LEARNING FROM THE BEST

Promising Practices from Tennessee's 2013 Reward Schools

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONTENTS

There are spectacular successes occurring every day in classrooms all over the state.

Across Tennessee, student test scores have risen steadily in every subject since tests were revised in 2009-10, so that nearly 91,000 additional students are performing at grade level in math and nearly 52,000 additional students are performing at grade level in science.

This report focuses on some of the schools that are making this possible. Each year, Tennessee recognizes 10 percent of its schools for overall excellence. The list includes the schools that have made the greatest gains from the previous year and the schools that achieved at the highest levels of absolute performance across the state. In the following pages, we shine a light on these schools, sharing some of their stories and practices as a source of inspiration and learning.

Highlights

- 169 out of 1,668 schools were recognized for Reward status.
- Reward Schools represent 52 districts and span all school sizes and types.
- 19 percent of Reward Schools serve predominantly black, Hispanic, or Native American students.

Bright Spots

- Several years ago, Coffee County High School was deemed to be failing under the previous No Child Left Behind regulations. Since that designation, Coffee County High School performance has grown at record levels, and the school has been recognized as a Reward School two years in a row.
- In 2011, Lowrance Elementary School had the lowest math test scores of all elementary schools in Shelby County. Only 20 percent of students were proficient or advanced. This year, almost 40 percent of students reached grade level in math. Like Coffee County High School, Lowrance is a Reward School for the second year.

Room for Improvement

- Our neediest students are still underrepresented in our best schools. On average, our Reward Schools have fewer minority and economically disadvantaged students than the state average.
- Our best schools achieve extraordinary results on our state tests, but there is still significant work to be done to ensure that all students across the state graduate high school ready for success in college and career.

Students at Percy Priest Elementary welcome Governor Haslam with a song.

Governor Bill Haslam congratulates Percy Priest Elementary at the announcement event for 2013 Reward Schools.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Decades of research on school improvement have found that the most effective schools share several common elements.

Great schools differ across many dimensions, including size, location, and the make-up of their student populations. But here we summarize these schools' common elements, drawing most heavily on research conducted by the National Center on Scaling up Effective Schools and the Urban Education Institute.[1] These elements provide the organizing framework for our investigation of Tennessee Reward Schools.

Leadership

Effective leaders focus the majority of leadership efforts on students learning and student growth. They set high expectations for all students and staff. They also promote equal access to school resources. They invite teachers, parents, and students into the decision-making process.

Instruction

The curriculum is aligned to rigorous standards. Teachers use collaborative strategies to develop classrooms that are informed by student data. Teachers develop lessons that are differentiated to meet their students' individual needs.

Human Capital

Teachers are hired based on their commitment to student learning and supported and developed with quality, ongoing professional development and feedback. School staff works together in a collaborative manner.

School Climate

The school is a safe, orderly and welcoming place that enables students and teachers to focus on learning. Classroom disruptions are minimal. Discipline codes are uniformly and consistently enforced. Strong connections exist between the school and parents and other community members.

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1   Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* University of Chicago Press; Preston, C., Goldring, E., Guthrie, J., & Ramsey, R. (2012). Conceptualizing essential components of effective high schools. Paper presented at the Achieving Success at Scale: Research on Effective High Schools Conference, Nashville, TN.

Reward Schools represent the top 10 percent of schools in the state.

These include the schools that have made the greatest achievement gains over the previous year (Progress) and the schools that have performed at the highest level over the previous year (Performance), excluding those schools that have large and growing achievement gaps. A subset of schools tops the lists for both overall achievement and growth, earning the high distinction of Performance-Progress.

