Tennessee's Commitment to Early Literacy

October 2023

TN Department of **Education**

CONTENTS

Introduction

Over the past several years, and in alignment with the Tennessee Department of Education's (department) [Best for All strategic plan](#), Tennessee has prioritized investments and supports for early literacy. Tennessee has had historically low literacy rates for over a decade, and pandemic related closures in 2020 and 2021 exacerbated achievement gaps across student groups and led to further declines in 3rd grade English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency. Research demonstrates that students who can read by the third grade have higher academic performance, postsecondary attainment, and obtain higher wage jobs.

BEST FOR ALL
We will set all students on a path to success.

ACADEMICS

ALL TENNESSEE STUDENTS WILL HAVE ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION, NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE

STUDENT READINESS

TENNESSEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS WILL BE EQUIPPED TO SERVE THE ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS IN THEIR CAREER PATHWAYS

EDUCATORS

TENNESSEE WILL SET A NEW PATH FOR THE EDUCATION PROFESSION AND BE THE TOP STATE IN WHICH TO BECOME AND REMAIN A TEACHER AND LEADER FOR ALL

In recognizing the value of early literacy and the urgent need to combat Tennessee's literacy crisis, Governor Lee, the Tennessee General Assembly, and the department focused efforts on improving literacy rates through strategic and long-term investments, including the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, Reading 360, and the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps). These investments have already led to gains in early literacy rates with 40% of 3rd grade students demonstrating proficiency in ELA in 2023, the largest single year increase and the highest 3rd grade ELA proficiency rates since 2017. They also established summer programming and tutoring opportunities for 3rd grade students in need of additional academic supports to be promoted to the 4th grade.

This report summarizes an overview of Tennessee's investment in early literacy and key data points from the first year of the state's 3rd grade promotion pathways.

Literacy Crisis in Tennessee

Tennessee has had historically low literacy rates for over a decade. In 2011, the state ranked 42nd in the nation on 4th grade reading based on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), otherwise known as the Nation's Report Card. Although the state's performance improved over the years relative to other states, Tennessee continues to fall below the national average in 4th grade reading.

Additionally, based on state assessment results, less than half of 3rd grade students have demonstrated proficiency in ELA standards since 2010.

> **In recent years, roughly two-thirds of 3rd grade students were not reading on grade-level, and this rate declined further during pandemic-related school closures.**

In 2017, 34.7% of 3rd grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading. This proficiency rate increased slightly in 2018 and 2019 to 36.8% and 36.9%, respectively, but declined further in 2021 due to disrupted learning and pandemic-related school closures. In 2021, only 32.1% of 3rd grade students were proficient in reading.

Tennessee's persistent low literacy rates highlighted a need to reform early grade reading instruction, support thoughtful implementation of ELA standards, and focus investments on additional learning opportunities for early grade students.

Figure 1: Tennessee's 3rd grade literacy rates (2017-2021)

What is TCAP?

Statewide assessments allow districts, teachers, families, and the state to measure students' academic progress and how it aligns with grade-level expectations. In Tennessee, students demonstrate their mastery of Tennessee's academic standards through the [Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)](#). The TCAP provides a metric for how a student is progressing on the standards and holds the state and districts accountable for student performance. TCAP tests are developed through a rigorous process involving Tennessee teachers, subject area experts, and assessment developers to ensure the test accurately measures a student's understanding of Tennessee's academic standards. Students participate in the TCAP starting in 3rd grade and are assessed in ELA, math, science, and social studies throughout their K-12 academic career.

Two Consecutive Years of Improvement

Following several state initiatives and investments in early literacy, Tennessee saw improvement in 3rd grade ELA proficiency rates in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, there was a 3.6 percentage point increase in the number of students scoring **MEETS** expectations or **EXCEEDS** expectations on the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP, bringing the state's proficiency rates almost back to pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, the state saw an even greater increase in 3rd grade ELA proficiency.

> **40% of 3rd grade students demonstrated proficiency in ELA in 2023, representing the largest single year increase and the highest 3rd grade ELA proficiency rates since 2017.**

Figure 2: Tennessee's 3rd grade literacy rates (2017-2023)
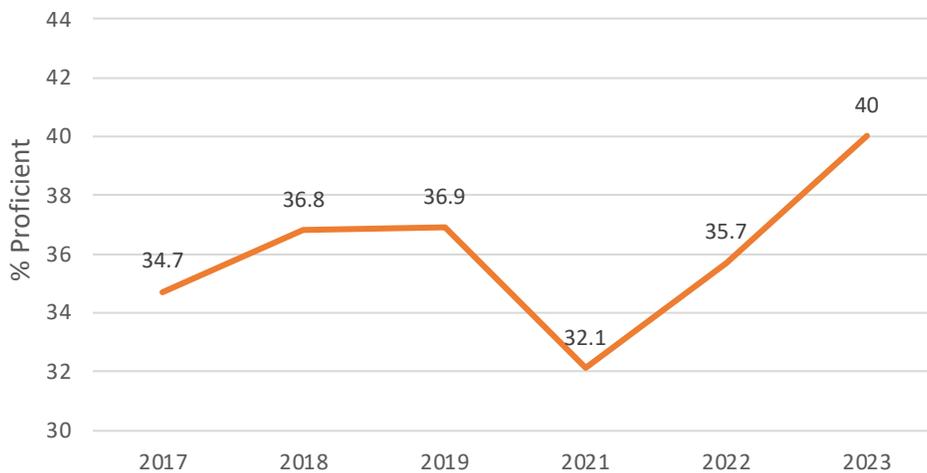
In the 2022-23 school year, K-3 students also demonstrated improved performance on universal reading screeners compared to the 2021-22 school year. In the 2021 spring administration of universal reading screeners, 52.1% of K-3 students scored above the 40th percentile thus indicating the student did not show signs of being at-risk for a significant reading deficiency. In the 2022 spring administration of universal reading screeners, the percentage of K-3 students who did not display signs of being at-risk for a significant reading deficiency increased to 55.2%. Additionally, in the 2022-23 school year, the percentage of K-3 students who either were at-risk for a significant reading deficiency or had a significant reading deficiency decreased between each administration window of universal reading screeners, thus demonstrating that the targeted supports provided to students throughout the school year are improving their reading skills.

Figure 3: K-3 Universal Reading Screener Performance
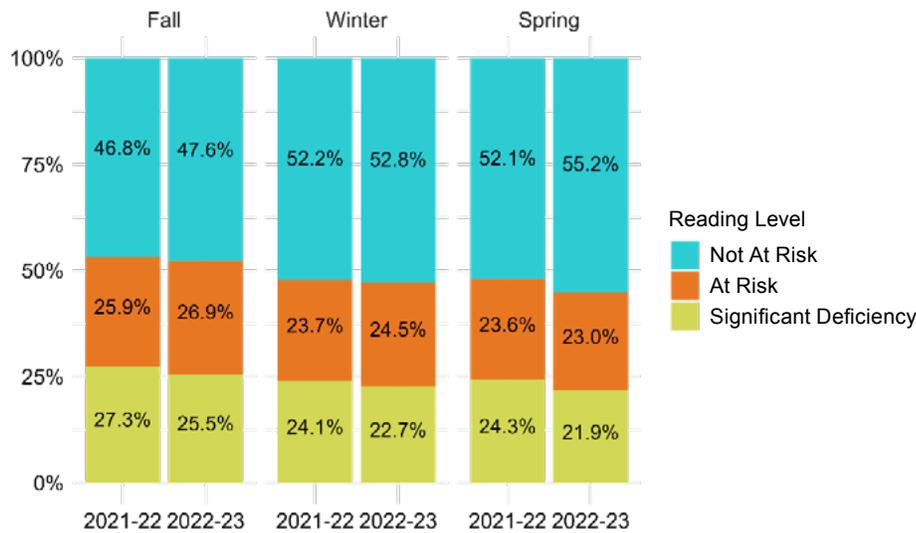
These improvements were a direct result of targeted efforts from educators, districts, families, and the state. Tennessee experienced widespread participation in all major state initiatives targeted toward early literacy that demonstrates a continued impact on the achievement and academic growth of 3rd grade students in both 2022 and 2023.

