



**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
NINTH FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER  
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

**CANDICE MCQUEEN**  
COMMISSIONER

June 13, 2017

U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

On behalf of Tennessee's 146 school districts, as well as the state department of education, I am writing to express great concern over the proposed funding reductions and eliminations of key programs in the FY2018 budget proposal. Specifically, we have significant concerns regarding the proposed elimination of the Title II, part A program. Title II, part A is the only funding source that is explicitly reserved for educators. It is critical to the success of our work and, more importantly, the success of students in Tennessee.

Over the past decade, Tennessee has utilized its Title II funds to align with state priorities and support educators across the state. As a specific example, we have worked to empower districts by providing key human capital data to address equity and shine a spotlight on students' access to highly effective teachers. This data has also helped to strengthen and expand the teacher pipeline for the rural communities, which account for about two-thirds of our districts. These kinds of initiatives must continue to be supported.

We have built on this work in our ESSA state plan, and a critical component for the successful implementation of our plan is improving support for teachers and leaders. We recognize that effective teachers are the No. 1 in-school factor in improving student achievement, and supporting our teachers and leaders from educator preparation programs, to the classroom, and through their careers is the only way to achieve success for all students.

One of the key strategic priorities in Tennessee's ESSA plan addresses the teacher and leader issues we are currently facing across that continuum, all of which are supported by Title II, part A. Our strategies include a more intentional focus on outcome measures for educator preparation providers, creating statewide and regional leadership pipelines that produce transformational school leaders, establishing principal pipeline models in all eight of Tennessee's regions, and funding the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) portal for Tennessee's TEAM evaluation model. The portal ensures that educator evaluation scores are reliable, valid, and create greater differentiation of teacher roles, responsibilities, and salaries. These are all key pieces of our work.

While the loss of these funds would certainly impact state-level initiatives, the loss would be felt most acutely at the local level. The funds provided under Title II are the only federal funds focused on teacher improvement and growth. Local districts rely on these funds for this purpose, providing professional learning opportunities for teachers, employing coaches, and paying stipends to teacher leaders. The professional learning budgets of many districts would be devastated by the loss of these funds, and all districts would be negatively impacted.

Tennessee's rural areas and poorer districts are especially dependent upon these funds, as their local budgets are unable to provide additional support for professional learning. It is imperative that rural districts are successful in developing their local talent, as it is a challenge to recruit teachers from outside their community. In rural districts, the school system is often the largest employer in the community, and funding for educators has a significant impact on the local economy. Supporting our districts through federal funding to employ coaches or augment teacher leader salaries provides a high return on investment, and these funds directly benefit the education of teachers, leaders, and their students.



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Title II funds have contributed to our success in becoming the fastest improving state over the past four years. We are excited about the work going forward and believe that with the appropriate funding and support, Tennessee will continue to improve and support the success of the 1,000,000 public school students we serve.

Thank you for considering our feedback as we move into the implementation of ESSA. I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these concerns with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Candice McQueen".

Dr. Candice McQueen  
Commissioner of Education  
Tennessee Department of Education