Selection Criteria

- **Performance**: Schools in the top 5 percent in the state for performance (as measured by proficiency levels on state tests and graduation rate)

- **Progress**: Schools in the top 5 percent in the state for year-to-year growth (as measured by value-added scores)

- **Performance-Progress**: Schools that are in both the top 5 percent for performance *and* year-to-year growth

- For school in any category, subgroup achievement gaps must be smaller than the state median and achievement gaps must not have increased from the previous year.
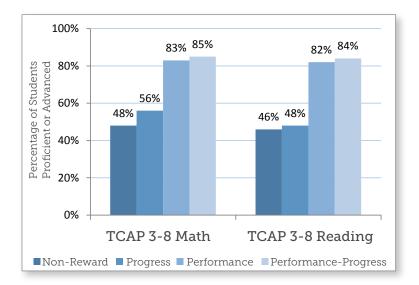
> " Our job is to watch what you all are doing, figure out why you are doing it well **and how others can do it just as well.** "
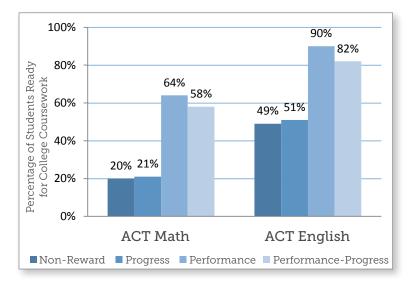
Commissioner
Kevin Huffman

Student Achievement

The figures below show the achievement of reward schools compared to Non-Reward Schools.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement reading and math tests are timed, multiple-choice assessment taken by students in grades 3-8. The ACT college readiness assessment is a curriculum and standards based test that measures students' academic readiness for college and is taken by 11th graders across the state.

Proficient and Advanced Students

- Performance and Performance-Progress Schools have a significantly greater percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced in both reading and math compared to both Progress and Non-Reward Schools.

- Progress Schools have a significantly greater percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced in math but do not differ significantly from Non-Reward Schools in reading.

College-Prepared Students

- Performance and Performance-Progress Schools have a significantly greater percentage of students meeting college-ready benchmarks in math and English than Progress and Non-Reward Schools.

- Students at Performance and Performance – Progress Schools exceed the national average of ACT test-takers meeting college-ready benchmarks for English (64 percent) and math (44 percent).

- Progress Schools do not differ significantly from Non-Reward Schools on ACT performance.
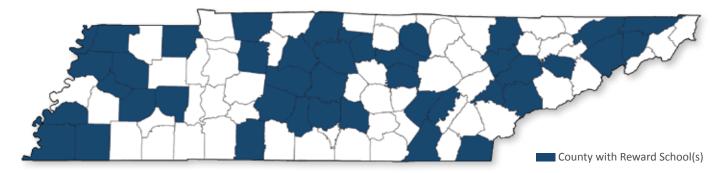
Out of 1,668 schools, 169 were recognized as Reward Schools using data from 2012–13.

- The majority of 2013 Reward Schools are elementary schools.
- 52 school districts had Reward Schools.
- Reward Schools vary in size, but they are larger than other state schools.
- Progress Schools look demographically similar to Non-Reward Schools.

- Performance Schools tend to have significantly lower percentages of minority students and students receiving free and reduced price lunch than Progress and Non-Reward Schools.
- 19 percent of Reward Schools (32 schools) serve predominantly black, Hispanic, or Native American students.

Number of Schools by Reward Status

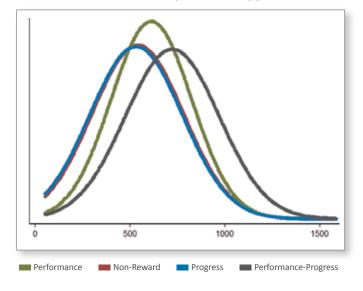|	Non-Reward	Progress	Performance	Performance-Progress
Elementary	694	39	44	10
Middle	308	22	4	3
High	259	15	11	2
Other	238	7	11	1
TOTAL	1499	83	70	16

Where are Reward Schools located?

■ County with Reward School(s)

School Enrollment

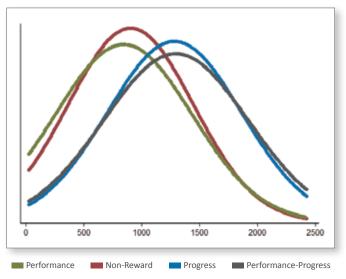### These figures show the school enrollment distributions for Reward Schools and Non-Reward Schools.

