

The Tennessee Commission on Education Recovery and Innovation



Year One Report Addendum

November 30, 2021

Commissioners: Dr. Marie Chisholm-Burns; Todd Dickson; Dolores Gresham; Dr. Youlanda Jones; Dr. Robert Christopher Jones; Frank Rothermel; Glenn Swift; Dr. Joey Vaughn, vice chair; Tara Scarlett, chair

Context for This Document

In December 2020, the Tennessee Commission on Education Recovery and Investment submitted its preliminary report to the General Assembly outlining COVID-19's effect on Tennessee's education system.¹ Because that report was submitted in the midst of the pandemic before much of the relevant data were available, it lacked the fullest possible picture of the impacts that the pandemic and natural disasters had on Tennessee's school districts, students, and families. Instead, it leveraged pre-pandemic statistics, national education trends, and survey data from superintendents in Tennessee in order to identify priority areas for the legislature.

Tennessee administered statewide testing in the 2020-21 school year, with results released in August 2021. This document serves as an addendum to the Commission's preliminary report, using those newly released data to identify key trends and areas of focus for the legislature as they continue to take steps to address the challenges facing the state's schools, teachers, students, and families.

This addendum does not replace that report but adds to it, creating an updated view of what data tell us about Tennessee's educational context.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters that struck Tennessee in 2020 severely disrupted education in Tennessee. For much of Spring 2020, schools were closed for **in-person instruction**, and annual statewide assessments were suspended. While schools and institutions worked to adapt, an effort that continued throughout the 2020-21 school year, the sudden and unanticipated need to dramatically change the operation of schools and the delivery of instruction created significant disruption, experienced most acutely by the most vulnerable students and families. Operational challenges and the effects of spring 2020 closures were compounded by the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on communities and families, even where schools were operating in person in 2020-21. In addition to the impact on communities, the disruption to “normal” schooling made it difficult to capture data essential to understanding how students were progressing to meet the state’s education goals.

Acknowledging both the importance of administering the **Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)** tests to understand where students are and the very real impacts that the pandemic and natural disasters had on teachers, students, and families across the state, Tennessee both administered statewide tests in fall 2020 and spring 2021 and passed legislation to protect schools, teachers, and students from any negative outcomes resulting from TCAP data. The Accountability Hold Harmless Law, passed by the General Assembly in January 2021, provided waivers from accountability provisions to districts that met the benchmark of at least 80% TCAP participation.²

In the spring of 2021, Tennessee administered the TCAP **End-of-Course (EOC)** and **TNReady** assessments (administered in grades 3 through 8), with 100% of school districts meeting the 80% participation benchmark and meeting 95% participation statewide.³

This addendum to the preliminary report provides a comprehensive analysis of COVID-19’s impact on student achievement in Tennessee using spring 2021 TCAP data. It summarizes trends in the data across the 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 administrations of the following assessments and grade levels:

- TNReady **English Language Arts (ELA)** Assessment: Grades 3, 5, and 8
- TNReady Math Assessment: Grades 3, 5, and 8
- TN English 1 EOC Assessment: Grades 8 and 9
- TN Algebra 1 EOC Assessment: Grades 8 and 9

In addition to TCAP data, this addendum includes data on:

- High school graduation rates
- **Ready Graduate** rates (Tennessee’s indicator of college and career readiness among high school graduates)
- **ACT** data
- Pre-K-through-12th-grade enrollment
- Pre-K-through-12th-grade withdrawal
- **Chronic absenteeism**
- Postsecondary enrollment, progress, completion, and other metrics

Where possible, data are disaggregated by student race/ethnicity, subgroup (e.g., socioeconomic status, disability status), geography (e.g., rural, urban), and mode of instruction at the district level during the 2020-21 school year (e.g., hybrid [combination of distance learning and in-person instruction]), remote [distance learning only]). There is a glossary on page 31 of this report where bolded terms and acronyms are defined.

High-Level Summary of Findings

Student proficiency declined between 2019 and 2021 in ELA and math. Math declines were more severe than ELA overall.

- ELA and math proficiency rates declined below 2017 levels (first year of data included).
- In ELA, the overall percentage of students meeting proficiency benchmarks dropped by 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2021.
- In grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 ELA, students attending suburban schools and Asian students experienced the largest declines in the percent scoring as proficient or better between 2019 and 2021 but also have the highest proficiency rates in comparison with other geographies and racial/ethnic groups.
- In math, the overall percentage of students meeting proficiency benchmarks dropped by 12 percentage points between 2019 and 2021.
- In grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 math, proficiency rates for districts located in cities and those for Black students as a group show the largest declines between 2019 and 2021.
- Districts operating primarily in person in school year 2020-21 had higher rates of proficiency in ELA and math compared to **hybrid** and **remote** districts (however, differences in the demographics of students attending districts operating in different modes as well as other potential differences prevent this analysis from determining how much influence the mode of instruction had on student outcomes).

Both high school graduation rates and the rate at which graduates met Ready Graduate benchmarks were consistent with prior years.

- Graduation rate data are not yet available for the class of 2021; however, 90% of students in the 2020 cohort graduated, consistent with prior years.
- **ACT** data show relative stability in the statewide average composite score year over year, from 19.4 in 2019 to 19.3 in 2020.
- Less than half (41%) of graduating seniors met **Ready Graduate** benchmarks in 2020, with considerable gaps among student subgroups. The rate of “readiness” remained stable in 2020, at a similar rate to the prior two years.

K-12 enrollment declined slightly for 2021, while withdrawals to home schools, dropouts, and chronic absenteeism increased between 2019 and 2021.

- Public K-12 enrollment in Tennessee had been relatively stable prior to the pandemic but declined for the 2021-22 school year, with just over 957,000 students enrolled statewide in fall 2021.
- More than 12,000 students withdrew to home schools in 2020, compared to fewer than 6,300 in 2019.
- Statewide dropout has remained stable through the pandemic, at nearly 5,000 students or between 6% and 7% each year.
- **Chronic absenteeism** rates rose between 2019 and 2021 among all students and within all subgroups of students, with the largest increases among Hispanic students (8 percentage points) and English language learners (10 percentage points).

To date, federal stimulus dollars have been used for educational technology and infrastructure costs (but data are not yet available for the largest, and most recent, stimulus funding package).

- Tennessee received nearly \$3.9 billion in **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)** funding and distributed nearly \$3.5 billion to districts.

- The two largest uses of **ESSER** funding by districts were purchasing education technology (\$34.7 million of ESSER 1.0 funds) and addressing facility needs and deferred maintenance (\$23.5 million of ESSER 2.0 funds).

The number of postsecondary students earning bachelor's and associate's degrees or completing certification programs remained consistent between 2019 and 2020.

However, student enrollment and progression toward completion declined.

- Undergraduate student enrollment fell by 4% overall between fall 2020 and fall 2021, with fewer students enrolling in full-time undergraduate programs.
- Community colleges experienced the steepest decline in enrollment — a drop of 7 percentage points between fall 2020 and fall 2021.
- The number of students progressing toward completion of a bachelor's or associate's degree or certification decreased overall between 2017 and 2021; however, the greatest declines occurred after the COVID-19 education disruption.
- Adult students over the age of 25, low-income students, and academically underprepared students progressed toward meeting milestones for **credit hours** earned at lower rates, compared to student progress overall.
- The completion of postsecondary programs stayed consistent between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.
- Between 2017 and 2021, the percent of adult students graduating with a bachelor's degree dropped by 10 percentage points, while adults completing an associate's degree or **long-term certificate program** increased during the same time period by 20 and 24 percentage points, respectively.

Together, these data paint a more complete picture of the challenges the state and communities faced throughout 2020. While these challenges were known, experienced, and anticipated in the midst of the crisis, the state lacked hard data when the Commission released its Year One Report in December 2020. Now that more data are available, it confirms that the pandemic has exacerbated preexisting problems and, in many cases, slowed or even reversed pre-pandemic improvement in key indicators of progress for students and systems, manifested in declines in test scores, increases in absenteeism, and impacts to postsecondary enrollment and progress.

The analysis below focuses primarily on statewide data, broken down where possible by student demographics and geographies across the state. There is certainly more variation, both positive and negative, in the impact of COVID-9 and the outcomes achieved over the past 18 months at the district, school, and postsecondary program and institution levels. The measures presented don't tell the full story of Tennessee's students and schools through the pandemic. But they do provide direction to state leaders that significant work must be done at every level, and must be done quickly, to ensure that Tennessee doesn't have a "COVID" generation marked by permanently compromised opportunity.

