



TENNESSEE ALLIANCE FOR
**EQUITY IN
EDUCATION**
Powered by The Education Trust in Tennessee

2023 Policy Agenda

The Tennessee Alliance for Equity in Education is composed of a diverse set of allies from across the state who share a unifying belief that our schools and postsecondary institutions create pathways to a more just Tennessee. We believe that Tennessee, at its best, offers opportunities that ensure all students can thrive. As an Alliance, our work focuses on students whose needs and potential have been overlooked for too long, including students from low-income backgrounds, of color, with disabilities, in rural areas, and English learners, regardless of immigration status. Through research, engagement, and advocacy, the Alliance works to expand opportunity, attainment, and equity from preschool through postsecondary education by engaging diverse communities and stakeholders to increase the public will to act on issues that impact educational justice.

Our 2023 Policy Agenda is the result of over 80 organizations across Tennessee coming together to address the most pressing education issues impacting our communities. There are contextual factors that impact every one of our priorities and increase the urgency of our work, including:

- **Data and Reporting Transparency:** Tennesseans often have limited access to information on how well we are serving students, hampering our ability to drive effective and equitable decision-making. Our goal is to ensure there is high-quality P-20 data and reporting across all priority areas that is publicly available, annual, comparative, longitudinal, accessible, and disaggregated by student group.
- **Access to Opportunity:** Tennessee's students face systemic barriers along the P-20 continuum that create inequitable outcomes and hinder students from realizing their full potential.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery:** The pandemic illuminated and exacerbated long-standing gaps, resulting in the need for innovative and large-scale responses to interrupted learning and its negative impact on student and staff well-being.

PRIORITY 1



Promote Accessible, Rigorous, and Affirming Learning Experiences

Equity Principle:

Every student in Tennessee attends a school that utilizes high-quality instruction and materials that are culturally and linguistically sustaining and prepare them for the opportunities and demands of an increasingly complex and diverse world.

Equity Actions:

- Expand consistent access to high-quality, affordable, and universal 3 and 4-year-old preschool education
- Promote empowering and standards-aligned instructional materials to ensure every student is on-track from early childhood education to postsecondary success
- Provide students with integrated academic support while maintaining access to grade-level content
- Ensure access to and success in rigorous coursework by equitably enrolling and supporting students in advanced courses and programs



PRIORITY 2

Address Funding and Resource Equity

Equity Principle:

Every student in Tennessee attends a school that receives robust funding and resources based on student needs through a flexible and transparent funding system.

Equity Actions:

- Increase allocations through the state formula to ensure our cost-adjusted funding level is at or above the national average (approx. \$15,487 per pupil)
- Monitor ESSER and TISA funding to ensure they are allocated and utilized to improve equitable student outcomes



PRIORITY 3

Increase Educator Diversity & Quality

Equity Principle:

Every student in Tennessee has access to skilled, well-resourced teachers, leaders, and staff who reflect the state's racial and linguistic diversity. Educators are supported and offered opportunities to engage in decision-making.

Equity Actions:

- Increase students' access to educators who are fully prepared and supported throughout their careers, including high-quality mentorship opportunities and leadership pathways
- Incentivize educator preparation programs to recruit, prepare, and retain diverse educators
- Target resources to intentionally recruit, hire, and retain a diverse educator workforce, including eliminating barriers to entering and remaining in the workforce through stipends, reimbursements, scholarships, competitive pay, and mental health support
- Appoint educators to serve on local and state boards, commissions, committees, and other education policymaking bodies



PRIORITY 4

Support Students' Social-Emotional and Academic Development

Equity Principle:

Every student in Tennessee has access to a physically safe, emotionally supportive, inclusive, diverse, and linguistically accessible school environment to advance their learning and support their mental health. Additionally, schools and districts have policies and practices that foster positive relationships between staff and students. Students are supported and offered opportunities to engage in decision-making.

Equity Actions:

- Invest in and build structures for wraparound student support and staff, including licensed professional counselors, social workers, and interpreters, as aligned with national best practices

- Eliminate exclusionary school discipline practices for non-violent offenses, including preschool to 2nd-grade suspensions and expulsions, and the use of corporal punishment statewide
- Provide support and funding to implement trauma-responsive and restorative practices and cultivate asset-based and anti-racist mindsets among school-based staff and students
- Appoint youth leaders to serve on local and state boards, commissions, committees, and other education policymaking bodies



PRIORITY 5

Expand Access and Success in Higher Education

Equity Principle:

Every student in Tennessee has access to an affordable postsecondary degree or credential that propels them to a career that ensures economic mobility. In addition, all students have access to resources that support them to and through higher education.

Equity Actions:

- Revise the in-state tuition policy for public institutions to ensure that every Tennessee high school graduate has access to equitable postsecondary education, regardless of immigration status or background
- Refine Tennessee Promise to eliminate barriers and address unmet, non-tuition higher education costs for students who would benefit most from financial support
- Leverage Tennessee's higher education outcomes-based funding formula to incentivize and support institutions to address opportunity and attainment gaps by race
- Provide targeted college success supports, including advising, from high school through postsecondary to address equity gaps in college-going and completion that lead to strong, sustainable careers