Reward and Non-Reward Schools represent a range of school enrollment sizes. The top of each curve represents the mean enrollment.

Elementary & Middle School
Enrollment by Reward Type

Performance   Non-Reward   Progress   Performance-Progress

High School Enrollment by Reward Type

Performance   Non-Reward   Progress   Performance-Progress

Elementary & Middle School Enrollment

- Enrollment distributions for middle and elementary Progress and Non-Reward Schools were almost identical, with both types of schools having a mean enrollment of about 500 students.

- While the distributions overlap greatly with Progress and Non-Reward Schools, Performance and Performance-Progress Schools had larger school populations with means of about 600 and 700 students, respectively.
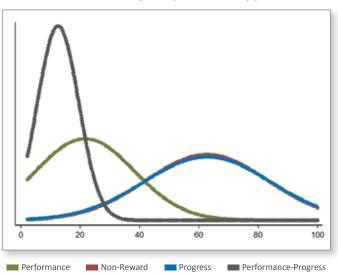
High School Enrollment

- Progress and Performance-Progress high schools had similar enrollment distributions, with means of around 1,220 and 1,300 students, respectively.

- Performance high schools had the lowest average enrollment of 845 students, and Non-Reward high schools had an average enrollment of 920 students.

These figures show the distributions of percentage of economically disadvantaged and minority students.

In general, Progress and Non-Reward Schools represent a range of school populations, whereas Performance and Performance-Progress Schools tended to have fewer low-income, minority students.
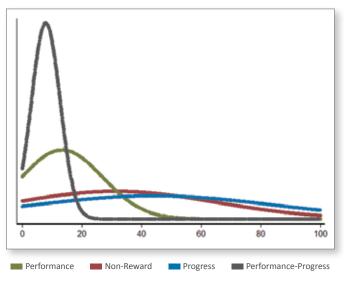

Percent Economically
Disadvantaged by Reward Type

Performance   Non-Reward   Progress   Performance-Progress

Percent Black, Hispanic, & Native
American by Reward Type

Performance   Non-Reward   Progress   Performance-Progress

Economically Disadvantaged Student Populations

• Progress Schools and Non-Reward Schools had similar distributions of percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, with an average of about 60 percent.

• Performance and Performance-Progress Schools had fewer economically disadvantaged students, though some Performance Schools did have averages above 40 percent.

Black, Hispanic, and Native American Student Populations

• Progress Schools and Non-Reward Schools both have similar distributions of percentage of black, Hispanic, and Native American students.

• On average Progress Schools had a higher average of 44 percent compared to 30 percent for Non-Reward Schools.

LEARNING FROM REWARD SCHOOLS

Themes and Practices

We conducted interviews with Reward School principals to deepen our understanding of effective practices in the state's Reward Schools.

Process for Selecting Schools to Interview

First, we compiled a list of schools that were Reward Schools in both 2012 and 2013. We then focused on schools that exceeded the state average in:

- Test scores (e.g., 3-8 TCAP math and reading; ACT math and English)
- Teacher effectiveness ratings

Then we prioritized candidates using the following criteria:

- Diversity and socio-economic enrollment (percentage of minority students and free and reduced-price lunch students)
- Geographic diversity

Finally, we selected a range of school types and Reward School classifications.

- 4 high schools, 3 middle schools, 3 elementary schools, and 1 K-8 school
- 4 Performance, 6 Progress, and 1 Performance-Progress

Interviewed Schools

Based on our selection process, we interviewed leaders at the following schools:

- Clinton Elementary School (Clinton City)
- Coffee County High School (Coffee County)
- Craigmont Middle School (Memphis City[1])
- Fred J. Page High School (Williamson County)
- Harrison Elementary School (Hamilton County)
- Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet School (Metro Nashville)
- Lexington Middle School (Lexington City)
- Lowrance Elementary School (Shelby County)
- Meigs Middle Magnet School (Metro Nashville)
- Pin Oak Elementary School (Henderson County)
- South Greene High School (Green County)

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1   Memphis City Schools is now part of Shelby County Schools.