TCAP ELA Data Summary

Key Takeaways:

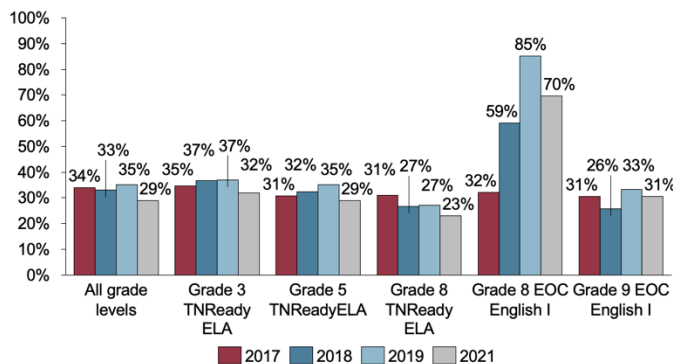
- Rates of student proficiency declined between 2019 and 2021 in **ELA** across all grade levels analyzed.
- Across elementary grades analyzed, ELA proficiency rates declined below 2017 levels (first year of data included).
- The overall percentage of students meeting proficiency benchmarks dropped by 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2021.

ELA Statewide Summary

As Figure 1 below illustrates, the overall percentage of students statewide who achieved proficiency on **TNReady** ELA assessments was relatively stable between 2017 and 2019, before dropping six percentage points between 2019 and 2021.

The English I **EOC assessment** is primarily administered to ninth graders; however, a small number of eighth-grade students also take it (in 2021, just 92 eighth graders took the English I assessment, compared to nearly 68,000 ninth graders). As the figure below shows, a much higher percentage of eighth graders met proficiency benchmarks on that assessment compared to ninth graders, even after a steep decline (of 15 percentage points) between 2019 and 2021. (Note that eighth grade students taking the English I EOC assessment tend to be on a more advanced academic track, so higher rates of proficiency are expected among those students.) The rate of ninth graders scoring as proficient remained relatively stable.

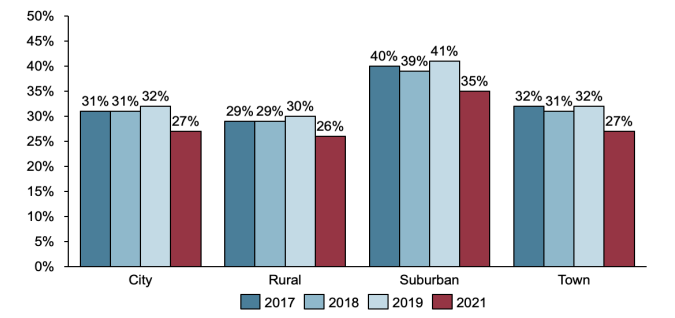
Figure 1. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in ELA, by grade level



ELA Trends by Geographic Type

Analyzing these data across geographies shows that combined **ELA** proficiency rates in grades 3-8 were stable prior to the pandemic, but all geographies saw declines between 2019 and 2021 (see Figure 2). Suburban proficiency rates were higher than other geographies across all years included in this analysis, however these districts saw the largest decline in their rates, 6 percentage points, between 2019 and 2021.

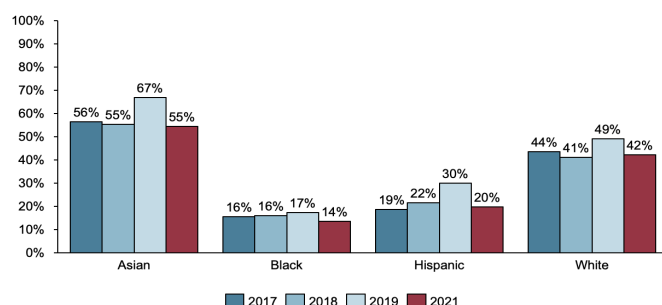
Figure 2. Percent of students in grades 3-8 meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in ELA, by geographic type



ELA Trends by Student Race/Ethnicity

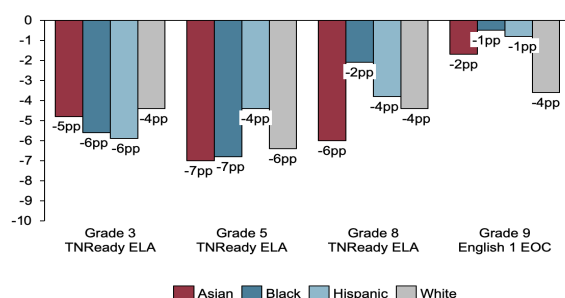
Across grade levels, there are large gaps in the percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks on ELA and English I assessments each year by student race/ethnicity. Asian students consistently outperform their peers, followed by white students, then Hispanic students, with Black students experiencing the lowest levels of achievement (see Figure 3). These gaps existed prior to the pandemic and have persisted.

Figure 3. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in ELA, by race/ethnicity, grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 combined



In Grade 3 ELA, the percent of Black and Hispanic students meeting proficiency benchmarks declined the most relative to other racial/ethnic groups between 2019 and 2021, at 6 percentage points each. On the grades 5 and 8 ELA **TNReady** and grade 9 English I assessments, declines in the percent proficient for Asian and white students were larger than those for Black or Hispanic students (see Figure 4). However, higher proportions of both of those student groups are achieving proficiency — both prior to and in the midst of the impact of the pandemic.

Figure 4. Percentage point (pp) change in proficiency rates on ELA TCAP assessments between 2019 and 2021, by grade level and student race/ethnicity



ELA Trends by Student Subgroup

High-need groups of students, including those who are economically disadvantaged, those who are learning English, and those who have disabilities, have consistently met grade-level **ELA** performance benchmarks at lower rates than their peers over the last several years (see Figure 5). Between 2019 and 2021, however, declines in the percent of students meeting proficiency benchmarks among high-need subgroups of students were smaller than for the “All Students” group, with the exception of economically disadvantaged students in grade 3 (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Percent of students in grades 3, 5, and 8 combined meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in ELA by student subgroup, 2017 through 2021

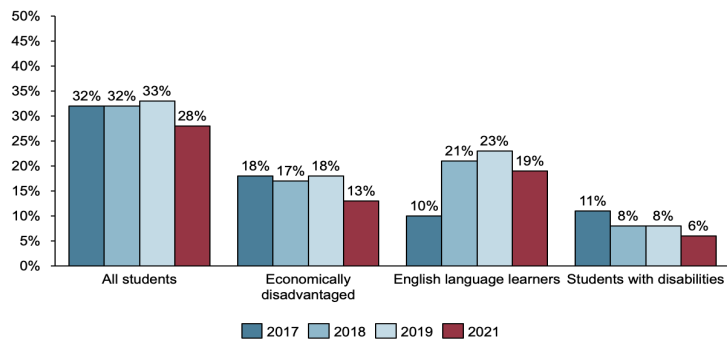
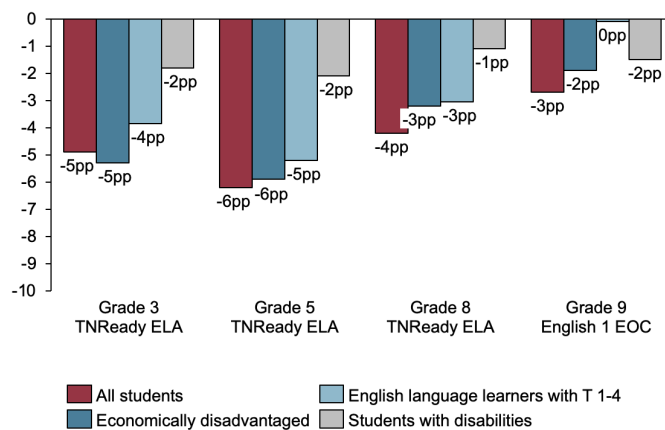


Figure 6. Percentage point (pp) change in proficiency rates on ELA TCAP assessments between 2019 and 2021, by grade level and student subgroup



TCAP Math Data Summary

Key Takeaways:

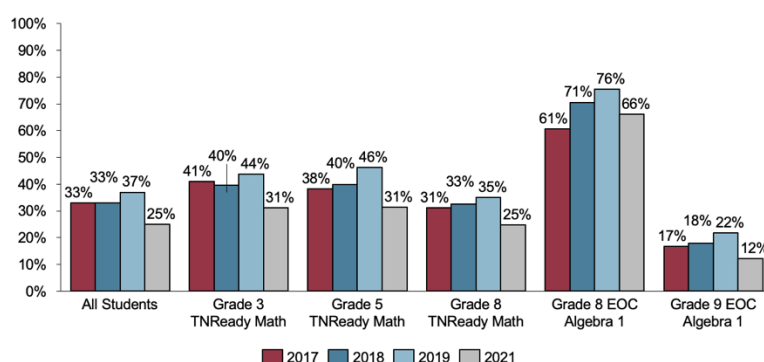
- The overall percentage of students meeting proficiency benchmarks dropped by 12 percentage points between 2019 and 2021.
- Student proficiency rates declined between 2019 and 2021 in math across all grade levels analyzed by 10 percentage points or more.
- Across elementary grades analyzed, math proficiency rates declined below 2017 levels (first year of data included), erasing significant gains in prior years (particularly in grade 5).
- In grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 math, students attending districts located in cities and Black students experienced the largest declines in percent achieving proficiency between 2019 and 2021.
- Significant gains in the percent of students demonstrating proficiency in math up to 2019, particularly for English learners and economically disadvantaged students, are all but erased in 2021 results.

