

Education

The Education Improvement Act calls for class sizes to be reduced by the 2001-02 school year. In 1998-99, 62 percent of public schools had already achieved the lower class sizes, and only 1.5 percent of classes required waivers for exceeding class-size limits. However, the number of waivers requested to allow professionals to teach subjects for which they were not trained rose 61 percent to 681 in 1998-99 from 424 in 1997-98.

In contrast, the number of people teaching without a license decreased 1 percent to 691 in 1998-99 from 701 in 1997-98 but has more than doubled from 327 in 1994-95. Average class-size goals are 20 students per teacher for kindergarten to grade four; 25, for grades four to six; and 30, for secondary schools. Nationally, 65 percent of public school teachers said they were satisfied with their class sizes (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1999).

Although its allocation of resources received a C+ from Education Week, which released a rating of state education efforts in its January 2000 report card, Tennessee received a C- for adequacy of resources. During the 1990s Tennessee's expenditures per student increased much faster than did national spending, increasing to \$4,391 in 1997-98 from \$2,972 in 1991-92, but still lag behind. Nationally, in the 1996-97 school year, public schools spent \$7,299 per pupil, up from \$6,983 (in 1998 constant dollars), according to the U.S. Department of Education (The Condition of Education, 1999).

According to the state report, spending for regular instruction increased nearly 49 percent; for special education, 53 percent; and for vocational education, 23 percent. In addition, local expenditures made up an average of 41.8 percent of public funding for school expenditures statewide. Increases in funding have been matched with an increased pressure for schools to show progress.

Performance Testing

Tennessee's testing program is considered one of the most extensive in the country, according to Education Week (1999). Tennessee high school seniors are required to take an exit exam, choosing from the standardized ACT, SAT, or Work Keys tests before graduating. The ACT and SAT are college placement tests. Work Keys measures workplace skills. The average ACT score for Tennessee in 1999 was 20 compared to the national score of 21. Only 52 percent of the high school graduates who took the ACT test had taken college preparatory courses. Only 13 percent of Tennessee's college-bound high school students took the SAT and outscored the national average by 55 points on the verbal and 42 points on the mathematics section. An estimated 24 percent of the students graduating in 1999 took the Work Keys test.

What Works

- Improve the climate of the school; deal with discipline problems so that children can be focused and free while they learn;
- Make meeting the needs of the children paramount in all decisions and respect the students;
- Work with the community and the parents to get their support and participation; show respect for the parents;
- Support collaboration among teachers themselves and with other staff;
- Focus on instruction, channel resources toward teaching improvements.