Figure 4: Tennessee has seen strong participation in programs designed to increase student outcomes...

DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING...

56 Literacy Implementation Networks

87 TN ALL Corps

TN ALL Corps
Tennessee Accelerating Literacy & Learning Corps

96 Early Literacy Network

TEACHERS COMPLETED TRAINING, AS OF AUGUST 1, 2023...

40,562 Early Reading Training

9,102 Secondary Literacy Training

STUDENTS IN 1ST - 8TH GRADE TUTORED THROUGH TN ALL CORPS...

101,583

(includes both district and community partner grants)

STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN...

SUMMER PROGRAMMING

120,343 in 2021 | **92,669** in 2022

...IN RISING 1ST - 8TH GRADE

STUDENTS SERVED THROUGH...

DISTRICT GRANTS
96,800
began Fall 2021

COMMUNITY PARTNER GRANTS
4,783
began Fall 2022

TENNESSEE'S RESPONSE:
Investment in Early Literacy Supports & Outcomes

Milestones

In response to Tennessee's historically low literacy rates and pandemic-related learning disruptions, Tennessee has led the nation in investing state and federal dollars to implement research-based policies and practices in early literacy. This includes major programmatic initiatives, such as *Reading 360*, *TN ALL Corps*, and *state and federal funded summer programming*. The state also codified strong laws and policies in early grade reading instruction through the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act*. Together, these investments, laws, and programs ensure the state, districts, and teachers are working to improve literacy rates through a comprehensive strategy.

2019

**AUGUST 15**

OUTCOMES

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program
TCAP
RESULTS RELEASED

2019 State-Level TCAP Results Released

36.9% of Tennessee 3rd Grade Students Scored **MEETS** or **EXCEEDS** in ELA on TCAP

NOVEMBER 5

Best for All **Strategic Plan Launch with a Priority on ACADEMICS**

LEGEND

OUTCOMES

TLLRSAA — Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

TLSA — Tennessee Literacy Success Act

R360 — Reading 360

TISA — Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

2020

MARCH 5

COVID-19 Comes to Tennessee

MARCH 25

Partnership with PBS Announcement

PBS TEACHING TENNESSEE

MARCH – MAY

COVID-Related School Closures; Virtual Learning; TCAP Testing Cancelled

AUGUST

2020-21 School Year Begins

Back to School

AUGUST 6

Best for All Central Launch

BEST FOR ALL CENTRAL

SEPTEMBER 23

OUTCOMES

Data Released Showing Significant Projected Learning Loss

DECEMBER 29

TLSA **TLLRSAA**

Gov. Lee Calls for Special Legislative Session on Education

FUNDING
ACCOUNTABILITY
LEARNING LOSS
LITERACY
TEACHER PAY

Milestones (continued)

2021

JANUARY 4

R360

Reading 360 Launched

JANUARY 14

TLSA TLLRSAA

Special Session Begins

FUNDING
ACCOUNTABILITY
LEARNING LOSS
LITERACY
TEACHER PAY

FEBRUARY 3

TLSA TLLRSAA

Special Session Concludes: *Tennessee Literacy Success Act & Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act* Signed into Law

3rd Grade Promotion Requirements Revised Effective Date of 2022-23 School Year

MAY 12

R360

Reading 360 Decodables Released

MAY 24 – AUGUST 6

R360

Reading 360 Early Reading Trainings

JUNE 1

TLSA

Foundational Literacy Skills Plans Submission Deadline

JUNE – JULY

TLLRSAA

1st Year of Summer Programming

JUNE 8 – JULY 1

TLSA TLLRSAA

AcceleratingTN 2021 Summer Bus Tour

JULY 22

TLSA

State Board of Education (SBE) Approves New EPP Standards on Foundational Literacy Skills

Best for All District Recognition Program Announced

LEGEND

OUTCOMES

TLLRSAA Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

TLSA Tennessee Literacy Success Act

R360 Reading 360

TISA Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

Milestones (continued)

2021 (CONTINUED)

AUGUST 2

OUTCOMES

2021 State-Level TCAP Results Released

32.1% of Tennessee 3rd grade students scored **MEETS** or **EXCEEDS** in ELA on TCAP, demonstrating declines in student achievement from pandemic-related disruptions

AUGUST 2 – OCTOBER 1

TLSA

2021-22 Fall Universal Reading Screener (TN-URS) Administered

SEPTEMBER

R360

Tennessee Literacy Month

SEPTEMBER 16

R360

Reading 360 Model Districts Announced

SEPTEMBER 21 – 23

R360

Reading 360 Virtual Summit

SEPTEMBER 22

TLLRSAA **TLSA** **R360**

Promising Practices Highlighted in TDOE Bright Spots Guide

SEPTEMBER 27

R360

Reading 360 Starting with Sounds Launch

SEPTEMBER 30

TLLRSAA

TN ALL Corps Launched; 87 Districts Participating

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

TISA

K-12 School Funding Statewide Engagement Process and Town Halls

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LEGEND

OUTCOMES

TLLRSAA Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

TLSA Tennessee Literacy Success Act

R360 Reading 360

TISA Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

Milestones (continued)

2022

JANUARY 1 – FEBRUARY 4

`TLSA`

2021-22 Winter TN-URS Administered
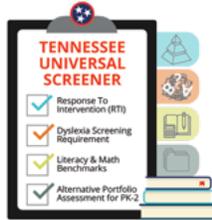
FEBRUARY 11

67 Best for All Districts Announced

FEBRUARY 24

`TISA`

Announcement of Funding for Student Success: *The Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act*

MARCH

`R360`

Tennessee Literacy Month

MARCH 7

`R360`

Tennessee Reading Research Center Established: *A Reading 360 Initiative*
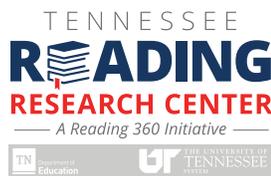
APRIL 11 – MAY 20

`TLSA`

2021-22 Spring TN-URS Administered
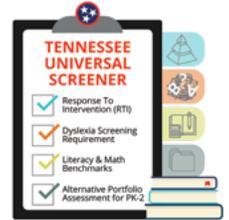
MAY 2

`TISA`

TISA Act Signed into Law; Invests an Additional $1 Billion for K-12 Public Education

MAY 23 – JULY 29

`R360`

Reading 360 Early Reading and Secondary Literacy Trainings

JUNE – JULY

`TLLRSAA`

2nd Year of Summer Programming

JUNE 1 – 15

`TLSA` `TLLRSAA`

AcceleratingTN 2022 Summer Bus Tour

JUNE 14

`OUTCOMES`

2022 State-Level TCAP Results Released

35.7% of Tennessee 3rd Grade Students Scored **MEETS** or **EXCEEDS** in ELA on TCAP, Representing 3.6 Percentage Point Increase in 3rd Grade ELA Proficiency from Previous Year

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LEGEND

OUTCOMES

`TLLRSAA` Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

`TLSA` Tennessee Literacy Success Act

`R360` Reading 360

`TISA` Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

Milestones (continued)

2022 (CONTINUED)

