



Advance Literacy Success in Tennessee NOW

When we learned over a decade ago that our state's K-12 academic standards were woefully inadequate, Tennessee's business leaders joined other student advocates to declare that our students deserved rigorous, 21st-century standards, and to insist on aligned testing that shows how well and quickly they're learning. Our students made big academic gains.

Now, it's time to stand up together again for excellence—in literacy. For seven years, Tennessee's fourth-grade reading proficiency levels have stagnated; today, nearly two-thirds of Tennessee's third-graders still can't read proficiently. Those with significant reading deficiencies face learning- and life-success losses. **They are:**

- ✘ less likely to catch up in later grades, graduate from high school, or complete the post-secondary training they need for the skilled, living-wage positions for which employers are increasingly hiring; and
- ✘ less likely to remain gainfully employed through adulthood – and more likely to experience poverty, unmanaged health conditions, pre-teen alcohol use, depression, and teenage pregnancy.

ALL of those outcomes pose grave, long-term threats to Tennessee's workforce, business climate, and economy. If we are serious about keeping Tennessee economically successful and competitive, and about optimizing the quality of life and well-being of all Tennesseans, we must refuse to accept the status quo. We must decide NOW to do nothing less than revolutionize early literacy instruction in Tennessee.

That's why we strongly support Governor Lee's proposed Tennessee Literacy Success Act (TLSA).

We believe this plan can deliver better educational, health, and economic outcomes for our future workers and consumers by making multiple critically needed improvements which support their success in literacy and in life:

- ✓ ***Implements A Phonics-Based Approach.*** The TLSA requires our public school districts to base their K-5 English Language Arts (ELA) programs on a phonics-driven, state-approved literacy skills plan. **Tennessee's youngest public-school readers all deserve to learn from a proven literacy foundation which improves their ability to get and stay on-grade—in ELA, math, science, and social studies.**
- ✓ ***Identifies Reading Deficiencies Before Fourth Grade.*** Under the TLSA, our state will create a **Universal Reading Screener.** Tennessee's public school districts must use either the state's free Screener, or their own state-approved tool, to screen every K-3 student three times/year. **These screenings will empower teachers & parents to discover reading deficiencies, and apply interventions, *before* students finish 3rd grade.**
- ✓ ***Helps Early Readers Tackle Reading Deficiencies.*** The TLSA requires Tennessee's public school districts to provide reading supports and interventions for each student with a significant reading deficiency, and to provide their parents with notification, reports, and at-home support tools. **Timely school interventions and new information & supports for parents can help our earliest readers get back on track to proficiency faster.**
- ✓ ***Provides Foundational Literacy Support to Today's Teachers.*** The TLSA also requires Tennessee teachers of grades K-5 to advance their knowledge by completing a state-approved professional development course on foundational literacy skills instruction; the state will make one available at no cost. **Improving early literacy in Tennessee will demand more from our current K-5 teachers, and our state must step up to provide the training and support that they'll need.**
- ✓ ***Improves Foundational Literacy Training and Standards for Teachers.*** The TLSA requires higher-ed institutions training Tennessee's future K-3 teachers to provide reading-instruction instruction aligned closely to foundational literacy skills standards. It also requires anyone seeking to earn, advance, or renew a K-3 teaching license to either pass a Tennessee reading instruction test or complete a foundational literacy skills instruction course. **Tennessee's future early readers deserve to learn from teachers who have proven basic proficiency in teaching foundational literacy skills.**
- ✓ ***Ensures Transparency on Tennessee's Literacy Performance.*** The TLSA requires the state to deliver an analysis on literacy, literacy instruction, and educator-preparation-program affordability, plus a report on implementation of the TLSA, to the General Assembly. **Policymakers and stake-holders—including parents, K-12 leaders, teachers, student advocates, and the communities and students they serve—deserve to know exactly how well our state is progressing in improving literacy proficiency.**