



## 2021 Education Funding Review

### Partner Toolkit

*Tennessee public education stakeholders and partners are encouraged to spread the word on the exploration of the state's public education funding strategy.*

*Use the drafted social posts, graphics, events, talking points to help us promote this exciting moment in Tennessee education history to highlight the exploration of a student-centered public education funding strategy.*

## OVERVIEW

On Friday, October 8, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee and Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn invited Tennesseans to participate in the full review of the state's education funding formula and explore possibilities for a more student-centered approach. District and school leaders, elected officials, families, education stakeholders and members of the public will be engaged in the coming months through committees, survey opportunities, local meetings and more. Public engagement will focus on a student investment strategy that incorporates the following:

- Prioritizes students over systems
- Empowers parents to engage in their child's education
- Incentivizes student outcomes
- Ensures all students, regardless of location or learning needs, are served at a high-level
- Reflects Tennesseans' values
- Creates flexible funding that prepare students for postsecondary success

*Please feel free to share, retweet, and repost any and all TDOE social posts. Below are sample social media posts and graphics to use on personal social media accounts as well as talking points to provide more language on this topic. Also included in this toolkit is information on in-person and digital events to engage with the public. This toolkit provides you with language to use throughout the engagement process over the next several months.*

## TALKING POINTS

- Tennessee students are the future of our state, and we must ensure our public schools are well-equipped to prepare each one of them for lifelong success.
- Our state's continued success in the future depends on our good stewardship of resources today.
- Our state has been a leader in education and focused on strategic investments for our kids, which is essential to continuing this academic acceleration statewide.
- Consistent with our focus to continuously improve the academic achievement of all Tennessee students, I am excited to serve on a funding review subcommittee and help facilitate open conversations about an investment strategy that aligns with those goals and values.
- A funding strategy that is student-centered is essential to better support the unique needs of each individual student and accelerating their academic outcomes.
- The state's funding review engagement includes a central steering committee composed of policymakers from across the state and 18 subcommittees, who represent district and school leaders, higher education partners, elected officials, business leaders, families, education stakeholders and members of the public.
- Additionally, there are 8 public town halls spanning all regions of the state to spark open dialogue. All Tennesseans are invited and encouraged to attend to share their hopes and feedback about public education funding and how to best support our children.
- Public engagement is focusing on a student investment strategy that:
  - Prioritizes students over systems
  - Empowers parents to engage in their child's education
  - Incentivizes student outcomes
  - Ensures all students, regardless of location or learning needs, are served at a high-level
  - Reflects Tennesseans' values
  - Creates flexible funding that prepare students for postsecondary success
  - Keep students in public education as the center of our focus
- Over the next three months, the subcommittees will meet twice a month. The central steering committee will convene monthly and review finalized feedback provided by the subcommittees.
- All associated committee meeting materials, including recordings, transcripts, and minutes, will be posted on the department's website at [tn.gov/education/tnedufunding](http://tn.gov/education/tnedufunding).
- We are engaging with the public through these committees and public town halls to explore a strategic, student-centered investment approach for public education that moves Tennessee forward, prioritizes students over systems, and supports ALL Tennessee kids.
- We want all Tennesseans to have a voice and seat at the table to discuss our collective vision for public education and what it means to truly invest in each and every student with transparency and accountability.

## **Main Takeaways**

### **WHAT**

- The Governor & Education Department are leading a statewide conversation about public school funding. All Tennesseans can participate and make their voice heard as the state explores a student-centered approach for public education funding.