Sample Interview Questions

We selected interview questions that aligned with the common characteristics of effective schools. We also asked for additional feedback on practices that school leaders would like to improve or change at their own schools, as well as what practices they find particularly effective that they would like to share with other schools.

Leadership

What sets your school apart from its peer schools in the state?

How do you communicate high academic standards among school and staff?

Instruction

What common practices do you see across your classrooms? Which of these do you believe most impacts student growth?

What types of interventions or decisions are made for students who need instructional support to reach proficiency?

Human Capital

What sort of characteristics do you look for or try to instill in your staff?

How do you support your lower performing staff?

How do you help or ensure that teachers implement what they have learned from professional development?

School Climate

What specific school discipline procedures have been particularly helpful?

How do you engage parents and other community members in your school?

LEARNING FROM REWARD SCHOOLS

Leadership *Themes*

Effective schools tend to have principals with clear, strategic visions that are focused on instruction.

These leaders set high expectations by communicating the philosophy that all students can and will learn. Additionally, these leaders use a variety of resources to address student learning challenges. They tend to focus their staff and resources solely around improving the quality of instruction and the students' academic experience. They provide incentives and support that reinforce their schools' values and mission.

All stakeholders held to high standards

Some principals described their school environments as "zero failure" and "no excuses" zones. Many noted that all members of their school community, including parents and non-teaching staff, needed to be aware of the high academic expectations in place. They explained that expectations should be introduced at the beginning of the school year and continuously enforced.

Teacher input is valued

Several principals noted that collaborative leadership was critical to their schools' success. They noted that giving teachers autonomy to explore instructional strategies and being open to their input helped the school improve and kept teachers engaged and motivated.

School leaders actively protect instructional time

Principals across the Reward Schools employed a variety of strategies to reduce paperwork, limit in-class disruptions, and provide teachers with dedicated planning periods. Several principals noted moving away from daily verbal school announcements to email/web-based announcements.

Clear vision, programs, and policies reinforce core values

Many principals described having a vision and working to invest stakeholders in that vision. Their schools' central displays and rewards/incentives were organized around the schools' core values. One principal said he reads the school mission aloud each morning and explained that the mission drives communication and decision-making throughout the school.

Principal Perspectives

"Teachers set the stage for the expectations. There is a strong instructional focus. We do a lot of community building with the kids so that when it is time to learn, they are **ready to get serious**."

"I welcome the input from teachers. They can actually tell you what's working, how it would be implemented. **We have collaborative leadership here**."

"We asked ourselves how much of our time are we losing? Then we compiled the data on the length of transitions, in class distractions due to announcements and other house-keeping. **We made changes to our schedule** as a result. We're now teaching bell to bell."

"I think **you have to have a vision** that everyone can buy into. Something that you can really stand behind."

Setting High Standards

Lexington Middle School (Progress)

The motto for the 2012-13 school year at Lexington Middle School was "no excuses." Principal Beth Deere said this motto was particularly important given the school was facing new challenges including increased populations of students with disabilities and more challenging annual measurable objectives. During faculty meetings, staff members participated in team building activities that reinforced the "no excuses" motto. For example, in one activity, teachers were assigned a variety of disabilities and then had to rely on coaching from their peers to complete an activity. Principal Deere noted that the school staff rose to the high expectations that come with the "no excuses" motto. She also noted that an important part of high expectations is providing opportunities to succeed and celebrating hard work and success.

Protecting Teacher's Time

Clinton Elementary School (Performance)

Clinton Elementary School uses a variety of strategies to reduce burden on teachers. These strategies include administrators making calls to parents regarding student behavior issues so that teachers do not have to do this after school, instructional assistants handling money issues and lunch duty, the school secretary performing as much clerical work as possible on her end, and administrators condensing announcements to weekly emails.

Responsiveness to Teacher Concerns

Meigs Middle Magnet School (Performance)

Principal Samuel Underwood and his leadership team act on feedback from teachers and school staff on what needs to be improved. They critically analyze teacher survey results and gather additional feedback from teachers and then make decisions based on that information. For example, when they learned of concern over the lack of access to copy machines, they changed placement of the copiers and got the district to provide more access to printers. Similarly, Principal Underwood oversaw the installation of wireless internet throughout the school building based on teacher input. He noted that seemingly small changes "can provide a foundation of support that is integral in making good things happen."

