



The Voice for Students

2018 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

OVERVIEW

Campaign for School Equity (CSE) aims to ensure that all children, especially those of color, and families in Tennessee have access to high quality education options by uniting communities of clergy, parents, and students to raise their voices to create effective change.

At CSE, we prioritize engagement and collaboration. We advocate for initiatives and policies that expand high quality education options at the state and local level; we empower members of the community through educating and informing them; we assemble local leaders in the community to initiate change; and we create new leaders through leadership programs for students and faith leaders.

CSE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The 2018 legislative session provides CSE with an opportunity to collaborate with Tennessee state legislators in order to expand and protect high quality education options for students of color, to engage the community, parents, and students as key education stakeholders, and to improve education outcomes for students of color. CSE urges Tennessee state legislators to support legislation that will:

Expand and protect high quality education options for low-income, students of color trapped in consistently low-performing schools

In Tennessee, the academic achievement gaps that persist among low-income students and students of color when compared to their White and more affluent counterparts are problematic. Expanding and protecting high quality education options for low-income students of color trapped in consistently low-performing schools is critical. Tennessee state legislators should:

- **Protect the Achievement School District (ASD):** The establishment of the ASD has had a significant impact on educational choice and options in Tennessee. Although, the ASD has a long way to go in achieving its goals, it has made some academic gains over the last few years. Within three years, the amount of students performing “below basic” on the math assessment in the third through eighth grade has decreased by 6% while the amount of students achieving proficiency in math increased by 6.5%. The amount of students performing “below basic” on the reading assessment in the third through eighth grade decreased by almost 3% and the amount of student achieving proficiency in science increase by almost 4%.

Incentivize the Tennessee Department of Education, local education agencies (LEAs), and schools to better engage parents, students, and the community in efforts to improve educational outcomes for low-income students of color

Parents, students, and the community are significant education stakeholders. Establishing partnerships with these groups can provide opportunities to use innovation, relationships, and resources in the effective ways for students in need. Tennessee state legislators should:

- **Pass the Parent Engagement Pilot Program:** This three-year pilot program is a good start to engaging parents early on in their child's academic progress. Priority for the six schools selected should be given to schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement (CSI and TSI schools) under Tennessee's new accountability system.
- **Improve the Tennessee Community Schools Act:** Community schools actively partner with community stakeholders, parents, and students to establish programs and leverage resources to meet student needs. Allowing LEAs to collaborate with community partners to establish community schools as well as awarding transformational community school grants to assist priority and focus schools in implementing a community school program will allow schools to more effectively meet student needs.
- **Expand opportunities for early access to postsecondary courses:** This opportunity will lead to key partnerships that will increase college and career readiness of Tennessee's students. All high school students should have equitable access to these rigorous course offerings.

Improve unfair school discipline practices and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline

Educational disparities extend beyond academic achievement. Across the nation, minority and low-income students are impacted by unfair school discipline practices. School discipline practices that disproportionately affect students of color contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Unfortunately, Tennessee is no exception to this national trend. According to the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), Tennessee data demonstrate the disproportionate rates that Black students in Tennessee are suspended and expelled. In Tennessee, Black students only make up 24% of the student population while White students make up 64%. Still, Black students are suspended and expelled more than White students. In 2012, 66.2% of students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension across the state were Black students. Tennessee state legislators should:

- **Establish a commission on the school-to-prison pipeline and restorative practices:** This commission would be a proactive approach to understanding and addressing issues that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline in Tennessee.

Increase funding and support for students in need of more rigorous support and intervention

Some students demonstrate a need for additional support and intervention to meet their academic and behavioral needs. A priority should be made to increase funding and resources for a multi-tiered support and intervention system that uses a data-driven problem-solving model to identify specific student needs, match appropriate instructional strategies, and frequently monitor progress. Tennessee state legislators should:

- **Increase funding for Response to Instruction and Intervention:** The Basic Education Program (BEP) Funding proposal to add funding for three Response to Instruction and Intervention positions within each public school (public charter and traditional) to the BEP calculation should be supported.
- **Increase funding and support for special education programs in public charter schools and traditional public schools:** State legislators should support legislation that requires special education services associations to provide services to charter schools, authorizes charter schools to create a special education services associations, and requires school districts to provide excess cost reimbursement funds received due to students generating excess costs to schools
- **Pass the K-12 Block Grant Act:** These block grants can support LEA school improvement efforts and the quality of education in struggling schools.

Ensure that public charter schools and traditional public schools receive equitable facilities funding and finance opportunities

The condition of school facilities has a large impact on student performance and safety. Public charter schools experience many obstacles to maintaining adequate facilities such as the need to find and pay for facilities through their own operating funds. According to the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Tennessee charter schools are 20 percent smaller than the national standard for space per student and 97 percent of schools have little to no outdoor space for their exclusive use. Tennessee state legislators should:

- **Increase funding and finance opportunities for the State Charter School Facilities program:** Legislators should support legislation allow Energy Efficient Schools Council to award grants or loans for efficient capital outlay projects to public charter schools, the ASD, and LEAs.