Math Statewide Summary

In math, declines in the percentage of students meeting grade-level proficiency benchmarks were substantial — a drop of at least 10 percentage points between 2019 and 2021 — overall and in grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 (see Figure 7).

Similar to the English I **EOC assessment**, the Algebra I EOC assessment is administered primarily in ninth grade, but a small number of eighth-grade students also take it (approximately 6,500 eighth graders in 2021 took the Algebra I EOC assessment, compared to nearly 47,500 ninth graders). A larger percent of eighth graders met proficiency benchmarks on this assessment compared to ninth graders, which is expected given that eighth graders taking Algebra I tend to be on a more advanced academic track. However, both grade levels experienced a 10-percentage-point decline between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 7. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in math, by grade level and assessment

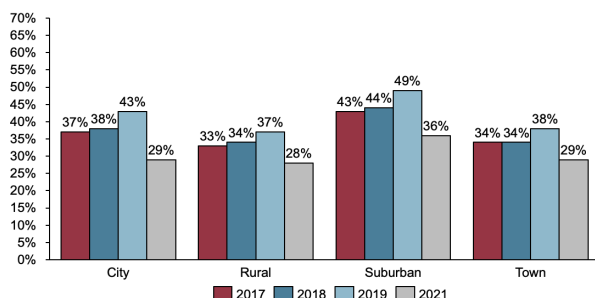


Math Trends by Geographic Type

Analyzing these data across geographies shows that math proficiency rates were rising in all geographies prior to the pandemic but, consistent with statewide trends, all geographies experienced declines between 2019 and 2021. Districts located in cities experienced the largest decline, of 14 percentage points, followed by suburban districts, with a decline of 13 percentage

points. Both rural and town districts saw declines of 9 percentage points between 2019 and 2021 (see Figure 8).

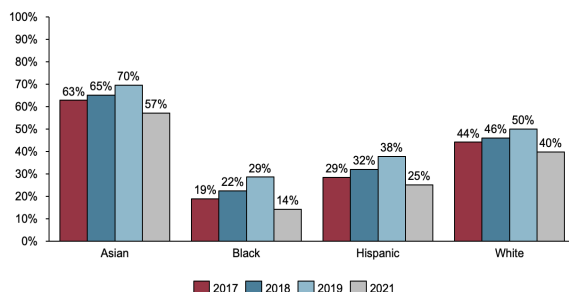
Figure 8. Percent of students in grades 3, 5, and 8 combined meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in math, by geographic type



Math Trends by Student Race/Ethnicity

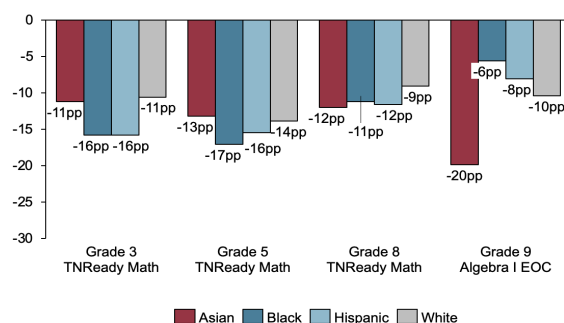
Similar to **ELA**, gaps exist in math among students by race/ethnicity, as they did prior to the pandemic. Asian students meet proficiency benchmarks at higher rates than their peers, followed by White students, Hispanic students, and Black students. However, as Figure 9 shows, math proficiency rates were increasing prior to the pandemic for all racial/ethnic groups of students, and all racial/ethnic groups experienced declines of 10 percentage points or more between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 9. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in math, by race/ethnicity, grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 combined



In grades 3, 5, 8, and 9, all racial/ethnic subgroups saw substantial declines in the percent of students meeting grade-level benchmarks. In grades 3 and 5, Black and Hispanic students saw the largest declines in proficiency rates, while Asian students experienced the steepest decline on the grade 9 Algebra I **EOC assessment** (see Figure 10).

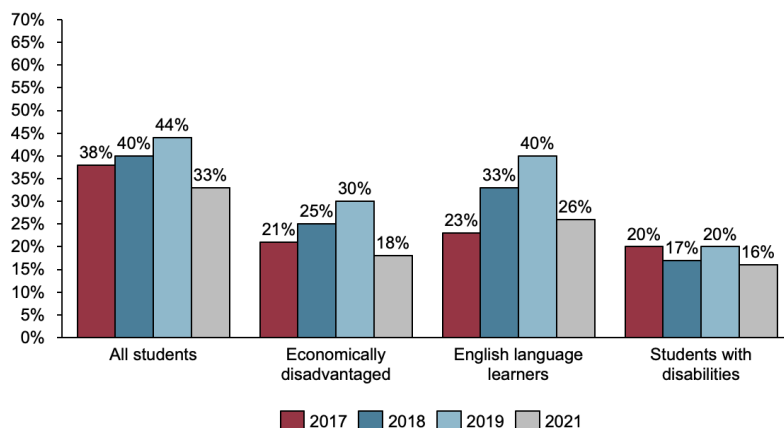
Figure 10. Percentage point (pp) change in proficiency rates on math TCAP assessments between 2019 and 2021, by grade level and student race/ethnicity



Math Trends by Student Subgroup

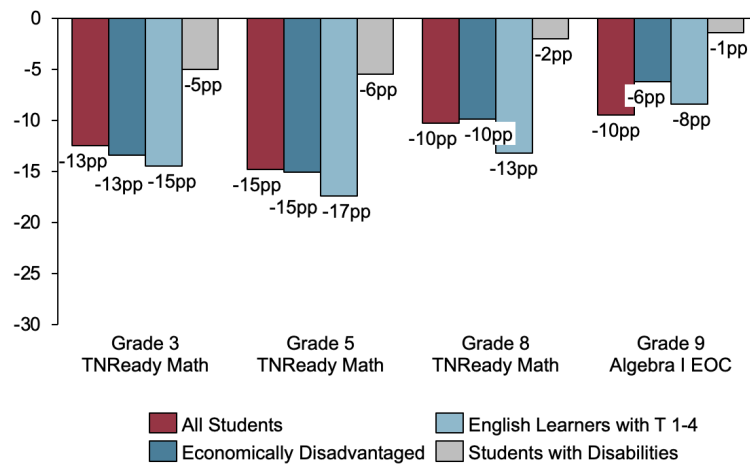
Like in ELA, high-need groups of students, including those who are economically disadvantaged, those who are learning English, and those who have disabilities, have consistently met grade-level math performance benchmarks at lower rates than their peers over the last several years. Math proficiency rates were generally rising prior to the pandemic, and all groups experienced declines from 2019 into 2021 (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Percent of students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 9 combined meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks in math by student subgroup, 2017 through 2021



Between 2019 and 2021, all groups of students, including high-need subgroups, experienced declines in the percent proficient in math. However, as Figure 12 illustrates, declines were largest for economically disadvantaged students and English language learners regardless of grade level, and smallest among the students with disabilities subgroup. However, pre-pandemic proficiency rates were also the lowest among students with disabilities.

Figure 12. Percentage point (pp) change in proficiency rates on math TCAP assessments between 2019 and 2021, by grade level and student subgroup



Spring 2021 TCAP Data by Primary District Operating Model

Key Takeaways:

- Districts whose primary operating model in school year 2020-21 was in person had higher rates of proficiency in **ELA** and math compared to **hybrid** and **remote** districts.
- There are considerable differences in the demographics of students attending districts operating in different modes as well as differences in how models were implemented and experienced by students and families, making it difficult to draw conclusions from these data one way or another about the impact of operating models on student outcomes.