JULY 22

TLLRSAA

SBE Approved Promotion & Retention Rule for Parent Appeals Process

AUGUST 1

TLSA

All Early Grade Educators EPPs Adopt New EPP Standards on Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction

AUGUST 1 – SEPTEMBER 30

TLSA

2022-23 Fall TN-URS Administered

SEPTEMBER

TLLRSAA

TN ALL Corps Month

SEPTEMBER 1

TLSA   **TLLRSAA**

TDOE Released 3rd Grade Remediation Toolkit

DECEMBER 5 – FEBRUARY 3

TLSA

2022-23 Winter TN-URS Administered

2023

FEBRUARY 8 – 9

R360

Reading 360 Virtual Summit

APRIL 10 – MAY 12

TLSA

2022-23 Spring TN-URS Administered

APRIL 13

TLLRSAA

Chapter 144 of the Public Acts of 2023 Signed into Law Extending Summer Programming to Rising Kindergarten & Rising 9th Grade Students

MAY 19

TLLRSAA

3rd Grade ELA TCAP Scores Released to Districts

TLLRSAA

SBE Approves Definition of Summer Programming Adequate Growth

LEGEND

OUTCOMES

TLLRSAA Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

TLSA Tennessee Literacy Success Act

R360 Reading 360

TISA Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

Milestones (continued)

2023 (CONTINUED)

MAY 22

OUTCOMES

2023 State-Level 3rd Grade ELA TCAP Results Released

RESULTS RELEASED

40% of Tennessee 3rd Grade Students Scored **MEETS** or **EXCEEDS** in ELA Proficiency on TCAP, Representing Highest Rate of 3rd Grade ELA Proficiency Since 2017

MAY 22 – JUNE 5

TLLRSAA

3rd Grade ELA TCAP Retake Window

RETAKE WINDOW

MAY 22 – JULY 28

R360

Reading 360 Early Literacy & Secondary Literacy Trainings

MAY 24

OUTCOMES

2023 District-Level 3rd Grade ELA TCAP Results Released

RESULTS RELEASED

MAY 30 – JUNE 30

TLLRSAA

3rd Grade Retention Parent Appeals Window

JUNE – JULY

TLLRSAA

3rd Year of Summer Programming

JUNE 29

OUTCOMES

2023 State-Level TCAP Results Released

RESULTS RELEASED

JULY 18

OUTCOMES

2023 District-Level TCAP Results Released

RESULTS RELEASED

AUGUST

2023-24 School Year Begins

Back to School

AUGUST 1

TLSA **R360**

Deadline for K-5 teachers to Complete Reading 360 Early Reading Training, Reading 360 Secondary Literacy Training, or Pass the Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment *to Obtain, Renew, or Advance Teaching License*

LEGEND

OUTCOMES

TLLRSAA Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

TLSA Tennessee Literacy Success Act

R360 Reading 360

TISA Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement Act

Reading 360°

Launched in January 2021, [Reading 360](#) provides a clear approach to improving literacy outcomes for all students through optional grants and resources to ensure students become strong readers. Reading 360 leveraged an initial $60 million in federal relief dollars and $40 million in federal grant funding to prioritize literacy instruction. The state used these funds to offer comprehensive early and secondary training programs to equip educators with evidence-based instructional practices and the latest research on cognitive science, engage families with resources like at-home decodable books, and offer embedded high-quality instructional material implementation support through district networks. Reading 360 recognizes the role districts, educators, families, and all Tennesseans play in addressing the state's literacy crisis from all sides and has served as the state's holistic approach to overall literacy instruction in Tennessee.
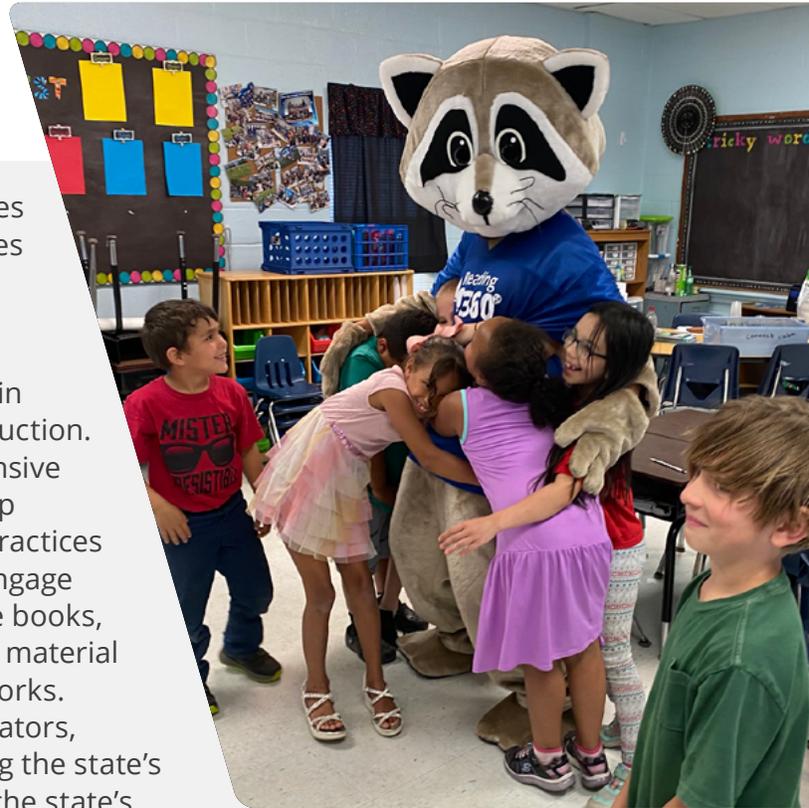
Early Reading Training: The two-week Early Reading Training ensures any Tennessee educator who helps young children learn to read has access to the latest research, implications for instruction, and practical tools for phonics-based reading instruction. The training includes two courses. Course I is available asynchronously to allow educators to progress through the course at their own pace with access to the information at any time and Course II is offered in person during the summer months. Between 2021 and 2023, the department offered $1,000 stipends to K-5 teachers who completed both courses of the training in addition to "classroom kits" for K-2 teachers with fun and engaging materials to utilize in classrooms. As of September 2023, over 40,000 educators have completed Course I and over 17,000 educators have completed both Course I and Course II of Early Reading Training. To sustain this opportunity for professional growth, Course II will be offered asynchronously beginning in summer of 2024.

Secondary Literacy Training: Following the success of the Early Reading Training, the department also developed the Secondary Literacy Training to support strong literacy instruction for middle grades and high school teachers. Like the Early Reading Training, the Secondary Literacy Training offers two courses, one asynchronous course followed by Course II, which is a week-long, in-person training that focuses on how teachers can use high-quality instructional materials to address all foundational skills and knowledge-building components of the Tennessee academic standards with examples geared toward upper grade teachers. Over 10,000 educators have completed Secondary Literacy Training Course I and over 3,000 educators have completed both courses of Secondary Literacy Training. Like Early Reading Training, Secondary Literacy Training will also be available asynchronously beginning in summer of 2024.

Literacy Implementation Networks: Through a competitive grant process, 48 districts were selected to participate in a five-year focused study to improve K-12 literacy instruction that began during fall 2021. Districts are organized into eight regional networks with a mentor district leading the focus of each region. An additional 11 districts were added to the network for the 2023-2024 school year, and specific early literacy support was added as an option for support. Each network meets monthly for six months and develops strong theories of action to focus on K-12 literacy practices and the implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

Early Literacy Networks: Early Literacy Network districts received grant awards of $80,000-$100,000 depending on enrollment to provide direct district support for teachers and leaders for the implementation of sounds-first instruction in Pre-K-2 grades. The districts participating in the network had to ensure that 25 percent of their K-2 teachers completed both Early Reading Course I and Course II during the 2021-22 training period, and that 60 percent of their K-2 teachers will have completed Course I by June 2023.Throughout the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, 92 districts opted to participate in the Early Literacy Network program.