Teacher Input on Instructional Resources

Pin Oak Elementary School (Performance)

At Pin Oak Elementary School, when selecting instructional resources such as textbooks and other curriculum materials, school leaders and teachers meet together to discuss what needs are present and how they can best be filled. Principal Lori Leasure said that when she started at the school, they were lacking math resources, so she assembled a group of math teachers to observe how a particular instructional program was working at a neighboring district. She said that investigating ideas and involving teachers is key to the process of selecting instructional resources.

Instruction   *Themes*

Quality instructional guidance requires that a rigorous curriculum aligned to district and state grade-level standards be in place.

The curriculum is available and delivered to all students with appropriate supports for students with special academic needs. Formative assessments, classroom diagnostic tools, and other student data are systematically used to differentiate student instruction, recommend intervention or enrichment opportunities. Teachers use collaborative strategies that foster critical thinking skills, creativity, team work, and enable students to relate content to their own lives.

Formative assessments used to identify students' needs

Principals noted that formative assessments (both vendor-created and homegrown) enabled school leaders and teachers to track student progress and identify interventions. Several principals suggested that it was critical to reduce the time between the assessment and intervening to support struggling students.

Innovative scheduling utilized for individualized student support

In addition to striving for "bell-to-bell" instruction, several Reward School principals reported developing school-wide tutoring or enrichment periods that enabled teachers and students to meet during a common period by altering the school day length or shifting lesson planning time. High school leaders reported using data to place students in double dose courses to provide them with extra support in reading and mathematics.

Data-driven instruction and goal setting

Reward School principals reported that their schools used data to drive conversations with parents, teachers, and students about growth areas and strengths and to collaboratively develop performance goals. One principal noted that data use enabled him to funnel many students, previously identified as proficient or average, into more advanced, rigorous courses.

Transition to the Common Core State Standards

Many Reward School principals noted that their schools had transitioned quickly to the Common Core State Standards. The principals expressed support for the standards and said they look for teachers to be implementing practices emphasized by the standards, such as questioning, feedback, and problem-solving.

Principal Perspectives

"For us, it's one thing to have the data, but it must be **shared across the board with teachers, students and parents**. Our data walls show our students this is where you were, this is what you need to work on, and this is great progress that you've have made."

"Students **work together** to increase their understanding."

"When we get new test results, [teachers] want it hot off the press and they are **ready to talk** about it."

"**We are big believers in the Common Core**. Students have to justify why they chose this answer over the others."

Questioning Strategies

Harrison Elementary School (Progress)

Principal Stacy Johnson and the teachers at Harrison note that their instruction is focused on using questioning strategies that prompt students to justify their thinking. Teachers said that they model the questioning strategies and use them in their own interactions with students and that over time students begin to imitate the questioning strategies in their interactions with each other. They said they train students to know that the "why" questions are coming so that students are prepared to provide their reasoning.

Tutoring Integrated into School Schedule

South Greene High School (Progress)

To provide struggling students with additional instructional support, South Green High School implemented built-in tutoring three days a week and a book club two days a week. The 30-minute sessions allow students to go to the classes where they needed the extra help. According to Principal Cindy Bowman, during the first year of implementation, the course failure rate for ninth grade students was reduced by 40 percent.

