

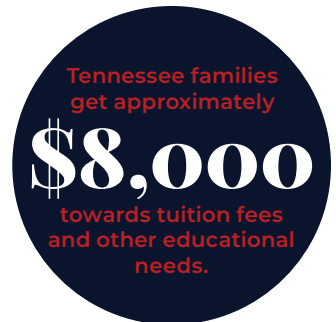


# TENNESSEE SCHOOL CHOICE SOLUTIONS

September 20, 2023

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on the educational progress of American schoolchildren, revealed deep inadequacies of the public-school monopoly, and left families feeling powerless about setting the direction of their children's education. Thankfully, in 2017, Gov. Bill Lee signed an [Education Savings Account \(ESA\) program](#) that provides approximately \$8,000 to families. This money can be allocated towards tuition fees and other educational needs. It will also allow Tennessee students to attend schools outside of their district, private schools, and charter schools.

National test results for 2022 show that school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic had a harmful effect on American schoolchildren. For the first time in the history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), scores in reading and math fell by the largest margin in more than 30 years and students in Tennessee were no exception. See *Chart on page 2*.



## In 2022, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in Tennessee:

The **reading level of 4th grade students** who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient in was only **30%**.

**Black 4th grade students** had an average reading score that was **29 points** lower than that for White students.



**Hispanic 4th grade students** had an average reading score that was **16 points** lower than that for White students.

**Low-income 4th grade students** had an average reading score that was **23 points** lower than that for students from middle and high income families.

These test scores can have powerful consequences for a generation of children. Reversing these achievement losses will need aggressive action over the next several years. Parents need the ability to leave their government-mandated schools if necessary to help ensure their children have better academic opportunities. School choice is also shown to improve public schools by increasing accountability, fostering competitiveness, and boosting student outcomes. When parents can choose which option best fits their child's needs, whether that means opting to switch or not, students reap the benefits.

School choice is not synonymous with "public vs. private" —Tennessee is a great example of how school choice can be delivered in the form of open enrollment in pre-existing public schools. In 2021, a bill passed requiring all school districts to offer an open enrollment period. This means that regardless of where a student lives, they can apply to attend or transfer to any school district in the state of Tennessee.

There are also two private school options for students. One is the ESA pilot program, which is available to low-income and middle-income families in certain districts. The second is called the Individualized Education Account Program, which allots funds for certain educational costs such as tutoring, private school tuition, and therapy. Though these are great steps forward, universal school choice—including private, parochial, and charter schools—is the goal.

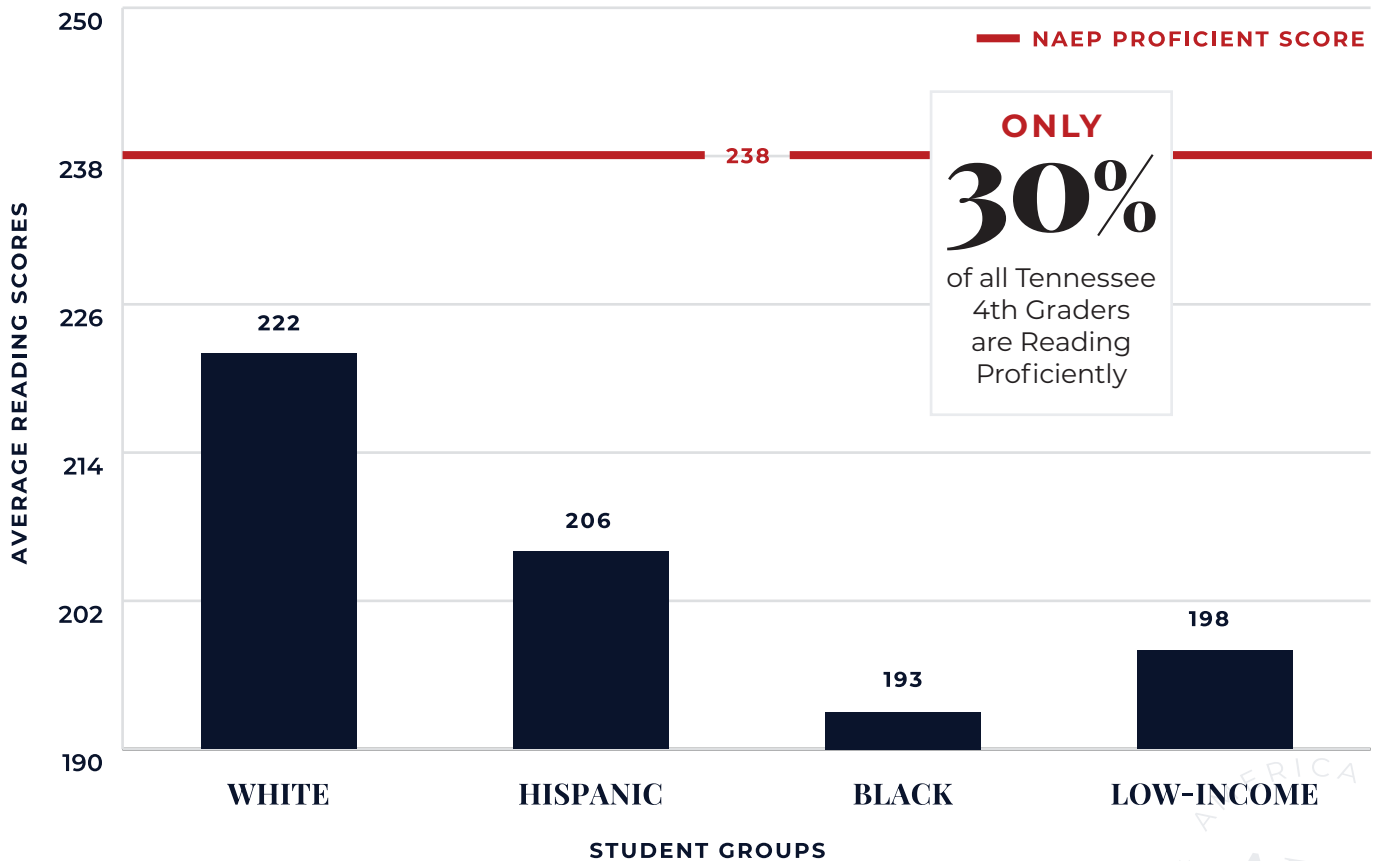
Current Governor Bill Lee has been committed to school choice since day one.

“Starting today, we will work to help eligible parents enroll this school year, as we ensure Tennessee families have the opportunity to choose the school that they believe is best for their child” he said on July 18th, 2022.

“ At AFPI, we believe that the purpose of education is to prepare Americans for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. ”

School choice is representative of two core American values—freedom and opportunity. At AFPI, we believe that the purpose of education is to prepare Americans for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As public support for school choice continues to grow, students across the nation will have access to schooling that meets individualized needs, and educational outcomes will improve. Most importantly, parents will be empowered to have a stronger voice in the conversation about their child’s schooling. While the Biden administration tries to stall progress on school choice policies, the Center for Education Opportunity remains highly committed to the school choice mission

### Tennessee 4th Grade Reading Scores



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessments.