### WHY

- Every student deserves a great education that prepares them for life after high school.
- The goal is to talk about how our state invests in its public-school students. The student-centered strategy we want to discuss will....
  - Prioritize students over systems
  - Empower parents to engage in their child's education
  - Incentivize student outcomes
  - Ensure all students, regardless of location or learning needs, are served at a high-level
  - Reflect Tennesseans' values
  - Create flexible funding that prepare students for postsecondary success

### HOW

- The public engagement process looks like:
  - A statewide formal steering committee comprised of legislative leadership
  - 18 subcommittees representing voices from around the state
  - 8 regional public town halls--- *highlight the town hall(s) in your area. More info below.*
  - And much more

### WHEN

- NOW! Please get involved. Attend a town hall. Talk to your communities, host localized conversations and help them have their voice heard.
- Visit the Tennessee Department of Education online or on social media to get all the information you need to plug in right away.

### **FAQs**

- **What is public school funding?**
  - Public school funding is the money a school district receives, either through federal, state, or local dollars, to provide an education to students. This includes funds for academic programming, district and school operations, and other resources.
- **Why is school funding important?**
  - School funding models signal both what we believe is important in a public education and the outcomes we expect that education to achieve for students. The method by which districts are allocated funding and the amount they receive guides their decisions on how to serve their unique students, including determining the right combination of programs, resources, and services to accelerate student achievement and success. Every student has a unique set of needs, and school funding is a major lever in ensuring all students receive the necessary supports for a high-quality education.
- **Where does funding for schools come from?**

- In Tennessee, funding for public schools comes from a variety of sources, including federal grants, state funds, and local funds.
- The federal government often provides grant funding to local school districts to support specific subgroups of students (e.g.: economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, etc.) or targeted need areas (e.g.: teacher professional development). Most recently, school districts received a large influx of federal relief funds related to pandemic response and recovery.
- The majority of funding for public schools comes from the state level. At the state level, public school funds are appropriated through the state legislature’s annual budget process. For the 2021-22 school year, the Tennessee General Assembly appropriated over \$5 billion dollars toward public school districts. The gross majority of these funds are allocated to districts through the state’s public education funding formula.
- Local funding for schools is also derived from the state public education funding formula, requiring localities to contribute local revenues to school districts in their area. Local governing bodies typically leverage revenues from taxes levied on property, goods, or other services to meet these requirements. Localities may also, at their discretion, contribute additional funds above the required amounts of the funding formula.
- **What are common types of state funding models for public education?**
  - State funding models for public education take a variety of forms. Generally, there are three types of models, but states may combine aspects of any of these models to develop a funding structure for public education.<sup>1</sup>
  - Student-Based: Districts receive a base amount of funding per student, with additional money added to provide additional supports to students with higher need or unique contexts. Above the minimum base for every student, additional funds in these models are typically allocated using (a) weights or multipliers against the base to capture varying levels of student need or (b) additional flat rates per students for more standardized costs.
  - Resource-Based: Districts receive a minimum base amount for resources, such as money for staffing, services, and programs. Resource-based models often utilize a ratio based on staffing to students.
  - Categorical: Districts receive dollars that are tied to specific programs and services. While less typical of state funding formulas, categorical funding is frequently used in the distribution of federal grant funds.
- **What does it mean to use weights in a school funding model?**
  - State funding models for public education, specifically student-based funding models, may incorporate “weights” based on specific student populations and needs. Generally, weighting means allocating additional dollars to students with higher needs or unique contexts with the goal of those students receiving the additional resources or supports to be successful. For example, a state may choose to assign weights to English Learner (EL) students in their funding model, meaning an EL student would generate additional funding for the services and supports they need.
- **How are student outcomes incorporated into a school funding model?**
  - State funding models for public education may also incorporate student outcomes, such as student achievement, graduation, or postsecondary readiness metrics, to generate

additional funding for districts to help boost academic achievement and improved outcomes for all students. A state may choose to allocate additional funds to a district for growth or achievement improvements for traditionally low-performing groups, for example a district that has a high number of economically disadvantaged students who are completing postsecondary coursework.