Interpreting Student Data Using Data Notebooks

Craigmont Middle School (Progress)

To build proficiency in data analysis, staff at Craigmont Middle School developed a data system called the "Proficient and Advanced Indicator Notebook." Using data spreadsheets, Principal Reggie Jackson had his teachers record the students' prior year test scores, current proficiency grouping, and expected scores. Teachers then used the recorded data to identify students below proficient and develop specific plans for helping them attain proficiency. Additionally, teachers continued to monitor student progress on interim assessments in the notebooks. Jackson said, "I attempted to make data collection and data analysis mean something to teachers."
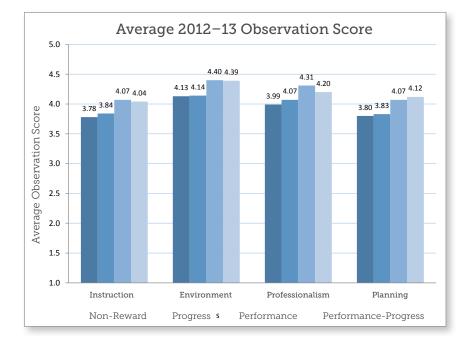
Instruction   *Observation Scores*

In 2011–12, Tennessee launched a new, statewide system of educator evaluation.

Observations are one component of this system. All teachers are observed multiple times each year. Most districts use the state's Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) rubric, but some districts use approved alternate models. The TEAM rubric contains four domains: planning, environment, instruction, and professionalism. Each domain has a set of indicators that are scored 1 to 5 each time that domain is observed.

Average 2012–13 Observation Score

	Instruction	Environment	Professionalism	Planning
Non-Reward	3.78	4.13	3.99	3.80
Progress	3.84	4.14	4.07	3.83
Performance	4.07	4.40	4.31	4.07
Performance-Progress	4.04	4.39	4.20	4.12

Takeaways

• Average teacher observation scores were significantly higher at Performance and Performance-Progress Schools than Progress and Non-Reward Schools.

• Average teacher observation scores at Progress Schools were significantly higher than Non-Reward Schools across all domains except environment.

Great teachers are the foundation of effective schools.

Quality professional development along with a collaborative, friendly staff culture and support from the school leadership enables teachers to develop master their craft. In effective schools, teachers know and embody the school's core values. Teachers have frequent opportunities to share instructional practices and learn from each other. The school leadership provides the resources and time that allows the teachers to meaningfully collaborate to improve instruction.

Teacher hiring and evaluation driven by school vision

Reward School principals noted that an important consideration in hiring new teachers was their fit within the school's culture and alignment with the school philosophy. Qualities that were commonly sought after included willingness to work hard, collaborative mindset, engaging and varied instructional approaches, commitment to building relationships with students and parents, and a sincere passion for working with students.

School leaders are aware of instructional quality and continuously offer feedback

In contrast to the perception that school leaders are hidden in their offices, Reward School leaders appear to be "plugged in" to the classrooms and aware of the instructional quality at their schools. Several mentioned conducting up to five to seven classroom observations per week outside of the required evaluation observations. Others sat in on Professional Learning Community groups and lesson planning sessions. Leaders noted that they regularly met with teachers, offered feedback, and helped to develop instructional strategies.

Quality professional development and mentoring

School leaders voiced a commitment to helping novice and veteran teachers perfect their craft. School leaders noted targeting professional development opportunities based on teacher evaluations that were separate from school-wide trainings. Most interviewed school leaders noted that they had teacher mentoring programs in place at their school for novice and lower performing teachers. Some principals also said they utilized substitute teachers or taught classes themselves to enable novice teachers to sit in on lessons by model teachers within their schools and across the district.

Principal Perspectives

"When I hire, I do not look for teachers who will fit in with the status quo. I look for people who are going to **change the school** to better align with our ultimate vision."

"My teachers do a great job of coming to me, the academic coach, and other teachers in the school when they need support. They never give up. Instead, **they dig a little deeper.** They are not afraid to go to someone else for help."

"What is important to me is that a teacher can work towards our vision and **uphold our mission**."

"My PD is tailored to my school. Every year, I start the school year out with a theme. We present a theme. This year, it was Engage, Equip, Inspire. Everything that we do relates back to that theme. Additionally, I try to look at deficits and focus on building professional development that will **allow us to improve** in those areas."

Teacher Collaboration

Fred J. Page High School (Performance-Progress)

Page High School teachers have many opportunities for collaboration. Teachers meet by department for an hour before school each Monday to work on vertical teaming.[1] For example, English language arts teachers are able to discuss which books are appropriate for students at each grade level and to avoid repetition. Teachers work on scope and sequencing, using data, teaching and integrating technology, and sharing student work. Grade-level teams meet to discuss topics such as cross-curriculum opportunities, freshman study skills, ACT practice, guidance and counseling, and postsecondary opportunities.