At-Home Decodable Book Series: The department, in partnership with the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation, provided the At-Home Decodable Book Series. This resource was free for all Tennessee families of K–2 children to encourage at-home reading practice and to help young learners become stronger readers. Each free decodable packet had seven decodable booklets, containing over 20 exciting stories full of sounds and words to practice. Families were able to read the stories at home with their children to help them sound out words and build their reading skills. There was an overwhelming response to the decodable sets. By May 2023, over 47,000 kindergarten sets, over 35,000 first grade sets, and over 34,000 second grade sets had been distributed to Tennessee families.

Nearly 60,000 Tennessee K-2 families have ordered Decodable Book Sets!!

Family Resources: To support caregivers and young learners, the department created various resources to support at-home learning. Pre-K to kindergarten transition resources, sounds first approach activities, activities for struggling readers, and universal reading screener support are resources that engage family involvement and understanding in building early readers. The department's partnership with GELF has also promoted literacy and enhanced early literacy skills among Tennessee's earliest learners. Through the partnership, Tennessee families and students benefited from the birth to 5 book delivery programs, a K-3 home library program, the family caregiver engagement program, a book bus tour, the Storybook Trails program, and Pre-K literacy backpacks.

GOVERNOR'S EARLY LITERACY FOUNDATION

Connected Literacy: Connected Literacy is a high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring program where community partners collaborate with districts to provide foundational skills tutoring grounded in Tennessee's Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement to students in grades 1-3. The primary focus of the Connected Literacy project is to provide vital early grade literacy support and accelerate literacy development for Tennessee's earliest learners, resulting in more students becoming proficient readers across the state. Over the past two years, Connected Literacy has provided tutoring to 6,000 students in three of Tennessee's largest districts. While continuing to serve these flagship districts, the project is expanding to serve at least five additional districts and 3,450 new students during the 2023–24 school year.

Practice reading with **Carl Ray** as he reads and sings **"Tiger in my Soup."**

Helping parents and students understand the importance of early literacy and how to practice reading in an engaging and fun way.
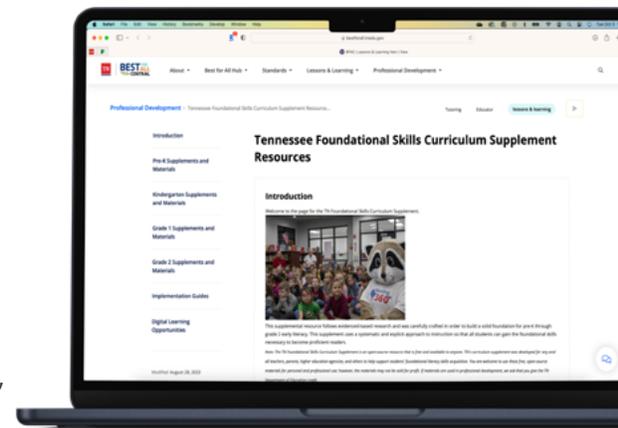
Starting with Sounds: Recognizing the importance of public awareness in addressing the state's literacy crisis, the department launched Starting with Sounds in September 2021 in collaboration with Tennessee PBS. Starting with Sounds highlights the importance of early literacy and how families and students can practice reading by watching and listening to national and local musicians, athletes, and champions of student success read their favorite books and sing songs to help build essential skills in reading.

Tennessee Reading Research Center: In partnership with the department, the Reading Research Center opened at the University of Tennessee Knoxville in 2022. The Reading Research Center was established through an interagency agreement with the University of Tennessee and funded by federal relief funding for education. The purpose of the Reading Research Center is to evaluate and independently analyze the effects of the Reading 360 initiatives on students' achievement, teachers' instruction, use of high-quality instructional materials, and Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) preparation of teacher candidates. Covering an initial evaluation period of three years, the center will examine the impacts of teachers' participation on summer professional development, high-quality instructional materials on teachers' instructional practices, EPPs work on students' academic achievement, and Literacy Implementation Networks and Early Literacy Networks on teachers' instruction.

TENNESSEE
READING
RESEARCH CENTER
—— *A Reading 360 Initiative* ——

Tennessee Literacy Success Act
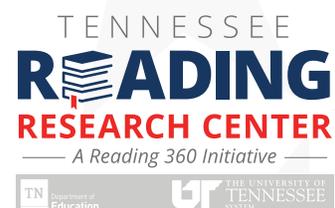
In January 2021, Governor Lee called a special legislative session to address the state's literacy crisis and advance legislation to combat pandemic-related learning loss and accelerate student learning. The Tennessee Literacy Success Act (Public Chapter 3 of the First Extraordinary Session of 2021) outlines a bold policy framework that engages students, families, districts, teachers, and higher education institutions to improve literacy rates through a focus on foundational literacy skills instruction. The Act places a heightened focus on literacy instruction at every level of education, from in the classroom to student assessment to teacher training.

Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction: The Tennessee Literacy Success Act requires that all districts and public charter schools provide foundational literacy skills instruction to K-3 students as the primary form of instructional programming in English Language Arts (ELA). To assist with planning, each district and public charter school is required to submit a Foundational Literacy Skills Plan (FLSP) to the department every three years outlining the amount of time dedicated to ELA instruction, adopted materials, parent communication, and reading intervention supports provided to students. Districts and public charter schools are required to indicate changes to adopted instructional materials or universal reading screener selection annually. The department developed a Foundational Literacy Skills Toolkit to provide support to districts and public charter schools as they developed their initial FLSP and for those that revised their plans within the three-year period. In 2021, 100% of districts and public charter schools submitted an initial FLSP. Several districts and public charter schools have revised their initial plans since 2021, indicating changes to their universal reading screener selection or adopted instructional materials.

High-Quality Instructional Materials: The Act also places a focus on high-quality instructional materials, recognizing that helping students learn to read requires strong instructional materials aligned to Tennessee standards. The Act reiterates that all districts and public charter schools must use ELA textbooks and instructional materials aligned with the state's academic standards, either by adopting materials from the approved Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission list or receiving a waiver from the State Board of Education.

Universal Reading Screeners: To assess student progress throughout the school year and identify areas for improvement, the Act requires that all districts and public charter schools administer a universal reading screener three times each year to students in grades K-3 and submit the results of each universal reading screener administered to students to the department. Districts may choose to administer either the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener, which is available for free to districts, or they may administer one of the other screeners approved by the State Board of Education in the Universal Screener Policy 3.302.

Home Literacy Reports: Following the local administration of universal reading screeners, the Act requires districts and public charter schools to provide a Home Literacy Report to a parent or guardian of a K-3 student immediately after each administration of a universal reading screener if the student is identified as having a significant reading deficiency. Districts are also required to notify a parent or guardian of a student in grades 4 and 5 each school year if the student has a significant reading deficiency. Home Literacy Reports must include information about the importance of students reading by the 3rd grade, at-home reading intervention activities, recommendations about individualized reading intervention supports, and information about promotion to 4th grade. The department's FLSP Toolkit gives detailed information regarding the requirements of Home Literacy Reports as well as sample letters that districts can use. Furthermore, districts are encouraged to send Home Literacy Reports to all students as a best practice to communicate academic progress to all families. The updated FLSP Toolkit includes sample letters for students at all reading levels.

