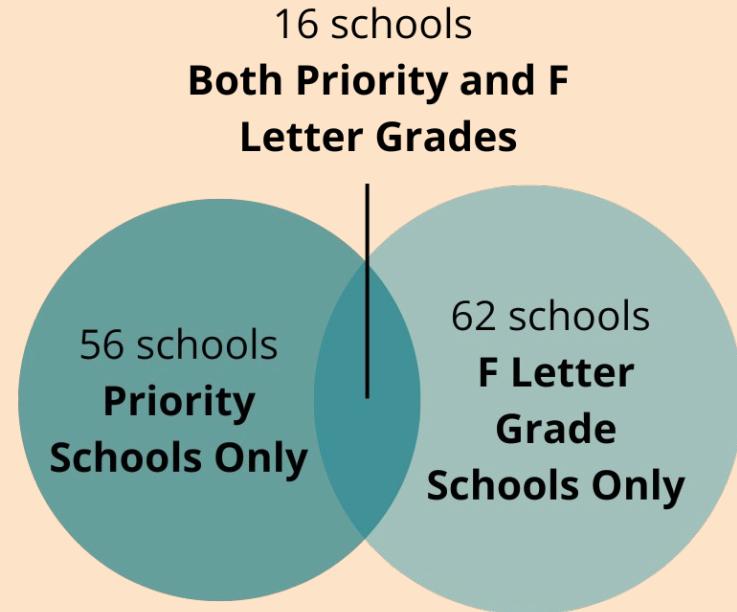
Audience Poll



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.

	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

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 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):

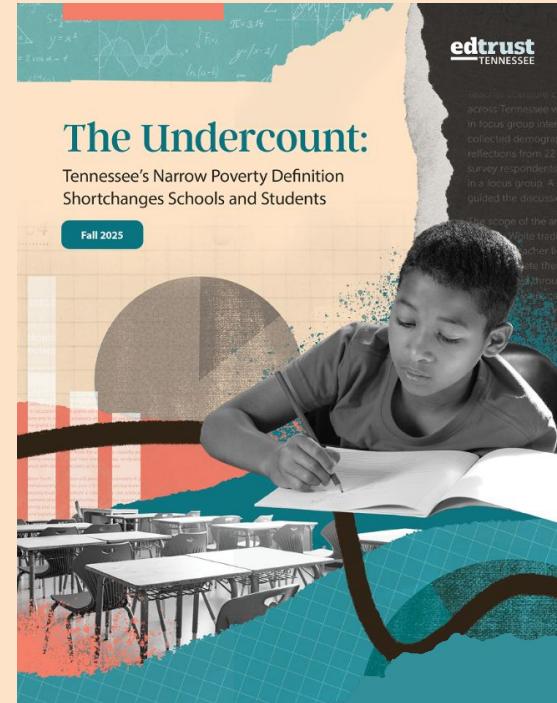
- About one in ten Tennesseans overall
- Almost one in four Tennessee children
- More than 132,000 Tennesseans in the Nashville region

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

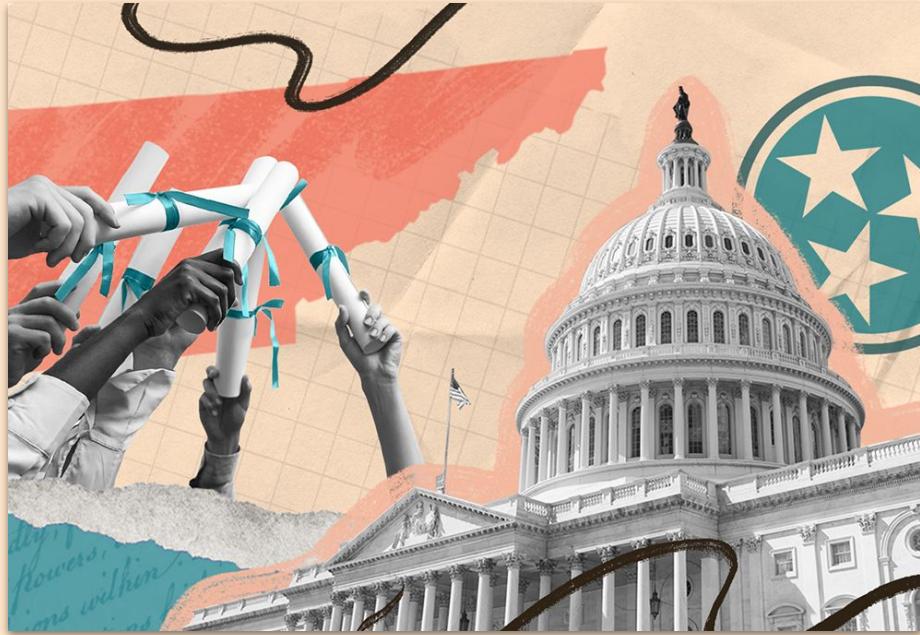
****Raise a  if state financial aid has helped you get a post-secondary education****

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



Lily Marcum
Anti Hunger Child Advocate
TN Justice Center

HB1153/SB740: Improving Access to Free School Meals

Overview

- Expands access by eliminating reduced-price meals and providing free breakfast and lunch for eligible students
- The state reimburses LEAs for remaining costs after federal funds are applied
- Sponsored by Rep. Lynn and Sen. Harshbarger