- **How is school funding currently structured in Tennessee?**
  - Currently, the Basic Education Program (BEP) is the primary funding formula for Tennessee’s K-12 public schools. The BEP is generally considered a resource-based funding model for public education.
  - The formula includes four categories—instructional salaries, instructional benefits, classroom, and non-classroom allocations. Each category includes various resource components such as a teacher (46 components in total) that have set funding amounts per component. The allocation for those resources is determined by multiplying the number of students from the prior school year by a ratio of student to resource and the set funding amount for that resource.
  - The BEP includes both a state and a local contribution to fund the total funding formula. Each category includes an initial funding split between these two sources, which is then adjusted based on fiscal capacity, or the ability to raise local revenue, of each locality. Counties with higher fiscal capacity receive less state BEP funds and must contribute more local dollars than counties with lower fiscal capacity.
- **What is the history of school funding in Tennessee?**
  - Tennessee’s current school funding model, the BEP, was created in 1992. While the general structure of the formula has not significantly changed in the last 30 years, various modifications have been made during that time.
  - In 2007, Governor Phil Bredesen and the 105<sup>th</sup> Tennessee General Assembly revised the BEP formula through passage of BEP 2.0. The revisions were aimed at allocating additional state money for school systems with high numbers of at-risk students and those with high growth in student populations. The revisions also expanded funding for English Learners (EL) and increased the state share to the instructional component of the BEP.
  - In 2014, Governor Bill Haslam appointed the BEP Task Force which consisted of 12 members, including state and local officials and education stakeholders. The purpose of the task force was to study the BEP to determine its appropriateness for Tennessee classrooms and schools. In 2016, the 109<sup>th</sup> General Assembly passed the BEP Enhancement Act which modified the formula’s calculation for local fiscal capacity and split the instructional funding into the instructional salaries and instructional benefits categories.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Every Post Needs**

- Use on all social posts: #TNEduFunding

- Tag Tennessee Department of Education – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)
  - Facebook (@TennesseeEducation), Twitter (@TNEdu) & Instagram (@TNDeptofEdu)
- Link to one of the department’s press releases listed at the bottom of [this webpage](#).

## **Social Posts**

### **Generic Posts**

- Tennessee students are the future of our state and how we fund education is one of the most important conversations that we can have. Opening the opportunity for public feedback will spark localized conversations on meeting the needs of all our students. For more information and learn how to get involved: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding>. #TNEduFunding
  - Twitter: TN students are the future of our state & how we fund public education is one of the most important conversations that we can have. Opening the opportunity for public feedback will spark localized conversations on meeting the needs of all our students. <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding>. #TNEduFunding
- As we strive to provide the best possible education for our students, exploring a student investment strategy that reflects Tennesseans’ values will ensure all students are served at a high level. For more information and learn how to get involved: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding> #TNEduFunding
  - Twitter: As we strive to provide the best possible education for our students, exploring a student investment strategy that reflects Tennesseans’ values will ensure all students are served at a high level. For more information and learn how to get involved: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding> #TNEduFunding
- Now is the time! Tennessee’s students are the future of our state, and we must ensure they are well-equipped for lifelong success. Learn more: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding> #TNEduFunding
- Our students are the future of Tennessee and now is the time to have a serious conversation about the ways in which we can strategically invest in public education funding to best support them. For more information and learn how to get involved: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding> #TNEduFunding

### **Draft Posts for Partners**

- Now is the time for bold action for our kids! We are delighted to welcome state and national experts to lead conversations on how we can develop a student-focused funding strategy in Tennessee that prioritizes students-over-systems. Visit this webpage for more information and learn how to get involved: <https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding>. #TNEduFunding
- As stakeholders, we have a hand in a child’s education and the future of Tennessee is integral to these conversations on exploring a funding strategy that emphasizes the needs of all students. We want to provide all Tennesseans a seat at the table to make their voices heard! Join us for public comment as we explore student-based investment strategy that serve ALL students at a high-level. #TNEduFunding
- Come join the conversation! More than 1,000 Tennesseans are engaging in discussions across the state and receiving updates related to a student-centered investment strategy. Visit