Teacher Preparation and Training: The Act recognizes that for students to be proficient in reading, teachers must also have the tools and training to effectively teach foundational literacy skills. The Act required the department to develop and submit to the State Board of Education for approval, foundational literacy skills standards for use by EPPs for the instruction of candidates seeking a license to teach students in K-3 and for those seeking an instructional leader license. The State Board of Education approved the EPP standards in July 2021, and all EPPs were required to provide training on reading instruction focused primarily on the foundational literacy skills standards starting in August 2022. The Act also requires the department to provide a free professional development course to K-5 teachers on foundational literacy skills instruction, also known as the department's Early Reading Training. All K-5 teachers are required to complete the course by August 1, 2023, and teachers are also required to show completion of either the professional development course or passage of the Department's Early Literacy Assessment to receive and maintain their license.
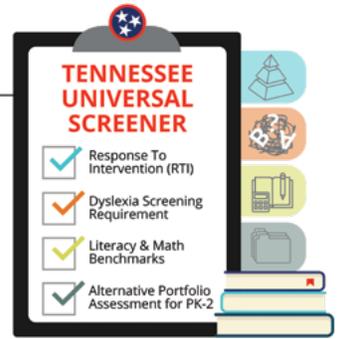
What are Universal Reading Screeners?

Universal reading screeners are short, skills-based assessments that measure a student's progress in foundational literacy skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Unlike TCAP assessments, universal reading screeners do not assess a student's understanding of Tennessee standards and are not intended to determine a student's proficiency in ELA. Instead, universal reading screeners are meant to assess a student's progress at specific points during the school year and identify areas for improvement in reading skills. This frequent progress monitoring in grades K-3 helps teachers identify students with reading challenges early in their education to provide additional learning supports and help students progress toward proficiency in ELA, as measured by the TCAP starting in 3rd grade. Universal reading screeners are also used as a component of the state's Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTI[2]) framework, a tool to screen students for dyslexia, and may be used as an alternative portfolio assessment for Pre-K-2 teachers.

All K-3 students participate in three universal reading screener tests that occur in the fall, winter, and spring. Districts can choose to administer the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimsWeb) that is provided for free by the state, or they can choose one of the other screeners approved by the State Board of Education in the Universal Screener Policy 3.302. A student's score on a universal reading screener is compared against the performance of their peers to determine where a student falls within the national norm. Students who are below the 15th percentile on a universal reading screener indicates they display a significant reading deficiency, and districts are required to immediately notify the student's family of available reading interventions through Home Literacy Reports. Students who are below the 40th percentile on a universal reading screener indicates they are at-risk for a significant reading deficiency and would also benefit from academic supports.

Figure 5:
Universal Reading Screener vs. TCAP[1]

Early Reading	Comprehension	Literacy
Print Concepts		Skilled Reading
Phonological Awareness		Application of reading to task
Phonics/Word Recognition	Merging of understanding meaning of text at varying text complexities, varying vocabulary, and text structures.	Ability to express understanding through written expression
Fluency		Apply writing conventions to ensure readers understand written expression

TCAP

Universal Reading Screening

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1   Note: Universal reading screeners measure early reading concepts and comprehension. TCAP assessments measure early reading concepts, comprehension, and literacy.

Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

In addition to the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly also enacted the [Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act](#) (Public Chapter 1 of the First Extraordinary Session of 2021) during the 2021 special legislative session. The Act established free summer programming opportunities for students in grades K-8. The initial Act required K-8 summer programming in ELA and math for the summers of 2021 and 2022 and in recognizing the need to ensure students have ongoing opportunities to accelerate learning, also built in permanent summer programming for grades 4-8 beyond the first two summers.

Targeted Enrollment: Enrollment in summer programming was geared toward students who demonstrated reading challenges. For summer programming geared toward students entering grades 1-5, one of the priority student criteria included students who scored below proficient on their most recent TCAP assessment or if a student did not have a TCAP score, a student who scored below the 40th percentile on their most recently administered universal reading screener. Students could also be prioritized based on eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and school-wide proficiency rates below 50%.

State and Federal Funded: Summer programming provided through the Act was state and federally funded. Districts received funds for summer programming in 2021 and 2022, including transportation funds, and the Act also built in recurring funding for subsequent years of summer programming.

Teacher Incentives: The Act also provided incentives and training for educators who staffed summer programs. Each teacher was required to receive a stipend of at least $1,000 per week, and the department provided a two-week professional development program on reading instruction for educators who taught ELA. Districts were encouraged to staff their summer programs with licensed educators, but if that was not possible, they could staff their programming with individuals without a teaching license who hold at least a bachelor's degree. The department provided a free training course to unlicensed individuals staffing summer programs to ensure they were prepared to provide strong interventions to students.

Expansion in 2023: Following the success from the first two years of summer programming, Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly enacted [Chapter 144 of the Public Acts of 2023](#) (PC 144) which expanded the grades for permanent summer programming from rising 4-8 to rising K-9 students.

TN ALLCorps

Tennessee Accelerating Literacy & Learning Corps

The Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act established a new program to support students below proficiency reach grade-level proficiency through the establishment of a tutoring structure, tutor training, district grants, and Community Partner grants.

Through the launch of TN ALL Corps, the department developed a research-based high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring model requiring all tutoring to be provided for 2-3 sessions per week for 30-45 minutes each in small groups of no more than three students. This high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring model was built based on national best-practices to support students struggling to reach grade-level proficiency in ELA and math. The department also developed and launched a virtual training program for tutors, providing comprehensive training in high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring and academic best practices to all tutors.

In September 2021, the department launched a grant program to districts to implement TN ALL Corps' high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring model in their communities. All districts that applied for the TN ALL Corps grant program received federal funds of $700 per student and were required to contribute $800 in local match dollars, totaling $1,500 in funds per student to provide tutoring services. To expand capacity of districts and expand the reach of TN ALL Corps tutoring, the department launched a Community Partner grant, awarding competitive grant funding to five community partners throughout Tennessee. Each community partner works to bring tutoring to districts that do not have TN ALL Corps or expand how many students can receive tutoring within a district.

Over the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years, 96,800 students have received tutoring through district grants and an additional 4,783 have received tutoring through Community Partner grants. In total, the program aims to serve over 200,000 students by the end of the 2023-24 school year.
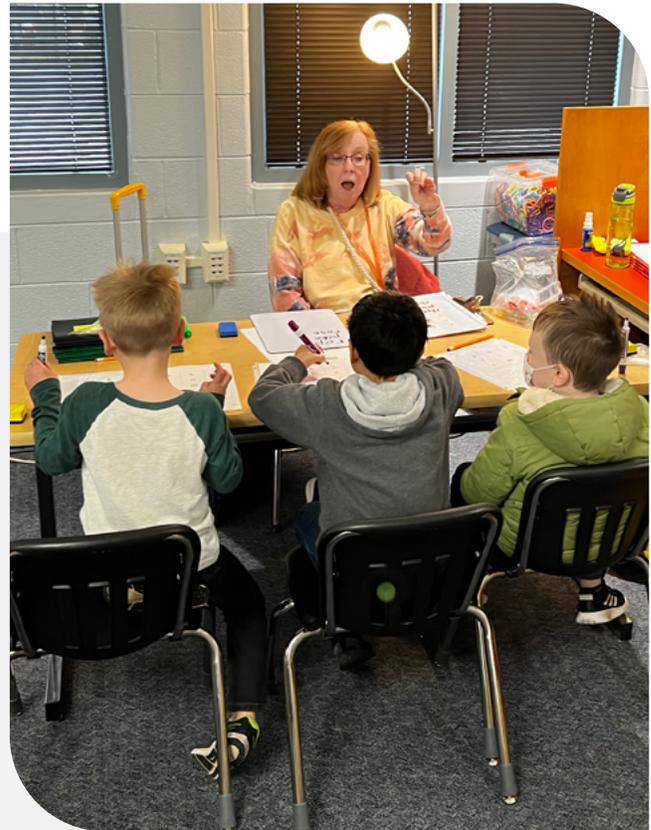
TISA
Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement

Tennessee's investment in early literacy did not stop after the establishment of Reading 360, the Literacy Success Act, or the Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act. In 2022, the state undertook a historic revision of the K-12 school funding formula, replacing the Basic Education Program (BEP) for the first time in 30 years. The Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) formula invests an additional $1 billion in recurring funding for public education and marks a significant shift in how the state funds public schools by prioritizing the allocation of funds based on individual student needs.