Summary

Between September 2020 and May 2021, districts across Tennessee reported their operating model to the state on a weekly basis, at a total of 32 points in time over the course of the year. Each district reported one of six operating models: **in person**, **in person — parent choice**, **hybrid — parent choice**, **hybrid — alt schedules**, **hybrid — grade bands**, or **remote only**. (For the purposes of this analysis, we consolidated these six options into three: in person, hybrid, and remote. See the glossary at the end of this document for a definition of each.) Some districts moved in and out of different operating models over the course of the school year, while others maintained the same model for its entirety. To understand how districts' student assessment data correlated with operating models, we assigned each district a *primary* operating model, defined as the operating model that it reported on more than 50% of the 32 reporting dates. Table 1 below summarizes the distribution of primary operating models, including the number of districts with each primary operating model and the total number of students enrolled across those districts.

Table 1. Count of districts and students by primary operating model

Primary operating model	Number of districts	Number of students
In person	26	191K
Hybrid	114	584K
Remote	7	206K

As Figures 13 and 14 illustrate, student demographics varied widely across districts' primary operating models. For example, while 78% of the students in districts whose primary operating model was in person were white, just 22% of students in remote districts were white. Nearly half of the students in remote districts were economically disadvantaged, compared to 29% and 18% of students in hybrid and in-person districts, respectively.

Figure 13. Student demographics by primary operating model

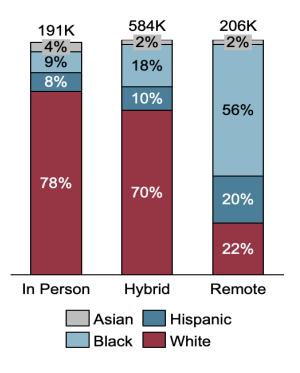
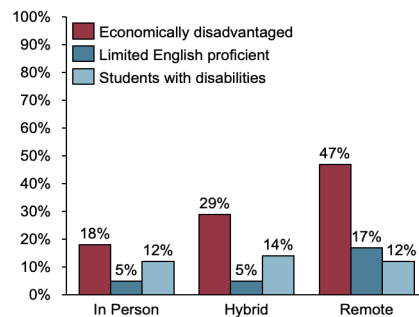


Figure 14. Student subgroups by primary operating model



Given the dramatic differences in student populations and other factors across operating models, this analysis does not enable clear conclusions about the effect of any one operating model on student achievement. That said, data show that more students in **in-person** districts met “**On Track**” or “**Mastered**” benchmarks in **ELA** and math (with the exception of Algebra I) across grade levels compared to students in districts operating in **hybrid** or **remote** models (see Figures 15 and 16 below).

Figure 15. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks, TNReady ELA and grades 8 and 9 English I EOC, by primary operating model

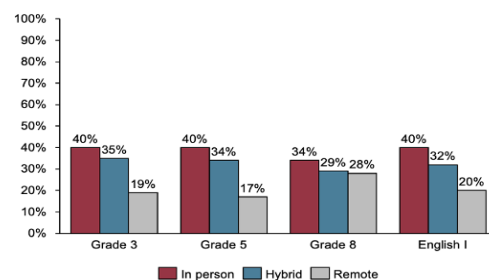
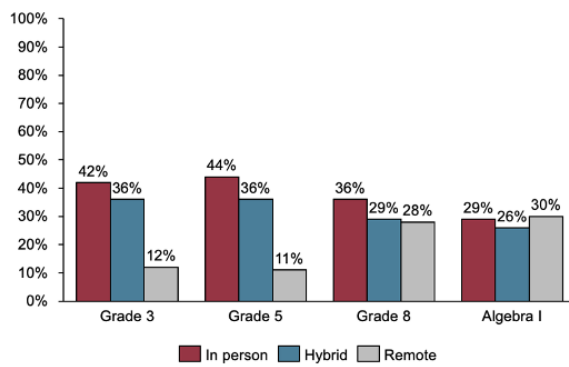


Figure 16. Percent of students meeting “On Track” or “Mastered” benchmarks, TNReady math and grades 8 and 9 Algebra I EOC, by primary operating model



High School Data Summary: ACT Scores, Graduation Rates, and Ready Graduate Rates

Key Takeaways:

- Graduation rate data are not yet available for the class of 2021⁴; however, 90% of students in the 2020 cohort graduated, consistent with prior years.
- **ACT** data show relative stability in the statewide average composite score year over year, from 19.4 in 2019 to 19.3 in 2020.⁵
- Less than half (41%) of graduating seniors met **Ready Graduate** benchmarks in 2020, with considerable gaps among student subgroups. The rate of “readiness” remained stable in 2020, at a similar rate to the prior two years.

ACT Data

The statewide average composite score for all students in 2020 was 19.3, down modestly from 2019. This score compares with a national average composite score of 20.6 in 2020, down 0.1 points from 2019.⁶ While data on Tennessee’s ACT scores is not yet available for 2021, data through 2020 for high-need subgroups, including students who are economically disadvantaged, those who are learning English, and those with disabilities, consistently reflect scores below the statewide average (see Figure 17).

Tennessee’s ACT participation is consistently strong. Data for the classes of 2017-20 show that statewide ACT participation rates have hovered just below 100% with some slight variation by student subgroup (see Figure 18). These high participation rates ensure a comprehensive picture of students’ postsecondary readiness statewide. It is worth noting that not all states require that all graduating students take the ACT, and states where participation rates are very high tend to reflect lower average scores compared to those in which students opt into taking college entrance exams. It is also worth noting that the way Tennessee calculates its average composite scores differs from how ACT calculates average composite scores: Beginning with the 2015-16 school year, Tennessee began calculating average scores at the school, district, and state level using the highest scores students earn in the three years preceding their graduation.⁷ ACT calculates average scores using the most recent score generated by each student. As a result, there are discrepancies between the data reported by TDOE and that reported by ACT. The statewide averages reported in the paragraph above reflect ACT-reported data. The subgroup data summarized in Figure 17 reflects data reported by TDOE.

Figure 17. ACT composite scores by student subgroup

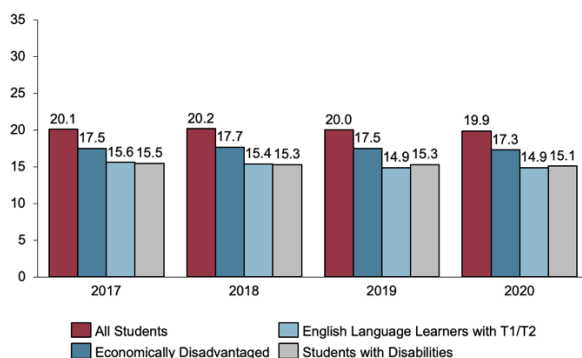
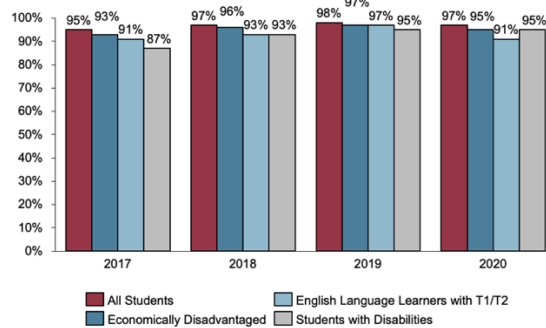


Figure 18. ACT participation rates by student subgroup



Graduation Rates Statewide Summary

Graduation rate data for the class of 2021 are not yet available.⁸ However, data show that Tennessee statewide high school graduation rates have stayed consistently around 89% over the last several years, including for the class of 2020, with gaps by student race/ethnicity and subgroup. As Figure 19 illustrates, Black and Hispanic students graduate at lower rates than their Asian and White peers. As Figure 20 illustrates, economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities graduate at lower rates than the statewide average.

Figure 19. High school graduation rates by race/ethnicity, 2017 through 2020

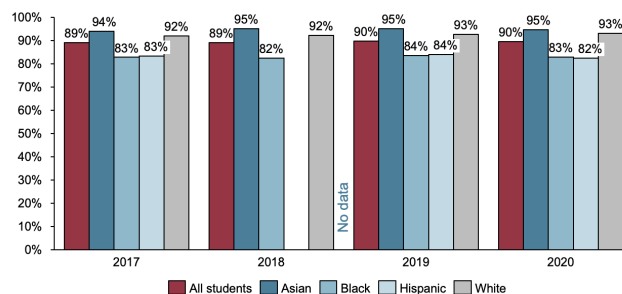
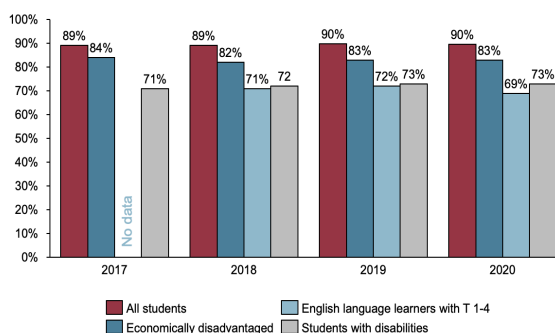


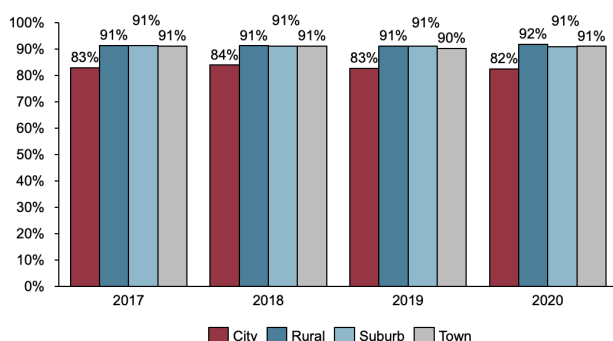
Figure 20. High school graduation rates by student subgroup, 2017 through 2020



Graduation Rates Summary by Geographic Type

As Figure 21 shows, graduation rates vary somewhat by geographic type, with districts located in cities having lower graduation rates than those located in rural communities, suburbs, and towns.