<https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding>. to learn more and for ways to get involved. E-mail [tnedu.funding@tn.gov](mailto:tnedu.funding@tn.gov) with questions. #TNEduFunding

- Tune in NOW to hear [leader/speaker name] discuss [insert topic/discussion] and ensuring all students are prepared for postsecondary success: [insert link to subcommittee meeting]. #TNEduFunding
- #HappeningSoon -- Over the next couple of months, committees will meet twice a month to provide input and ideas on the state's education funding strategy. All associated committee meeting materials, including recordings and minutes, will be posted here:  
<https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding>. #TNEduFunding
  - Twitter: #HappeningSoon: Over the next few months, committees will meet twice a month to provide input & ideas on the state's education funding strategy. All associated committee meeting materials will be posted here:  
<https://www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding> #TNEduFunding

## GRAPHICS

To accompany each of your social media posts, please use the graphics here: [TDOE Funding Graphics](#)

## LINKS

Below are helpful links to accompany your social media posts and reference during your conversations with stakeholders.

- [Tennessee K-12 Public Education Funding Engagement Webpage](#)
- [Tennessee K-12 Public Education Funding Engagement Interest Sign Up Form](#)
- [Tennessee K-12 Public Education Funding Engagement Newsletter Sign Up](#)
- Press Releases:
  - [Gov. Lee Calls for Review of State Education Funding Formula](#)
  - [TDOE Announces Central Steering Committee; 18 Subcommittees to Explore Student-Centered Funding Strategy](#)
  - [TDOE Announces Chairs of 18 Education Funding Review Subcommittees; Conversations to Explore Student-Based Investment Strategy](#)
  - [TDOE Announces 12 Members of Steering Committee to Discuss Student-Focused Funding Strategy for Public Education](#)
  - [TDOE Announces Members of Student- and Parent-Focused Funding Review Subcommittees](#)
  - [TDOE Announces Subcommittee Members Representing Tennessee Schools and Districts Focused on Student-Based Funding Strategy](#)
  - [Tennesseans Invited to 8 Statewide Public Town Halls to Discuss a Student-Focused Funding Approach](#)

- [Tennessee Funding Review Subcommittee Members Announced Representing Higher Ed, Business, & Education Foundations & Advocacy Groups](#)
- [TDOE Announces Member of Fiscal Responsibility Funding Review Subcommittee](#)
- Public Town Hall Facebook Event Pages:
  - [Mid-Cumberland Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [Southwest Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [South Central Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [East Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [First Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [Southeast Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [Northwest Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)
  - [Upper Cumberland Region Public Town Hall Facebook Event](#)

## EVENTS

### TDOE Hosted

- **Virtual Funding Twitter Chats with TDOE.** 1 hour long each, twice a month during November & December. Held virtually on regular cadence to answer public questions and share updates. TDOE Comms will develop questions we'll pose to people, and canned responses for questions we anticipate receiving.
  - Time: 12 noon- 1 p.m. CT
  - Dates: November 9, November 16, December 7, December 14
- **Public Town Hall meeting in each CORE region.** Each will be live streamed on Facebook and Microsoft Teams live. Click [here](#) for information about each. Recordings of each town will be made available on our [YouTube page](#).
  - Mid-Cumberland- Wednesday, October 27<sup>th</sup>
  - Southwest- Thursday, October 28<sup>th</sup>
  - South Central- Monday, November 1<sup>st</sup>
  - First- Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - East- Wednesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - Southeast- Thursday, November 4<sup>th</sup>
  - Northwest- Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>
  - Upper Cumberland- Tuesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>
- **Considerations for hosting local town hall/ meeting:**
  - Consider a location that is convenient for individuals in your community.
  - Collaborate with local community partners, such as nonprofits, community foundations, etc., to co-host and/or assist with outreach.
  - Promote via social media and create a Facebook event.
  - Extend personal invitations to local school board and district officials and elected officials.
  - Ensure parents and students are aware of the opportunity to engage
  - Alert local media ahead of time and also invite them to attend.