TISA includes two direct funding components targeted to early grade students. Districts will receive direct funds for all students in grades K-3. Additionally, districts will receive direct funds for rising 4th grade students who scored **BELOW** or **APPROACHING** on the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP. The amount of direct funding per student depends on appropriations by the Tennessee General Assembly. For the 2023-24 school year, each district will receive $500 per student for K-3 students. Districts will also receive $500 per student for rising 4th grade students who are not proficient in reading. These funds are intended to support districts in providing additional academic supports for these students.

TENNESSEE FAMILIES:
Multiple Promotion Pathways Available for 3rd Grade Students

3rd Grade Promotion Pathways

As Tennessee began implementing comprehensive early literacy programs, Tennessee's 3rd grade promotion requirements were updated in 2021 to ensure students struggling in reading receive the additional supports provided through the Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act before advancing to the 4th grade.

In 2011, Tennessee passed a 3rd grade retention law, which stated that a 3rd grade student shall not be promoted to the 4th grade "unless the student has shown a basic understanding of curriculum and ability to perform the skills required in the subject of reading as demonstrated by the student's grades or standardized test scores." The previous law also stated a 3rd grade student identified for retention may be promoted to the 4th grade if the student participated in an "LEA approved research-based intervention program." This previous law led to varying metrics, local board policies, and intervention strategies across the state to determine student promotion to the 4th grade.

The state's updated 3rd grade promotion requirements created a common threshold across the state in how students are identified for retention while also outlining multiple pathways to promotion to the 4th grade that focused on providing students with additional academic supports for future success.

> **Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, 3rd grade students who score APPROACHING or BELOW on the ELA section of the spring TCAP assessment or TCAP retake must receive additional learning supports from their school to be promoted to the 4th grade.**

Students identified for possible retention have multiple pathways to promotion, and the law provides for certain exemptions based on whether the student is an English Learner (EL) with less than two years of ELA instruction, was previously retained, or has a disability or suspected disability that impacts reading. Figure 6 outlines pathways to promotion based on the updated 3rd grade promotion requirements.

Figure 6: Pathways to 4th Grade
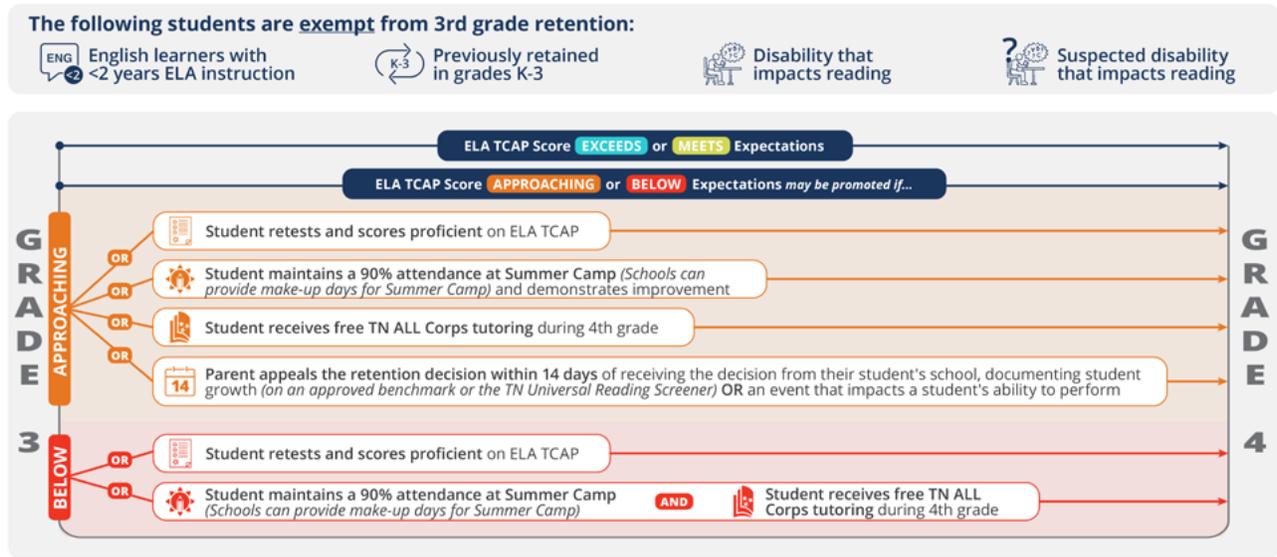
Exemptions to 3rd Grade Retention

The law includes four exemptions to 3rd grade retention. If a student who scores **BELOW** or **APPROACHING** on the ELA section of the TCAP meets one of these exemptions, they can be promoted to the 4th grade without having to participate in one of the promotion pathways.

The four exemptions include:

- Students who are English Learners (EL) with less than two years of ELA instruction;
- Students who were previously retained;
- Students with a disability that impacts reading; or
- Students with a suspected disability that impacts reading.

Districts must determine whether an individual student meets one of the circumstances that exempts the student from retention. All decisions regarding exemptions must be made on a case-by-case basis considering the unique needs and circumstances of the individual student and documented in the student's file.

2022-23 3rd Grade ELA TCAP Results

The state's 2022-23 3rd grade ELA TCAP results built on the growth from 2022, confirming that the intervention strategies in place through Reading 360, the Literacy Success Act, the Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, and TN ALL Corps were working to improve the state's literacy rates. Tennessee experienced a 4.3 percentage point increase from the previous year in statewide 3rd grade ELA TCAP scores, the largest single year increase since 2017.

Recognizing the need for districts to quickly communicate 3rd grade promotion pathways to families, the department provided districts with 3rd grade ELA TCAP results on May 19th, the earliest districts have been provided this information. Districts were given individual student ELA scores that showed whether the student scored **EXCEEDS** expectations, **MEETS** expectations, **APPROACHING** expectations, or **BELOW** expectations on the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP. This information allowed districts to identify students who did not score proficient on the ELA portion of the TCAP and communicate the available pathways for promotion to families, including the TCAP retake, parent appeals, summer programming, and tutoring.

> **Based on the 2022-23 TCAP results, 45,393 students were eligible for one of the 3rd grade promotion pathways.**

This number represents the students who scored **BELOW**, **APPROACHING**, or did not have a valid score on the ELA portion of the 3rd grade TCAP, and also encompasses students who may have met an exemption to retention *(i.e. EL with less than two years of ELA instruction, previously retained, or has a disability or suspected disability that impacts reading).*

District-Level Implementation Supports

Student and Family Communication: A key component to strong implementation of the 3rd grade promotion requirements is district communication to students and families. Pursuant to the Literacy Success Act, districts are required to provide Home Literacy Reports to families of K-3 students with a significant reading deficiency after each administration of a universal reading screener.

This early and regular communication about a student's performance on universal reading screeners helps parents stay informed on their child's progress and allows districts to provide targeted supports to students struggling with reading. The department provided optional resources to districts to assist with communication strategies, including template letters notifying families if their child has a significant reading deficiency based on universal reading screener results.

