

# ESSA State Plan Highlights Tennessee

**April 2020**

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015 reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Historically, the Acts focused on underserved student populations. ESSA created an opportunity to broaden accountability beyond traditional subjects, such as math, to potentially focus on health and wellness in schools via the ‘fifth indicator’, School Quality or Student Success (SQSS). States could select health and wellness-related indicators for SQSS, and identify strategies and initiatives throughout their ESSA plans to improve the school health environment.

This study identified exemplary State ESSA plans (from [a larger study](#) that analyzed plans from all 50 states and DC) to highlight best practices and lessons learned in developing and implementing their plans. Tennessee was one of three states selected as a case study. State education agency officials from the three case study states participated in key informant interviews to inform the case study development.

## Key Highlights

*ESSA has given us an opportunity to strengthen support for the whole child and the work of Coordinated School Health to create safe and healthy school environments.*

– State Education Official

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) engaged with a wide range of stakeholders across the state through townhall meetings, focus groups, and other activities. TDOE focused on incorporating this feedback, as well as aligning its ESSA State plan with the state’s strategic plan goals and existing statewide health and wellness initiatives centered around [Tennessee’s Coordinated School Health](#) (CSH) approach, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>1</sup>



1 CSH was incorporated into the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) framework developed by ASCD and the CDC.

### School Quality or Student Success: Chronic Absenteeism.

Tennessee selected chronic absenteeism as an indicator of School Quality or Student Success and this measure is reflected in its state report cards. This was an indicator that the state had already been monitoring.

*Coordinated School Health work in Tennessee has been based on the educationally relevant health disparities that cause students to miss school and/or not be successful at school for several years.*

– State Education Official

### Integrating the Coordinated School Health Model.

Tennessee began applying a CSH approach with the Coordinated School Health Improvement Act of 2000 that authorized funding for ten pilot sites. In 2006, the Tennessee Coordinated School Health Expansion and Physical Activity Law authorized funding for statewide implementation of the CSH approach, including a Coordinator of School Health in every school district in the state by the 2007-08 school year. Building upon this history of CSH in the state, the ESSA plan integrated CSH into its Safe and Healthy Students approach. As a result of having the CSH Coordinator in every district, state officials can better monitor and support health and wellness-related ESSA implementation, as well as local school wellness policy implementation.

### Implementation of School Health Index and School Health Advisory Councils.

In 2016, the Tennessee State Board of Education required that every school district implement the [School Health Index](#) (SHI) to monitor school health environments, as well as establish a School Health Advisory Council (SHAC). Aligned with their CSH approach, the district-level Coordinator oversees the SHAC, as well as implementation of the SHI.

## Lessons Learned & Recommendations

### Weave Health & Wellness into State Strategic Planning.

TDOE identified three evidence-based areas of focus within their state's strategic planning: strong leadership, effective educators, and student support. These areas were heavily incorporated into their ESSA plan to ensure consistency with their strategic plan, including the CSH approach, which was woven into the student support area.

*Coordinated School Health is student-centered and this aligned with our focus area of student support in our strategic plan and ESSA.*

– State Education Official

### Seek Opportunities for Funding.

While previous health and wellness initiatives related to CSH were funded with state dollars, ESSA created an opportunity for school districts to identify their unique needs and leverage federal funding. CSH Coordinators in school districts helped to identify the unique needs of the district and seek out those opportunities, as well as coordinate the use of funds.

*Our coordinators are making the most of ESSA funding, particularly Title IV funds, to support the health of students in their districts. This has given them the opportunity to strengthen the work that they have been doing for over seven years, prioritizing student health and wellness by addressing health disparities.*

– State Education Official

### Connect Broadly with Advocates to Advance Wellness Work.

State officials described the importance of learning from representatives in other states, non-profit organizations, and other organizations that are advancing wellness initiatives in their respective areas. The ability to share best practices and ideas has “inspired” ongoing initiatives in health & wellness.

*It has been very helpful to connect with other school health advocates across the nation. Every state has strong champions in this field and we can all learn from each other. There’s a lot of things that they’re doing that really inspire me and our work. And I share that with our team and our coordinators across the state when I do learn it.*

– State Education Official

### Family Engagement is Key.

Coordinated School Health has always recognized family engagement as a critical component of student health and wellness. The TDOE Office of CSH works with the TDOE [Office of Family and Community Engagement](#) at the state level and CSH coordinators are part of the districts’ parent and family engagement planning at the local level.

*Our coordinators across the state develop school health action plans each school year that include a parent outreach and involvement objective.*

– State Education Official

### Solicit Student Voice and Engagement.

Student voice was a critical piece during the development and implementation phases. State officials described ways that student voice and engagement were included in the implementation of CSH-related initiatives and to advocate for health and wellness initiatives at the state and district level.

*Students are the center of the work we do in Coordinated School Health and their voices are critical to ensuring that they are healthy and ready to learn. Across our state, students serve on Healthy School Teams and Student Health Advisory Councils and their input is invaluable. Also, students in the health science focus area participate in school health initiatives across the state.*

– State Education Official

### Key Agencies

At the time of this study, the TDOE was under reorganization with a new State Education Commissioner and also undergoing a new strategic planning process. The previous Commissioner oversaw the development and implementation of the State ESSA plan.

The state CSH team works to implement the CSH approach, and collaborates closely with many internal and external departments, including the Office of Family and Community Engagement, the Office of School Safety, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and the Tennessee Department of Health.

### Demographic Profile

Tennessee State Demographics (2017)		
	n	%
Total population	6,597,381	
% White (non-Hispanic)	5,131,786	77.8
% Black (non-Hispanic)	1,107,392	16.7
% Hispanic	340,063	5.2
% American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)	17,568	2.7
% Student eligible for free or reduced price meals (2015-16)	573,342	57.6
% Rural-remote school districts (2016-17)	11	7.5%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD) 2015-16 and 2016-17

### **Tennessee ESSA Resources**

- Tennessee State ESSA Plan: <https://www.tn.gov/education/essa.html>
- Tennessee State Report Card: <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/report-card.html>
- Tennessee Department of Education: <https://www.tn.gov/education>
- Tennessee CSH: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/coordinated-school-health.html>
- Tennessee CSH—Best Practices, Programs, and Policies: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/coordinated-school-health/csh-best-practices-programs-and-policies.html>

### **Health & Wellness-Specific ESSA Resources**

- [Using State Policy to Create Healthy Schools: Coverage of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework in State Statutes and Regulations—Child Trends](#)
- [State ESSA Plans to Support Student Health and Wellness: A Framework for Action—Healthy Schools Campaign](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning and Development, Conditions for Learning, and Whole Child Supports in ESSA States Plans—Council of Chief State School Officers](#)

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### About Healthy Eating Research

*Healthy Eating Research* (HER) is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Technical assistance and direction are provided by Duke University under the direction of Mary Story PhD, RD, program director, and Megan Lott, MPH, RDN, deputy director. HER supports research to identify, analyze, and evaluate environmental and policy strategies that can promote healthy eating among children and prevent childhood obesity. Special emphasis is given to research projects that benefit children and adolescents and their families, especially among lower-income and racial and ethnic minority population groups that are at highest risk for poor health and well-being and nutrition related health disparities. For more information, visit [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org) or follow HER on Twitter at [@HERResearch](https://twitter.com/HERResearch).

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