Figure 21. High school graduation rates by geography, 2017 through 2020



Ready Graduate Rates Statewide Summary

Although Tennessee's statewide high school graduation rate hovers around 90%, less than half of the students who graduate are meeting the state's **Ready Graduate** benchmark,⁹ which indicates readiness for postsecondary success. Statewide, 41% of students meet the Ready Graduate benchmark. Rates are even lower for Black and Hispanic students (see Figure 22) and for economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities (see Figure 23).

Figure 22. Percent of students meeting Ready Graduate benchmarks, by race

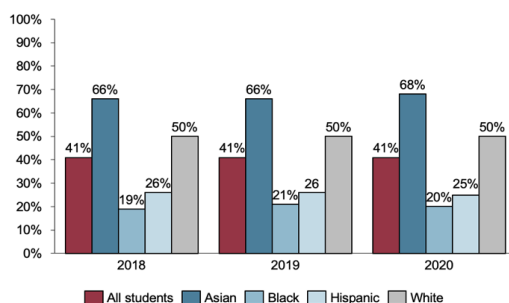
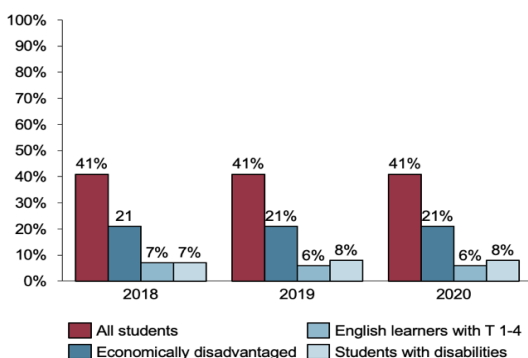


Figure 23. Percent of students meeting Ready Graduate benchmarks, by subgroup



K-12 Enrollment, Withdrawal, Dropout, and Chronic Absenteeism

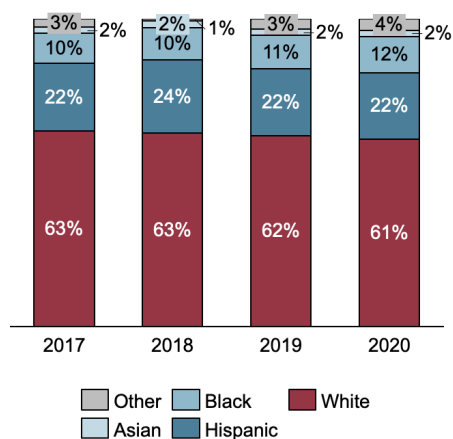
Key Takeaways:

- Public K-12 enrollment in Tennessee had been declining prior to the pandemic, and that decline continued into 2021, with just over 957,000 students enrolled statewide in fall 2021.
- More than 12,000 students withdrew to home schools in 2020, compared with fewer than 6,300 in 2019.
- Statewide dropout has remained stable through the pandemic, at nearly 5,000 students or between 6% and 7% each year.
- **Chronic absenteeism** rates rose between 2019 and 2021 for all students and within all subgroups of students, with the largest increases among Hispanic students (8 percentage points) and English language learners (10 percentage points).

K-12 Enrollment

Tennessee's K-12 public school enrollment has declined slightly in recent years, from approximately 1 million students in 2017 to just over 957,000 in 2021.¹⁰ While there has been a slight decline in the percent of students who are white and a slight increase in the percent of students who are Hispanic, white students continue to make up the majority of Tennessee's public school population (see Figure 24).

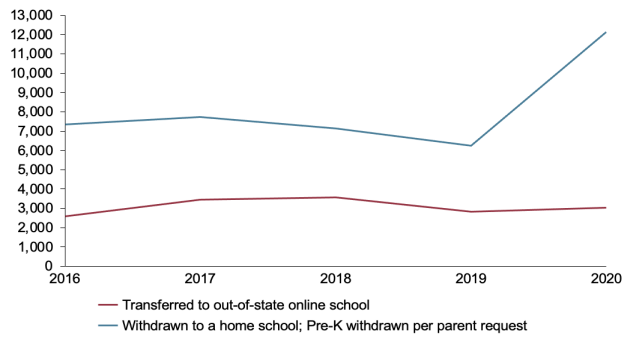
Figure 24. Percent of K-12 enrollment in Tennessee public schools, by race/ethnicity



K-12 Withdrawal

When a parent unenrolls their student from a Tennessee school district for any reason, the district reports a withdrawal code to the Tennessee Department of Education, indicating the reason that student withdrew. As Figure 25 below shows, there was a considerable increase from 2019 to 2020 in the number of students whose parents withdrew them to home-school. While these data do not fully capture “missing students” — those who were expected to enroll but did not — they offer an emerging picture of how the pandemic may have affected enrollment patterns.

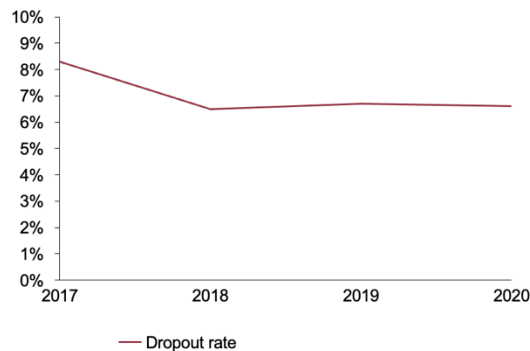
Figure 25. Number of students withdrawing from districts, by withdrawal reason



High School Dropout

Cohort dropout rates have remained steady for the past several years, hovering just below 7% (see Figure 26). The class of 2020 had a dropout rate of 6.6%.

Figure 26. High school dropout rates



Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student missing 10% or more of the days the student is enrolled for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspensions.¹¹ The statewide rate of chronic absenteeism for all students has been stable at 13% to 14% for the last several years, with variation by race/ethnicity and subgroup (see Figures 27 and 28). Chronic absenteeism rates increased from 2020 to 2021 for all students and within all subgroups of students. Increases in rates of chronic absenteeism were steepest for Black and Hispanic students and for English learners and economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 27. Rates of chronic absenteeism K-12, by race

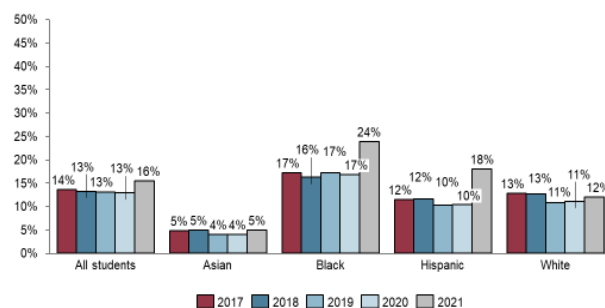
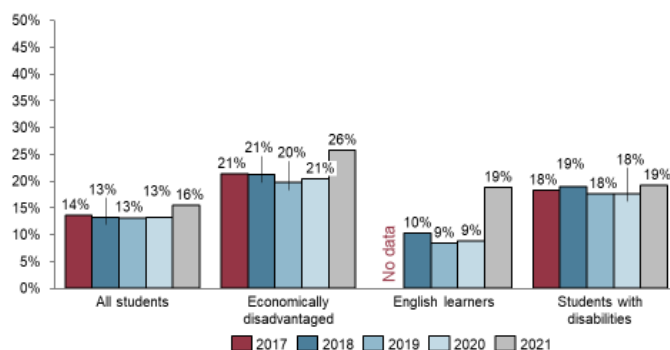


Figure 28. Rates of chronic absenteeism K-12, by student subgroup



Chronic absenteeism rates tend to be higher in the high school grades, relative to kindergarten through eighth grade (see Figures 29 and 30). Since 2018, chronic absenteeism rates for Tennessee high school students had been declining overall and by race and student subgroup. However, those rates increased across races and subgroups, with a particularly pronounced increase among high school English learners.