Impact

- Tackles hunger for 1 in 5 Tennessee children facing hunger
- Improves academic performance, attendance, and behavior
- Reduces stigma, meal debt, and family financial strain



Opportunities for Community Engagement

- **Share stories** that show the impact of school meals on students and families
- **Collaborate with schools** to highlight success of meal programs
- **Advocate with legislators** for full funding and long-term support

Partner Spotlight



Selah Torralba
Advocacy Coordinator
TN Immigrant & Refugee
Rights Coalition



EDUCATION FOR ALL TENNESSEE



Overview

- The Education for All campaign began from conversations with TIRRC's organizing, policy & advocacy teams talking about the impact of HB 793 / SB 836 on our communities.
- 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

- In 11 weeks, TIRRC and our sister C4 organization, TIRRC Votes, signed on **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.
- This bill is not only affects immigrant students, but it impacts everyone's access to public resources

Opportunities for Community Engagement

- **Take action with us in 2026 at the state legislature! TIRRC's Day on the Hill: March 24, 2026**
- **Take action with a local SOCM Public School Strong partner in Nashville or your local city!**

EDUCATION FOR ALL TENNESSEE





Together, we have power!

IN 11 WEEKS, WE ...

- Held more than 10 community events around Education for All TN
- Made thousands of calls to state legislators
- Sent thousands of emails to legislators
- Had over 1,000 volunteers join Education for All TN
- Increased our social media presence
- Had Tennesseans from 294 cities take action
- Held dozens of community trainings
- And MORE!

We won with the help of our community and all of us coming together to talk to our neighbors, tell our stories, and demand action!

Partner Spotlight



Kelli Nowers
Executive Director
AWAKE TN



HB39/SB155: Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Act

Overview

- The bill requires all TN public and public charter high schools to provide menstrual hygiene products in girls' restrooms, locker rooms, and the nurse's offices.
- Provides grants to each school based on student population.

Impact

- 1 in 4 students have stayed home from school during their period due to lack of access to adequate menstrual products.
- Individuals experiencing period poverty may use toilet paper, rags, old clothes, etc., during their menstrual cycle due to the inability to access sanitary pads, tampons, or other period products.
- 2 out of 3 teens report stress due to lack of access to period products in their schools.

Opportunities for Community Engagement

- [Tell Governor Lee to Fund Menstrual Products in Schools!](#)
- AWAKE Day on the Hill: March 24, 2026

Alliance Policy Agenda Activation



Dr. Diarese George
President & CEO
Nashville Public Education
Foundation

Melanie Shinbaum
Executive Director
Nashville Early Education
Coalition

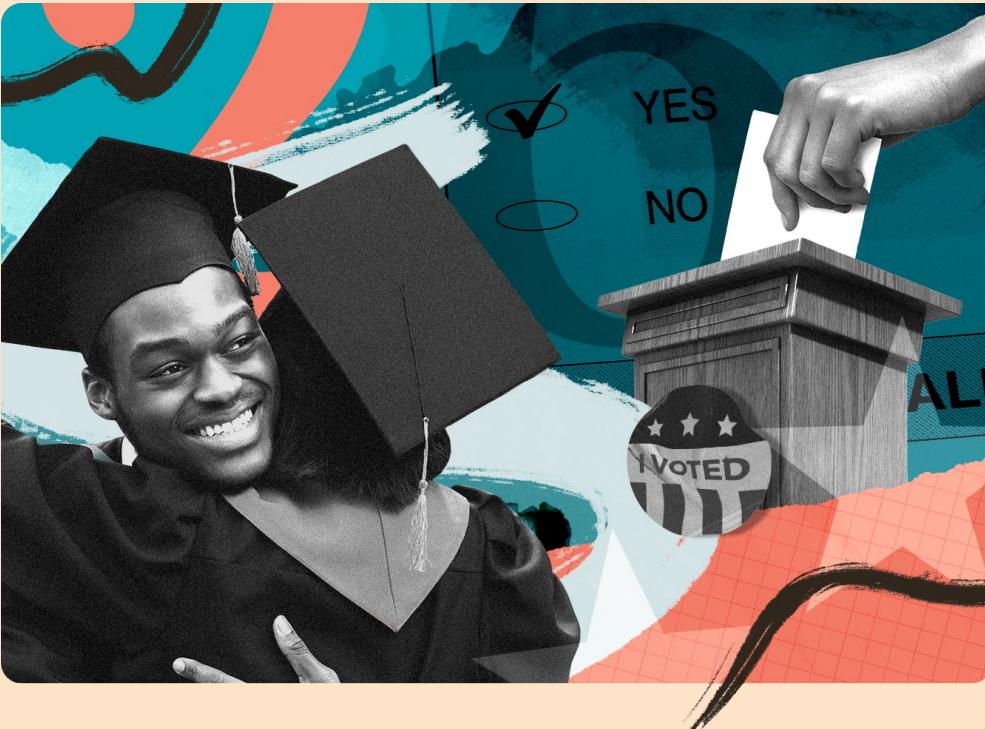
Stephen Santellan
Executive Director
Teach for America
Nashville-Chattanooga

Daryl Curry
Chief Talent Development Officer
Nashville Area Chamber of
Commerce

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?

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>



@edtrusttn



EdTrust-Tennessee



edtrusttn@edtrust.org



Thank you!