Hiring as a Team

Harrison Elementary School (Progress)

Principal Stacy Johnson includes staff when interviewing for open positions. They collaborate on interview questions and communicate school expectations to candidates so they know what will be expected of them if they are hired. Principal Johnson explained that they always makes sure to find someone who will fit with the school mission and culture, being "very selective with who they hire even under a time crunch."

Professional Learning Opportunities

Coffee County High School (Progress)

At Coffee County Central High School, teachers of similar courses meet weekly with their professional learning communities (PLCs). In these groups, teachers are taught how to access and interpret the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and other testing data. Teachers reflect on student patterns and disaggregate the data at the subgroup level to examine trends. They use the data to determine what teaching practices and interventions have been effective. School leaders said that each PLC meeting is focused on the following question: Does what you are doing impact student learning? Professional development is also provided through state and school trainings in the Common Core State Standards. School leaders said they often bring the elements of state training to the school's own professional development. For example, last year school-level trainings focused on the "core four" teaching practices of questioning, academic feedback, problem solving, and thinking.

Supporting New Teachers

Lexington Middle School (Progress)

New teachers at Lexington Middle School are provided several layers of support. First, they are assigned a teaching mentor. They also receive additional attention from school leaders and support from subject-area academic coaches. Finally, they participate in PLCs and vertical teaming to support their lesson planning and development.
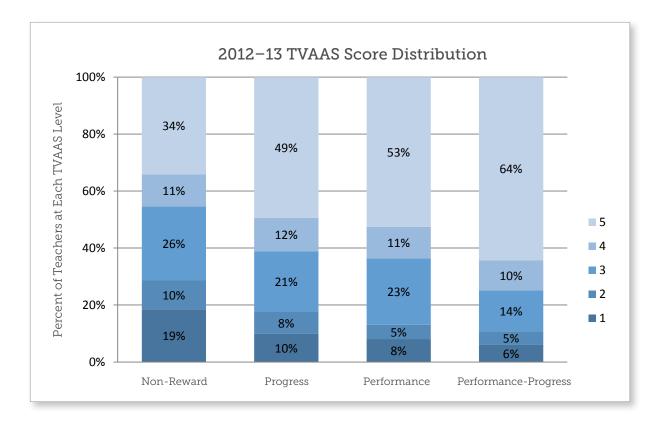
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1   Vertical teaming occurs when teachers of similar content across grade levels work together.

Human Capital *Value-Added Scores*

Human capital includes the quality of the workforce in the school.

Tennessee uses a statewide educator evaluation system to assess teacher quality. The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) measures an individual teacher's effect on student test scores. TVAAS scores are only given to teachers in tested subjects and grades and, when available, are one measure included in the teacher evaluation system. TVAAS scores range from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the least effective teachers and 5 representing the most effective teachers.

2012–13 TVAAS Score Distribution

Percent of Teachers at Each TVAAS Level

	Non-Reward	Progress	Performance	Performance-Progress
5	34%	49%	53%	64%
4	11%	12%	11%	10%
3	26%	21%	23%	14%
2	10%	8%	5%	5%
1	19%	10%	8%	6%

Takeaways

- Reward Schools had a significantly greater percentage of teachers who received a 4 or 5 on TVAAS than Non-Reward Schools.
- Almost 75 percent of teachers in Performance-Progress Schools received a 4 or 5 on TVAAS.
- Over 60 percent of teachers in Progress and Performance Schools received a 4 or 5 on TVAAS.

School Climate   *Themes*

Effective schools are organized to promote a culture of learning for all students.

They are safe, orderly, and welcoming. Positive relationships exist between students, teachers, and school leaders. School staff work to foster connections with parents and other community members.