Figure 29. Rates of chronic absenteeism in high school, by race

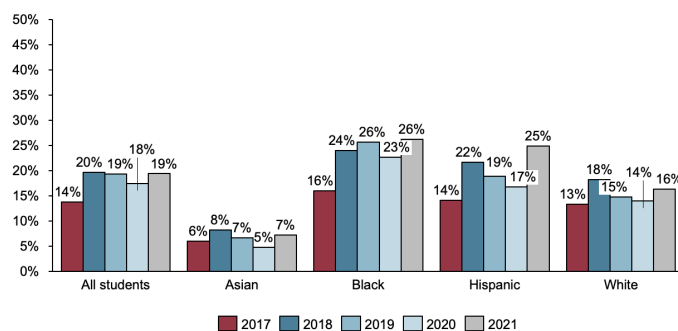
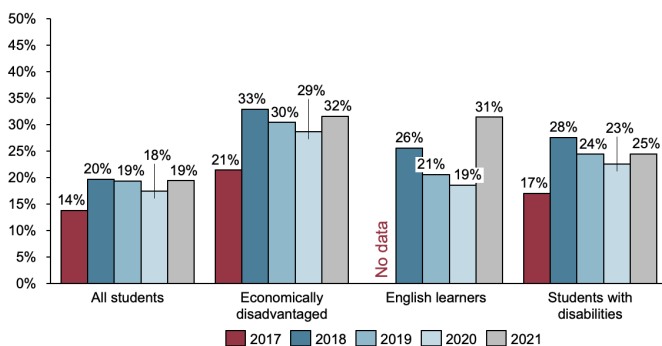


Figure 30. Rates of chronic absenteeism in high school, by student subgroup



Postsecondary Data Summary

Key Takeaways

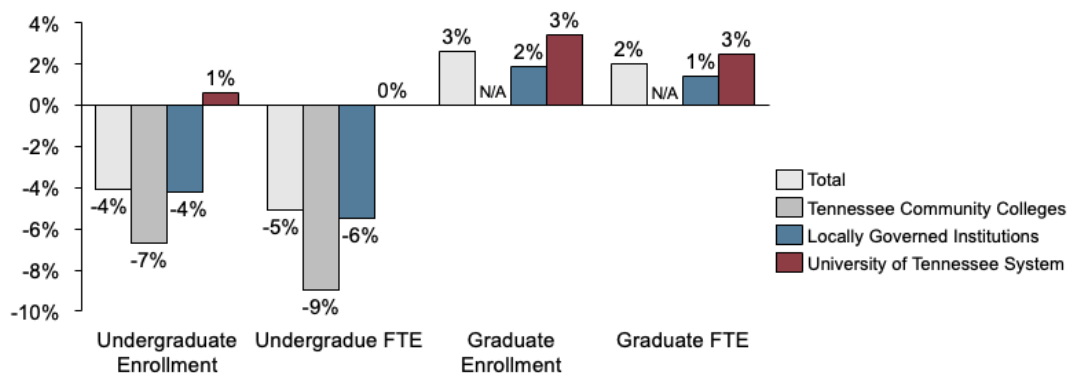
- Undergraduate student enrollment in fall 2021 fell by 4% (to 176,615) students, compared to fall 2020.
- Community colleges experienced the steepest decline at 7%.
- Fewer undergraduate students enrolled in full-time postsecondary programs in fall 2021.
- The number of students progressing towards completion of a bachelor's or associate's degree or certification — as measured by achieving **credit hour** milestones — decreased overall between 2017 and 2021; however, the greatest declines occurred after the 2019-20 academic year and were most pronounced for adult students over 25 years of age, low-income students, and academically underprepared students.
- The percentage of university students graduating with a bachelor's degree remained stable between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, hovering around 60%.
- The number of students completing an associate's degree or one-to-two-year certification program at a community college remained stable between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years.

Enrollment Trends

Overall, undergraduate student enrollment declined by approximately 4% across all of Tennessee's postsecondary institutions between fall 2020 and fall 2021. Community colleges in Tennessee experienced the greatest decline, almost 7% (see Figure 31). The percent of graduate student enrollment increased by 3% overall, driven largely by the University of Tennessee system.

Data are also available on **full-time equivalent (FTE)** enrollment, which considers the total **credit hours** in which students are enrolled and translates that total to the number of students those hours would equate to if every student were full-time. In other words, if an institution enrolled 2 students — one taking a half of a full-time course load and the other taking a full-time course load — those two students would equate to a 1.5 FTE enrollment. Comparing FTE data to the number of students reflects that FTE enrollments declined at higher rates than total students enrolled. This suggests fewer students were enrolled in full-time undergraduate programs versus part-time.

Figure 31. Postsecondary enrollment changes, fall 2020 to fall 2021



Postsecondary Milestones

Enrollment data provide an indicator of initial access to postsecondary opportunities, but other measures give a sense of student success after enrollment. Tennessee's higher education funding formula is partially based on student outcomes — rewarding institutions based on the degree to which students achieve certain milestones. Data collected to support this funding system provide a more detailed picture of student success.

For four-year universities, Tennessee counts how many students achieve 30, 60, and 90 **credit hours** earned, a reflection of the degree to which students remain enrolled and successfully earn course credit (also called “progression”). The state also collects data on degrees earned (completion) and on graduation rates. Graduation rate data reflect the percent of first-time, first-year students who complete an undergraduate degree within six years, meeting the state's definition of “on-time graduation.”

Similarly, for community colleges, the state collects data on similar progression milestones — the number of students acquiring 12, 24, and 36 credit hours. Completion data are captured for associate's degrees and two types of industry certifications. In addition to those measures, the state collects additional data that reflects community colleges' specialized role in providing early postsecondary opportunities for high school students, in enabling students to earn credit and experience that transfers to four-year or other institutions, and in preparing students for the workforce.

These measures include:

- The number of high school students who complete at least one **dual enrollment** course.
- The number of students who successfully transfer to another postsecondary institution with at least 12 credit hours.
- The number of students placed in a job.

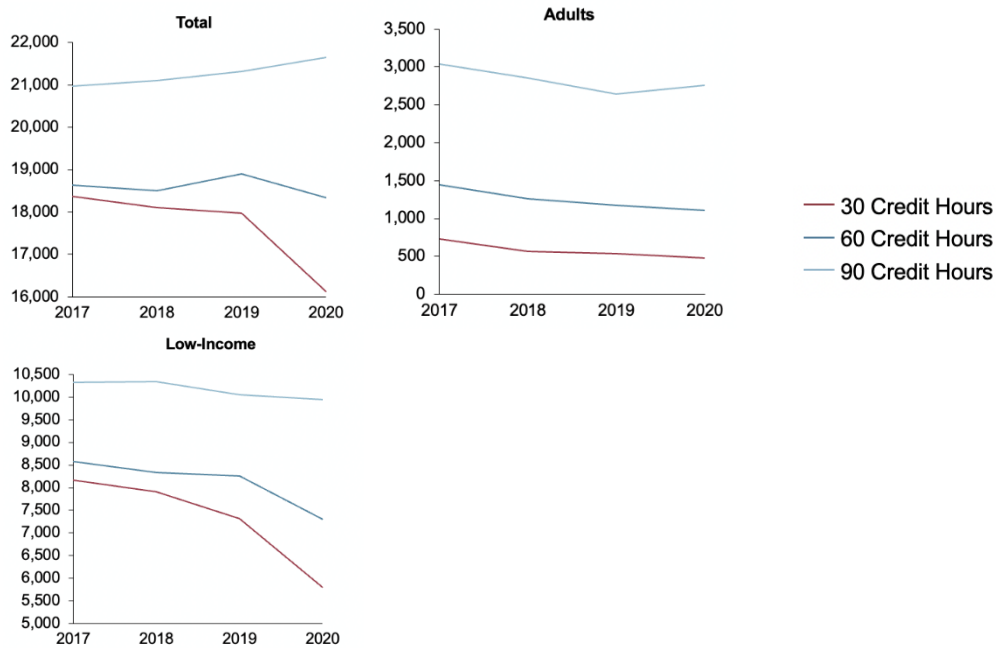
The state collects these measures for all students and for **focus populations** that differ by institution type. Focus populations for all institutions include adults aged 25 and older and low-income students. Focus populations for community colleges also include students identified as academically underprepared (based on **ACT** scores or as determined by the institution).