Summer Programming: Third grade students identified for possible retention may be promoted through summer programming opportunities established by the Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, provided that the student, depending on whether the student scored **APPROACHING** or **BELOW** on the ELA portion of the TCAP, meets certain attendance requirements at the camp, demonstrates growth, and participates in tutoring in 4th grade.

- A student who scored **APPROACHING** on the ELA portion of the TCAP can be promoted if they attend summer camp, maintain 90% attendance at the camp, and achieve adequate growth on the post-test. Adequate growth is defined as a 5-percentage point increase on the post-test from the student's baseline score based on either the spring ELA portion of the TCAP or TCAP retake, if applicable.

- A student who scored **BELOW** on the ELA portion of the TCAP can be promoted if they attend summer camp, maintain 90% attendance at the camp, and participate in high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring for the entirety of the 4th grade. A student who scored **BELOW** on the ELA portion of the TCAP does not need to meet adequate growth requirements at the summer camp ,but must demonstrate 4th grade adequate growth on the 4th grade ELA portion of the TCAP to be promoted to 5th grade.

The Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act outlines certain requirements for district summer programming, such as hours of ELA and math instruction and administration of pre-tests and post-tests. However, districts retained flexibility to design summer programming to best meet the needs of their students and communities, including outreach to students, attendance policies, and targeted instruction. In summer 2023, districts received funds to implement summer programming, including transportation funds.
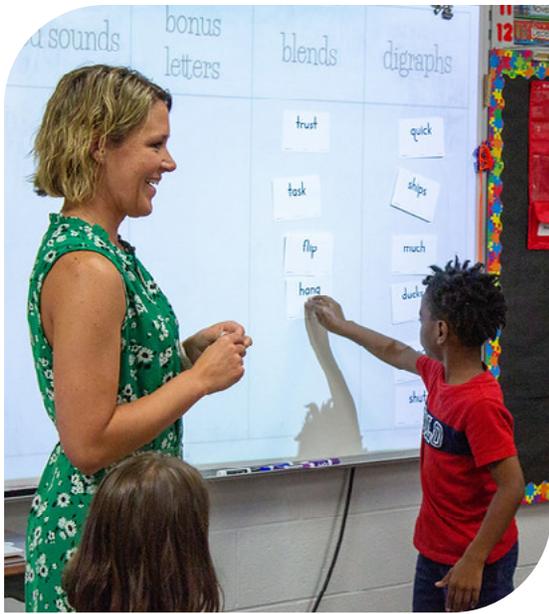
For most districts, summer programming occurred in June and July. Students who scored **BELOW** or **APPROACHING** had to maintain 90% attendance at the camp. If a student missed days of camp, districts could offer make-up days in accordance with local board policies to assist the student in achieving 90% attendance. Districts reported enrollment and attendance through Summer Programming Enrollment and Attendance Reporting (SPEAR).

The department created a post-test to determine whether students who scored **APPROACHING** on the ELA portion of the spring TCAP or TCAP retake opportunity achieved adequate growth at the end of summer camp. Pursuant to State Board of Education Promotion and Retention Policy 3.300, adequate growth is defined as a 5-percentage point increase on the post-test from the student's baseline score. The spring ELA TCAP score served as the baseline score in calculating adequate growth, unless the student moved from **BELOW** to **APPROACHING** based on TCAP retake results, in which case the TCAP retake score was used as the baseline score. The department's post-test was designed to align with the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP to ensure a standards-based assessment was used consistently when determining a student's responsiveness to supports and interventions in ELA. The department returned adequate growth determinations within five days of the conclusion of summer learning camp.

4th Grade Tutoring: Students identified for possible retention may also be promoted by choosing to participate in high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring during the entirety of their 4th grade year. Students who scored **APPROACHING** on the ELA portion of the TCAP can be promoted to the 4th grade if they participate in tutoring for the entirety of the upcoming school year. Students who scored **BELOW** on the ELA portion of the TCAP must attend summer programming and maintain 90 percent attendance and participate in tutoring in 4th grade to be promoted.

Tutoring is required to be high-dosage, low ratio, meaning a minimum of two, 30-minute sessions each week with a 1:3 tutor to student ratio. In alignment with TN ALL Corps, this requirement allows students to receive individualized academic support throughout their 4th grade year. The department has provided support to districts through TN ALL Corps since 2021 to assist them in training educators to provide tutoring services, including free training offered to both licensed and unlicensed educators on high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring best practices. Like summer programming, districts retain flexibility to structure tutoring programs to meet the needs of their students, staff, and families. Districts may offer tutoring during the school day, after school, or partner with local organizations to offer tutoring services.

Students who scored **BELOW** or **APPROACHING** on the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP and are promoted to the 4th grade through a tutoring pathway must demonstrate adequate growth on the 4th grade ELA portion of the TCAP to be promoted to the 5th grade, provided that a student cannot be retained in 4th grade more than once. The department will be proposing a definition of 4th grade TCAP adequate growth to the State Board of Education for approval in the fall of 2023.

State-Level Implementation Supports

TCAP Retake: One of pathways to promotion to the 4th grade is scoring proficient on the TCAP retake. All students who scored **BELOW**, **APPROACHING**, or did not have a valid score on the ELA portion of the TCAP were eligible to retake the assessment. The retake window was May 22nd through June 5th, and districts could select to administer the retake on any of the days within that window.

The retake assessment mirrored the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP, previously administered in the spring. To expedite scoring and ensure districts and families received results quickly, the retake assessment was administered online using Schoolnet, a secure testing platform. The retake also excluded the writing portion of the ELA portion of the TCAP, which allowed the department to return test results immediately after the student completed the assessment. This allowed districts to make promotion decisions and communicate other promotion pathways to students if they did not score proficient on the retake.

The department publicly released [district-level results](#) on the TCAP retake on June 7th. Statewide, 3,344 students scored **MEETS** or **EXCEEDS** expectations, earning a pathway to promotion to the 4th grade.

Additionally, the TCAP retake allowed students to gain additional promotion pathways. Out of the students who scored **BELOW** or did not have a valid score on the spring TCAP, 2,619 moved into the **APPROACHING** category, thus making them eligible for a parent appeal and promotion to the 4th grade through tutoring supports.

Parent Appeals: Another pathway to promotion to the 4th grade was a parent appeal. The law requires that the department administer an appeal process for students who scored **APPROACHING** on the ELA portion of the TCAP. There are two criteria where the department granted an appeal:

- **Ground 1:** The student received a score at or above the 40th percentile on their spring universal reading screener; or

- **Ground 2:** A catastrophic situation occurred during the days leading up to the TCAP test that impacted the 3rd grade student's ability to perform on the test. Catastrophic situations include, but are not limited to, a death in the immediate family, loss of a family home, significant medical diagnosis, abuse, physical or emotional neglect, or household dysfunction *(e.g., substance abuse, incarcerated relative, mental illness).*

Parents of 3rd grade students who scored **APPROACHING** could file an appeal to the department between May 30th and June 30th. The department posted the appeal form publicly on its website for parents to access. Student appeals decisions were shared regularly with districts to ensure they stayed updated on student promotion eligibility.