Rules understood by all students and applied consistently

Most leaders expressed that orderly, well-managed classrooms and well-behaved students are necessary to build an academic culture that promotes student learning. They noted that rules should be explicit, clear, and visible to students through out the school. Students should be fully aware of the behavioral expectations and consequences of not fulfilling those expectations. Several leaders also described students as being active members in developing and communicating school policies.

Parent outreach and involvement

Most principals mentioned efforts to involve parents and their local communities. In addition to holding conferences and making calls home, some principals reported hosting family events and sending home newsletters. Others offered services just for parents such as computer classes and FAFSA application sessions.

Focus on building student relationships and investment

Several school leaders remarked that an essential part of the faculty's role was to develop trust with students and foster caring professional relationships. They said that school staff challenge students to uphold the school's values, support students in enrichment opportunities, and reward and highlight student achievements.

Teacher collaboration and dedication

Almost all the interviewed principals said that the teachers at their school go "above and beyond" expectations by holding tutoring before and after school, leading clubs, and striving to find teaching strategies that will help students understand the curriculum. Principals also noted that teacher collaborated via PLCs, common planning time, and vertical team planning.

Principal Perspectives

"Every year here they follow the **same rules and expectations**."

"The teachers really go **above and beyond** and help with life as well as learning inside the classroom."

"We help kids see the **value in the work** that they are doing."

"All the grade levels do a lot of team building activities to **build relationships** with the kids."

"**Our teachers really know their students** and bring out the best in them in the classroom and co-curricular activities."

Setting Expectations

Harrison Elementary School (Progress)

All grade levels at Harrison Elementary do team building activities to build relationships with and among their students. The fifth grade does a "team building Olympics" where students solve problems as a class, team, or in partners. One activity involves using toothpaste to write out a word that describes their group and then working together to put the toothpaste back in the tube. This sends the message that "once you put something out there it is hard to take back." Another activity includes students working in groups to act out classroom expectations and having other teams guess what rule or expectation is being demonstrated.

Clinton Elementary School (Performance)

Principal Jamie Jordan explained that a uniform set of school rules, called KNIGHTS rules, keeps everyone on the same page regarding behavior expectations. Each letter of KNIGHTS, the school mascot, represents a different rule. The rules are reviewed at the beginning of each school year.

Orientation to a New School

Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet School (Performance)

Hume-Fogg hosts a freshman transition week to help transition the students to their new school. Students do scavenger hunts, review school protocols and rules, and go over strategies for being successful such as being your own advocate and planning for assignments. They also conduct an ongoing freshman year transition academy. Topics include effective organization skills, study skills, and team building.

Craigmont Middle School (Progress)

Students at Craigmont created and produced an orientation video that introduces new students to the school's culture, policies, and procedures.

Establishing a Positive Culture

Lowrance Elementary School (Progress)

Principal Kelvin Bates developed a positive culture at Lowrance by accentuating the positives. When he became principal, he saw low test scores as "the greatest opportunity for growth." The school began celebrating growth in small increments and highlighting students, teachers, and grade levels showing improvement. He says this helped build a community mindset where teachers were taking responsibility for all students in the school.

FINAL NOTES

This report describes several common themes from interviews with school leaders of the state's Reward Schools.

We suggest that school leaders reflect on the extent to which their schools embody the themes shared by Reward Schools in the areas of leadership, instruction, human capital and school climate. These themes are reviewed below. While each school is unique, ideas that have proven successful can be adapted into many distinct contexts. We hope that this report generates conversations about the best ways to carry promising practices from Tennessee's highest performing and fastest improving schools into all schools across the state.

Leadership

- All stakeholders held to high standards
- Clear vision, programs, and policies reinforce core values
- Teacher input is valued
- School leaders proactively protect instructional time

Instruction

- Data-driven instruction and goal setting
- Formative assessments used to identify students needs
- Innovative scheduling utilized for individualized student support
- Transition to Common Core

Human Capital

- Teacher hiring and evaluation driven by school vision
- School leaders are aware of instructional quality and continuously offer feedback
- Quality professional development and mentoring

School Climate

- Rules understood by all students and applied consistently
- Focus on building student relationships and investment
- Teacher collaboration and dedication
- Parent outreach and involvement