All of these measures factor into state funding for institutions, and they provide valuable information on trends in student access and success within Tennessee's postsecondary systems.

Student Progression to Completion

The number of university students who progressed toward completion of a degree between 2017 and 2021 decreased overall; however, the decline was most pronounced for the number of low-income students completing at least 30 or 60 credit hours between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. One thousand, five hundred two fewer low-income students, or 20% less, reached the 30-credit milestone, while 957 low-income students, or almost 12% less, reached the 60-credit milestone (see Figure 32 and Table 2).

Figure 32: Progression toward degree completion, university students 2017-21



School years	30 credit hours			60 credit ours			90 credit hours		
	Total	Adults	Low-income	Total	Adults	Low-income	Total	Adults	Low-income
2017-18	18,377	735	8,170	18,640	1,446	8,576	20,972	3,034	10,322
2018-19	18,102	565	7,907	18,501	1,261	8,336	21,110	2,851	10,335
2019-20	17,983	535	7,310	18,908	1,175	8,259	21,321	2,644	10,049
2020-21	16,123	484	5,808	18,346	1,103	7,302	21,654	2,754	9,946

Similarly, the number of community college students who progressed toward the completion of a degree or certification decreased between 2017 and 2021. Although already on a decline, the number of **focus population** community college students completing at least 12 or 36 **credit hours** dropped substantially between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. For example, the number of adult students completing at least 12 credit hours decreased by 22% from 4,039 to 3,147 students. Likewise, the number of low-income and academically underprepared students completing at least 12 credit hours each fell by approximately 4,000 students (see Figure 33 and Table 3).

Figure 33. Progression toward degree or certificate completion, community college students 2017-21

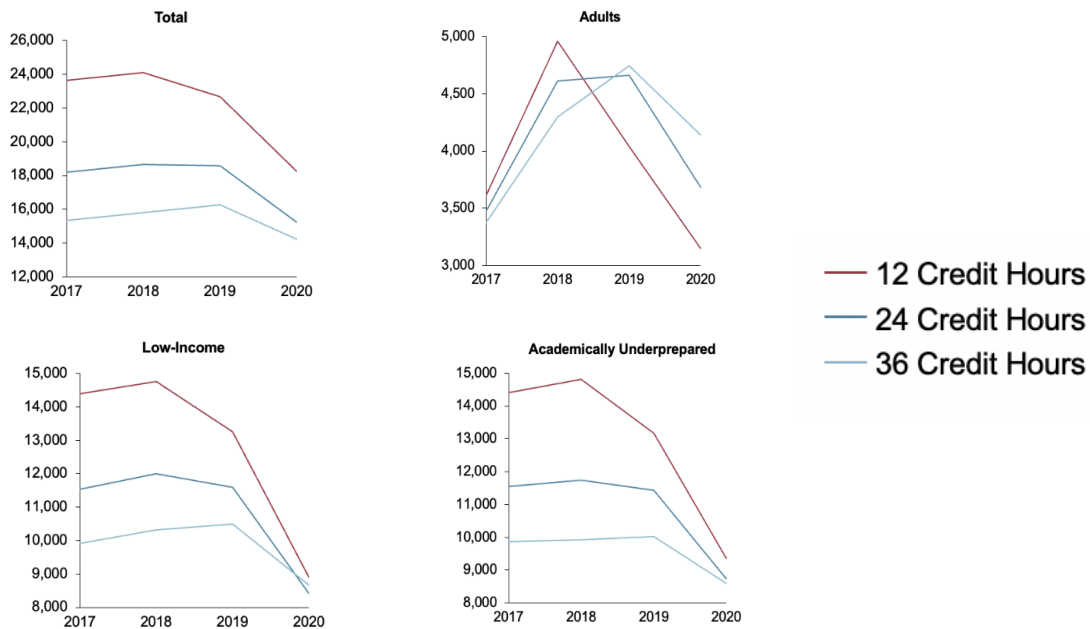


Table 3. Progression toward degree or certificate completion, community college students 2017-21

School Years

12 credit hours

Total

Adult

Low-income

Academically underprepared

2017-18

23,649

3,609

14,399

14,398

2018-19

24,111

4,961

14,753

14,807

2019-20

22,689

4,039

13,260

13,171

2020-21

18,248

3,147

8,894

9,351

	<u>24 credit hours</u>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Low-income</u>	<u>Academically underprepared</u>
<u>2017-18</u>	<u>18,207</u>	<u>3,473</u>	<u>11,530</u>	<u>11,544</u>
<u>2018-19</u>	<u>18,676</u>	<u>4,612</u>	<u>12,004</u>	<u>11,745</u>
<u>2019-20</u>	<u>18,587</u>	<u>4,663</u>	<u>11,588</u>	<u>11,436</u>
<u>2020-21</u>	<u>15,212</u>	<u>3,682</u>	<u>8,414</u>	<u>8,722</u>
	<u>36 credit hours</u>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Low-income</u>	<u>Academically underprepared</u>
<u>2017-18</u>	<u>15,337</u>	<u>3,373</u>	<u>9,908</u>	<u>9,862</u>
<u>2018-19</u>	<u>15,784</u>	<u>4,301</u>	<u>10,312</u>	<u>9,934</u>

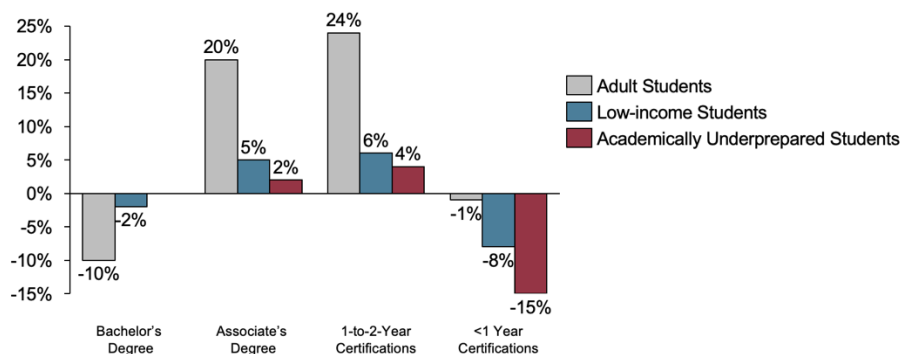
<u>2019-20</u>	<u>16,255</u>	<u>4,746</u>	<u>10,502</u>	<u>10,019</u>
<u>2020-21</u>	<u>14,230</u>	<u>4,137</u>	<u>8,660</u>	<u>8,589</u>

Completion

The percentage of students graduating from a four-year university with a bachelor's degree stayed fairly consistent despite the COVID-19 education disruption, hovering around 60%. The impact on **focus population** student groups completing a bachelor's degree was minimal also, although there was an overall decline between 2017 and 2021 of nearly 10% for adult students over 25 years old and 2% for low-income students, respectively (see Figure 34).

Similarly, the number of students earning an associate's degree or certification remained stable after the COVID-19 education disruption after experiencing an overall increase by 7% for associate's degrees and 10% for one-to-two-year certificates between 2017 and 2021. Notably, the percentage of adults over age 25 completing an associate's degree program and a one-to-two-year certification program increased significantly by 20% and 24%, respectively, between 2017 and 2021 (see Figure 34). With regard to **short-term certification programs** requiring less than one year to complete, low-income and academically underprepared student completion declined significantly by 8% and 15%, respectively.

Figure 34. Change in degree and certificate completion among special populations, 2017-21



Other Community College Metrics

- There was a 6% decline in the number of students transferring from a two-year postsecondary institution to a four-year postsecondary institution between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years.
- The percentage of students pursuing **dual credit** courses declined by 8% between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.
- The percentage of students graduating from a community college program and obtaining employment decreased by nearly 10% between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, with 3,568 students being placed in a job after completing a program.

Allocation of Federal ESSER Funding

Key Takeaways:

- Tennessee received nearly \$3.9 billion in **ESSER** funding and distributed nearly \$3.5 billion to districts.
- The two largest uses of ESSER funding by districts were purchasing education technology (\$34.7 million of ESSER 1.0 funds) and addressing facility needs and deferred maintenance (\$23.5 million of ESSER 2.0 funds).

Summary

As part of federal pandemic relief funding, state education agencies were able to apply to the U.S. Department of Education for ESSER Fund dollars. There were three total rounds of funding, known as ESSER 1.0, ESSER 2.0, and ESSER 3.0. Across these three rounds of funding, Tennessee received a total of nearly \$3.9 billion. In accordance with program requirements, 90% of those dollars (nearly \$3.5 billion) were distributed to districts (see Table 4).

