

A light blue map of Tennessee serves as the background for the top half of the page. It shows major cities like Nashville, Memphis, and Clarksville, along with various highways and geographical features.

## Tennessee Department of Education (TNDOE)

**Evaluation System:** The Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)

**History:**

Implemented in the 2011-2012 school year under Governor Bill Haslam and Commissioner Kevin Huffman and continues now under Governor Bill Haslam and Commissioner Dr. Candice McQueen.

**How it works:**

Teachers earn one of five ratings.

**Impact on salary:**

Tennessee provides local districts with a minimum salary schedule that sets a base salary with raises earned for each year of experience and type of degree. Distinguishing Tennessee's salary schedule from other states is its requirement that districts must also differentiate teacher compensation based on at least one of the following criteria: additional roles or responsibilities, hard-to-staff schools or subject areas, and performance based on teacher evaluations.

Minimum number of years to achieve highest salary: *After 11 years, Tennessee's state salary schedule provides that teachers with a bachelor's degree will earn \$40,595 and those with an advanced degree will earn \$45,075.<sup>98</sup> These amounts may be supplemented by Tennessee's districts.*

### REFLECTING ON SYSTEM

#### Notable features

- Requires a high number of observations, especially during the first half of the school year. A teacher's prior year performance and license type determine number of observations. Most new teachers are observed six times and most veteran teachers are observed four times — with half of these observations occurring during the first half of the school year. Highly rated teachers are formally observed once but also supported by multiple, short walkthroughs.
- Is fully integrated into Tennessee's teacher preparation, licensure, support, and dismissal systems, with these particularly noteworthy applications:
  - Teacher preparation program accountability: Tennessee requires educator preparation programs to collect and report data on the performance and effectiveness of program graduates, as measured by student growth data.
  - Tenure: A tenured teacher who receives one of the two lowest ratings may be reverted to probationary status until earning a higher rating two years in a row.
  - Dismissal: Unlike 28 states, Tennessee explicitly makes teacher ineffectiveness grounds for dismissal and also requires that teacher evaluation system ratings serve as sufficient evidence of ineffectiveness.<sup>99</sup>
- Independently evaluates the system to determine efficacy. In 2016, Tennessee partnered with Vanderbilt University to form a research alliance (Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA)), with the goal of building Tennessee's capacity for continual improvement through independent studies and external research that provide valuable information to state policymakers.<sup>100</sup>

“Our evaluation system has been a consistent approach of developing the capacity of teachers to improve. The state’s TEAM model provides a common language and the vocabulary of continuous improvement. In fact, more than 70 percent of educators believe that the TEAM model has positive impacts for both teachers and students.”

— Paul Fleming, *Tennessee's Assistant Commissioner of Teachers and Leaders*<sup>111</sup>

#### Opportunities for improvement

- Despite the strengths associated with Tennessee's system, it continues to face implementation challenges. Spring 2018 marked the second time in three years that there were significant online testing disruptions of the state standardized assessment, namely log-in delays and connectivity issues, which led the legislature to delay any application of evaluation results to determine employment or compensation.<sup>101</sup>

## BUILDING BUY-IN

### Steps to build buy-in

In response to feedback from educators during the first year of its evaluation system implementation, Tennessee established a centralized communication strategy to provide teachers and school leaders with the information necessary to successfully implement this system, as well as to learn from educators' implementation experiences. As part of this process, Tennessee met with more than 7,500 educators and considered feedback — surveys, stakeholder meetings, and email communications — from thousands more. In addition, then-Commissioner Huffman visited more than 100 districts to discuss evaluation system implementation with educators.<sup>102</sup>

### Surveys of teachers and administrators

According to the recently released 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, 72 percent of teachers believe the teacher evaluation process used at their school has led to improvements in their teaching. This is up from 38 percent in 2012. Further, 69 percent of teachers believe the teacher evaluation process used at their school has led to improvements in student learning. This is up from 28 percent in 2012. Also, 53 percent of teachers surveyed believe that the feedback received from evaluators was focused more on helping teachers improve, rather than making judgments about performance.<sup>103</sup>

The 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey indicates that 92 percent of administrators feel that they receive useful feedback as a result of the evaluation process, and 91 percent report making changes to their leadership practices as a result of evaluations. Overall, 87 percent of administrators report being satisfied with the evaluation process.<sup>104</sup>

## EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

### Recognizes strong teachers and keeps them in the classroom?

Yes, Tennessee's teacher retention data demonstrate that teachers earning highly effective ratings are generally retained at a higher rate than less effective teachers. Specifically, in the 2012-2013 school year, more than 90 percent of teachers earning one of the three highest ratings in Tennessee's teacher evaluation system were retained, whereas approximately 80 percent of teachers earning the lowest rating were retained.<sup>105</sup>

### Helps all teachers improve?

Yes, a recent report<sup>106</sup> by TERA found that teacher improvement in Tennessee appears steeper in recent years and coincides with Tennessee's significant investment in efforts to improve teacher professional learning. These investments include Tennessee's development and implementation of its teacher evaluation system in the 2011-2012 school year. Specifically, researchers found that teacher improvement<sup>107</sup> in the years subsequent to the implementation of Tennessee's teacher evaluation system, from 2013 to 2015, was "much more rapid and sustained" than teacher improvement between 2008 and 2010.<sup>108</sup>

### Correlates with increased student achievement?

Yes, for the 2016-2017 school year, 55 school districts, equaling more than a third of Tennessee's districts, earned overall Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) composites representing the highest level of growth. This includes districts with a wide range of academic achievement and student demographics. Further, fewer districts reported the lowest two categories of growth during this same year.<sup>109</sup> These data represent an improvement over the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years, during which 46 and 52 districts, respectively, earned overall TVAAS composites representing the highest level of growth.<sup>110</sup> Note that these gains cannot be tied directly to the evaluation system without a controlled study.

**“On organizational theory, it’s really important to be clear on the non-negotiables and then provide intentional and intensive supports. Take the time on the front end to develop the rationales so that districts appreciate that this is being done *with them*, rather than *to them*.”**

— Paul Fleming, *Tennessee's Assistant Commissioner of Teachers and Leaders*<sup>112</sup>

