

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
July 9, 2018

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Tennessee Department of Education Secures Grant to Improve Student Academic Achievement and Health
Tennessee only state in the nation to receive funding for partnership to advance student health, academics

NASHVILLE— Education Commissioner Candice McQueen announced today that Tennessee was awarded over \$4.3 million in grant funding to support the implementation and evaluation of evidence-based strategies and activities to prevent childhood obesity, reduce the risk of children and adolescents developing chronic disease in adulthood, and help manage chronic health conditions prevalent in Tennessee students. In addition to this work, Tennessee was the only state to receive an additional grant to fund the National Professional Development and Partnership for School Health (NPDPSH) project. The funds, awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will also support professional development and training to help educators improve student health and academic achievement.

“We know that a student’s health and academic performance are closely linked, so we are excited to provide more of our students the opportunity to continue to grow and learn while benefitting their physical health,” said McQueen. “These grants will allow us to provide resources to our districts and schools to further the well-being of all Tennessee children.”

Research shows that children who eat more nutritious meals and are more physically active perform better in the classroom. However, Tennessee students are struggling in the battle to modify behaviors, such as poor eating habits and lack of exercise, which contribute to development of chronic diseases later in life. In Tennessee, more than 39 percent of school-aged children are overweight or obese and overall Tennessee currently has the highest childhood obesity rate in the nation.

Through efforts supported by this new grant, the department will be able to help provide students education on proper nutrition, physical activity, and management of chronic health conditions, so students can establish healthy behaviors that could reduce the rate of overweight and obesity, reduce the risk for future chronic diseases, and improve academic performance in schools. The efforts supported by the grants will focus on the three strategies:

1. **Infrastructure development:** the department will develop strategies and best practices to increase awareness and promote evidence-based policies on school-based health education, physical education/physical activity, healthy eating, and management of chronic health conditions.
2. **Professional development and training:** the department will design professional development and training opportunities on establishing systems for the management and support of students with chronic health conditions.
3. **Technical assistance:** through a partnership with the department of health, the department will provide statewide and district technical assistance through professional development and training, on-site visits, online learning, and additional methods as needed.

Tennessee is one of 17 states that secured grants to implement these strategies using a comprehensive, statewide approach over the next five years. While some activities will be implemented statewide, the department has selected 10 districts with which to prioritize the work. The 10 priority districts are: Crockett County Schools, Lauderdale County Schools, Weakley County Schools, Maury County Schools, Wayne County Schools, Rutherford County Schools, Trousdale County Schools, Monroe County Schools, Grainger County schools, and Hawkins County Schools. These districts were selected for particular focus based on their high percentage of overweight or obese students, economically disadvantaged status, percentage of student’s with chronic health conditions, and access to physical activity programs.

In addition to this work, Tennessee was the only state to receive an additional grant to fund the National Professional Development and Partnership for School Health (NPDPHS) project. Through a coordinated effort, the NPDPHS will provide national professional development for Tennessee to improve the implementation of school health policies and practices and increase the percentage of individuals or teams who have been able to transfer school health skills into practice.

These new efforts will build on the work already started by the Tennessee Departments of Education and Health through the [Active Students, Active Learners](#) initiative, which began in August 2017. Together the departments are working to help bring tools and evidence to education decision makers that illustrate the significant impacts of physical activity on the whole student, particularly academic performance.

For more information on the grant, contact Christine Rockwood, physical education/physical activity specialist at Christine.Rockwood@tn.gov. For media inquiries, contact Sara Gast, director of communications at (615) 532-6260 or Sara.Gast@tn.gov.