Table 4. Total CARES, CRRSA, and ARP Relief Funding

	ESSER 1.0	ESSER 2.0	ESSER 3.0	Total ESSER
State CARES allocation	\$259,891,154	\$1,107,656,022	\$2,487,638,081	\$3,855,185,257
State set-aside (10%)	\$25,989,115	\$110,765,602	\$248,763,808	\$385,518,525
Local education agency (LEA) allocations (90%)	\$233,902,038	\$996,890,420	\$2,238,874,272	\$3,469,666,731

Analysis of districts' ESSER 1.0 budget categories reveals that districts used those funds primarily to plan for long-term closures and to purchase education technology (see Table 5). Smaller amounts were put toward student mental health supports, the unique needs of special populations, and summer/supplemental learning opportunities.

Table 5. Use of ESSER 1.0 funds

Category	Total funding statewide
Mental health supports	\$2,243,864
Unique needs of special populations	\$2,519,525
Summer/supplemental learning	\$6,685,435
Planning for long-term closures	\$15,682,235
Purchasing education technology	\$34,760,071

Analysis of districts' ESSER 2.0 budget categories reveals that districts primarily used those funds to address learning loss and to address facility needs and deferred maintenance. Smaller amounts were used for other purposes, including providing mental health supports and addressing learning acceleration (see Table 6).

Table 6. Use of ESSER 2.0 funds

Category	Total funding statewide
Planning for long-term closures	\$598,063
Addressing the unique needs of special populations	\$987,010
Providing mental health supports	\$1,031,263
Addressing learning acceleration: summer, supplemental after school, and tutoring	\$2,423,443
Purchasing education technology	\$9,132,827
Addressing learning loss: coordinators, summer, supplemental after school, and tutoring	\$18,573,602
Addressing facility needs and deferred maintenance/infrastructure	\$23,544,544

Data are not yet available for districts' **ESSER** 3.0 budgets.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters that struck Tennessee in 2020 and reverberated into 2021 had significant impacts on education outcomes in Tennessee, from kindergarten through postsecondary. In particular:

- Rates of students scoring proficient on **TCAP** assessments declined between 2019 and 2021 in **ELA** and math, with declines in math being particularly severe.
- Student groups whose proficiency rates were most negatively impacted were economically disadvantaged students, urban and suburban students, English language learners, and students of color.
- Nearly 3,300 more students dropped out of high school in 2020 than in 2019.
- **Chronic absenteeism** rates rose between 2019 and 2020 across all subgroups of students.
- Postsecondary undergraduate student enrollment declined overall, particularly at the community college level.
- There were also declines in the number of students progressing toward completion of a postsecondary degree or credential.

The state undertook a number of actions to address these challenges, including:

- Offering flexibility in testing administration to maximize districts' ability to meet participation goals.
- Distributing nearly \$3.5 billion in **ESSER** funding directly to districts to help them meet their most pressing needs.
- Calling a special legislative session in January 2021, which resulted in the passage of legislation specifically aimed at addressing students' learning recovery needs.
- Making strategic investments in a variety of programs to support districts and students, such as summer programming, tutoring, and the **Reading 360 initiative**.

Looking forward, there is much work to be done. However, Tennessee has both the data to know how its students are performing and where gaps exist and a robust infrastructure of state policy and programming to support districts in meeting their students' needs — which together lay the foundation for a path to recovery.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term	Acronym	Definition
American College Testing	ACT	A standardized test used for college admissions in the United States.
Chronic absenteeism		Missing 10% or more of the days the student is enrolled for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspensions.
Credit hours		Recognition for having taken a course at a school or university, measured by the number of hours a student is enrolled in a class per week.
Dual enrollment/Dual Credit		A postsecondary course, taught either at the postsecondary institution or at the high school, by postsecondary faculty or credentialed adjunct faculty. Students are enrolled at the postsecondary institution and earn postsecondary credit upon completion of the course. High school credit is awarded based on local policy.
End of Course Assessments	EOC	Subject-area assessments administered at the end of primary courses at the high school level to assess student understanding of state standards.
English language arts	ELA	Reading, writing, and comprehension of the English language.
English language learner transition 1-4		Students who have successfully completed and transitioned out of an English language learning (ELL) program. The numbers 1-4 indicate the number of years since a student has transitioned out of an ELL program.
Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief	ESSER	Federal grants awarded to state educational agencies for the purpose of providing local education agencies with emergency relief funds to address the impact of COVID-19.
Focus population		Special populations at the postsecondary level. At the four-year university and community college levels, focus populations are adult students over age 25 and low-income students. At the community college level, learners who are underprepared are also focus populations.
Full-time equivalent	FTE	Students whose total credit hours for a given semester are equivalent to a full-time course load.

Hybrid instruction — alternative		An instructional model where students alternate between in-person school and remote/distant learning, usually based on days of the week.
Hybrid instruction — grade bands		An instructional model where students enrolled in a particular grade alternate between in-person school and remote/distant learning on an established schedule.
Hybrid instruction — parent choice		An instructional model where students receive some academic instruction in person and some academic instruction in a remote/distant setting, but parents have other options.
In-person instruction		An instructional model where students exclusively receive academic instruction in-person at a physical school building and have no other option.
In-person instruction — parent choice		An instructional model where students exclusively receive academic instruction in-person at a physical school building, but parents have other options.
Long-term certificate program		A career technical education program of study leading to an industry-recognized certificate requiring 24-60 credit hours.
Mastered		Students performing above grade level on a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment.
On Track		Students performing on grade level on a Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment.
Reading 360 Initiative		A statewide program providing optional grants to local school districts to invest in comprehensive reading programs.
Ready Graduate		A state indicator that a high school graduate is college and career ready. A Ready Graduate must meet one of the following four criteria: (1) score benchmark on the ACT or SAT; (2) complete four early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs); (3) complete two EPSOs and earn an industry credential; or 4) complete two EPSOs and earn demonstrate military readiness.
Remote-only instruction		An instructional model where students exclusively receive online academic instruction in a remote/distant setting.
Short-term certificate program		A career technical education program of study leading to an industry-recognized certificate requiring fewer than 24 credit hours.

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program	TCAP	TCAP has been the state's testing program since 1988, and it includes TNReady assessments in math, English language arts, social studies, and science, as well as alternative assessments, like MSAA and TCAP-Alt, for students with special needs.
Tennessee Ready	TNReady	Subject-area assessments administered at the end of the school year to students in grades 3-8 to assess student understanding of state standards.

Endnotes

¹ Marie Chisholm-Burns et al., *Preliminary Report to the General Assembly: Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tennessee's Educational Systems* (Nashville: Tennessee Commission on Education Recovery and Innovation, 2020), https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/stateboardofeducation/documents/education-recovery-and-innovation-commission/2020-report/ERIC_REPORT_ONE.pdf.

² Tennessee Department of Education, "Accountability," TDOE, last modified February 1, 2021, [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/2020-21-leg-session/Accountability%20District%20&%20School%20Board%20Summary%20of%20Legislation%20-%20508%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/2020-21-leg-session/Accountability%20District%20&%20School%20Board%20Summary%20of%20Legislation%20-%20508%20(1).pdf).

³ Tennessee Department of Education, *Spring 2021 TCAP Release* (Nashville: TDOE, 2021), <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/tcap/spring-2021/TN-AcademicPerformance2020-2021.pdf>.

⁴ Graduation-rate data for the class of 2021 are not yet available because these data are subject to review by districts and are lagged by one year for accountability purposes. This is the standard data reporting protocol for this measure.

⁵ ACT, Inc., "The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2019," <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr-2019/National-CCCR-2019.pdf> and ACT, Inc., Average ACT Scores by State for the Graduating Class of 2020, <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/2020/2020-Average-ACT-Scores-by-State.pdf>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, "Data Downloads & Requests," TDOE, n.d., <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>.

⁸ Graduation data lag by one year because they are subject to review and appeal by school districts as part of the state's accountability system. Data for the class of 2021 will be available in 2022.

⁹ To be considered a Ready Graduate, a student must meet at least one of four criteria: (1) score 21 or higher on the ACT, (2) complete four EPSOs, (3) complete two EPSOs and earn an industry credential, or (4) complete two EPSOs and earn a score of military readiness on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Armed Forces Qualification Test (ASVAB AFQT). The Ready Graduate indicator is calculated for all schools with at least 30 students in the graduating cohort. It is calculated by dividing the number of on-time graduates meeting at least one Ready Graduate criterion by the total number of students in that cohort.

¹⁰ Profile data files, district-level data. Tennessee Department of Education, "Data Downloads and Requests," TDOE, n.d., <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>.

¹¹ Tennessee Department of Education, "Chronic Absenteeism," TDOE, n.d., <https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/chronic-absenteeism.html>.