Figure 7: Timeline of State-Level Supports

APRIL 17 – MAY 2	MAY 19	MAY 22 – JUNE 5	MAY 30 – JUNE 30
Spring 3rd Grade ELA TCAP testing window	3rd Grade ELA TCAP scores released to districts	3rd Grade ELA TCAP retake window	Parent appeals window
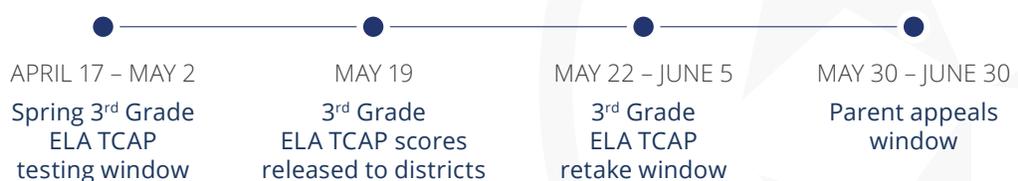
2022-23 3rd Grade Data Overview*

Total 3rd Grade Students				74,742
Total 3rd Grade Students with Valid Spring TCAP Results				73,433

Pathway	Evidence		Count	Percent of Valid Tests
PROMOTED Spring TCAP	Scored Proficient on Spring TCAP		29,349	39.97%

Students At Risk of Retention – *Did not Score Proficient on Spring TCAP*				
Pathway		Evidence	Count	Percent of 3rd Graders
PROMOTED TO 4TH GRADE	3rd Grade TCAP Retake	Scored Proficient on TCAP ELA Retake	3,344	4.47%
	Adequate Growth (AG) in Summer Programming	Scored **APPROACHING** Expectations on TCAP or TCAP ELA Retake; met 90% Attendance Rate and achieved AG in Summer Programming	1,532	2.05%
	Parent Appeal	Parent Appeal Approved	7,146	9.56%
	Exempt	Student has a disability or suspected disability that impacts reading	10,620	14.21%
	Exempt	Student is an English Learner with less than 2 years of ELA instruction	2,712	3.63%
	Exempt	Student was previously retained	2,119	2.84%
	Other	Student met other exemptions determined locally	2,314	3.10%
	Tutoring in 4th Grade	Scored **APPROACHING** Expectations on TCAP or TCAP ELA Retake. Student will test for AG at conclusion of 4th grade tutoring	8,086	10.82%
	Tutoring in 4th Grade	Scored **BELOW** Expectations on TCAP; met 90% Attendance Rate in Summer Programming. Student will test for AG at conclusion of 4th Grade tutoring	3,970	5.31%
	Tutoring in 4th Grade	Attendance evidence not yet reported for Summer Programming. Student will test for AG at conclusion of 4th Grade tutoring	297	0.40%
RETAINED		Retained	898	1.20%
NOT ENROLLED		Not Enrolled	2,296	3.07%
NOT REPORTED		Not Reported	59	0.08%

Data Note: The provided data is based on district-submitted data as of 9/13/23 and state assessment data prior to the application of accountability protocols. Some third grade students qualified for multiple pathways. Each student was counted in the first available pathway that they qualified for based on the order shown in the table above. For example, if a student had an approved parent appeal and qualified for an exemption because they were previously retained, the student was counted in the Promoted- Parent Appeal pathway.

Expanded Pathway Opportunity

Starting in the 2023-24 school year, 3rd grade students who scored **APPROACHING** on the ELA portion of the TCAP will have an additional promotion pathway to the 4th grade. Chapter 338 of the Public Acts of 2023 (PC 338) amended T.C.A. § 49-6-3115 to allow a student who scored **APPROACHING** to be promoted to the 4th grade if the student scores within the 50th percentile on the most recently administered state adopted benchmark assessment and participates in tutoring for the entirety of the student's 4th grade year. PC 338 also amended the parent appeals process to allow a principal, guidance counselor, teacher, or other school administrator to file an appeal on behalf of the student with written consent from the parent or guardian. Furthermore, students who were retained in any grade K-3 must receive tutoring services for the entirety of the school year which ensures they are provided additional learning supports early in their education.

Looking Ahead

Tennessee has made significant strides in improving early literacy rates through strategic and long-term initiatives. In response to historically low literacy rates and pandemic-related learning loss, Governor Lee, the Tennessee General Assembly, and the department prioritized investments in early grade reading instruction. The impact of major initiatives, like Reading 360, and bold early literacy policies, like the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, and TN ALL Corps have already shown to improve 3rd grade ELA proficiency rates the past two years. Additionally, thousands of students who did not demonstrate proficiency on the 3rd grade ELA portion of the TCAP will receive free additional learning supports, including summer programming opportunities and/or tutoring.

Now is the time to strengthen, scale, and sustain early literacy teaching practices that are moving our students in the right direction. Eliminating implementation gaps and addressing achievement gaps should continue to be a top priority. Tennessee will continue to focus on the implementation of strategic learning supports provided to students through summer programming, tutoring, and other statewide initiatives to continue to improve early literacy rates and ensure all students are set up for lifelong success.
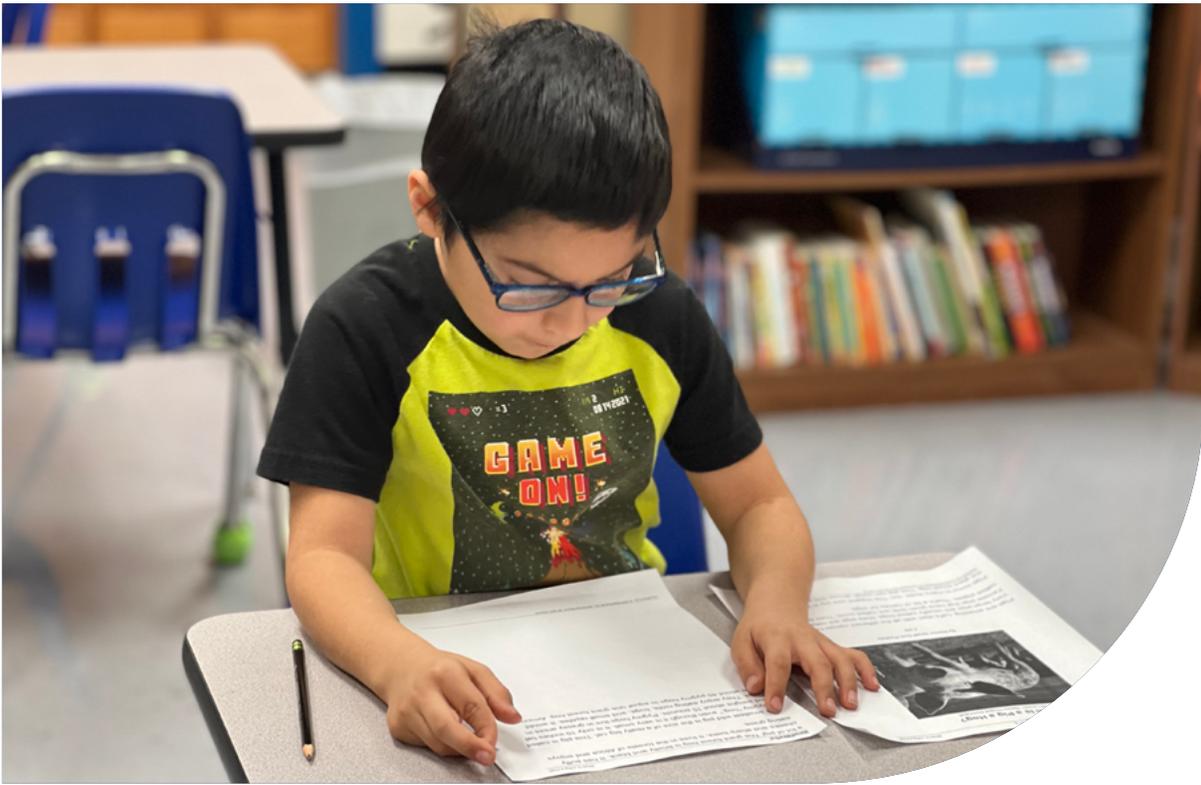
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