



Department of
Education

Tennessee Principal of the Year: Guidebook for Applicants

Tennessee Department of Education | December 2023

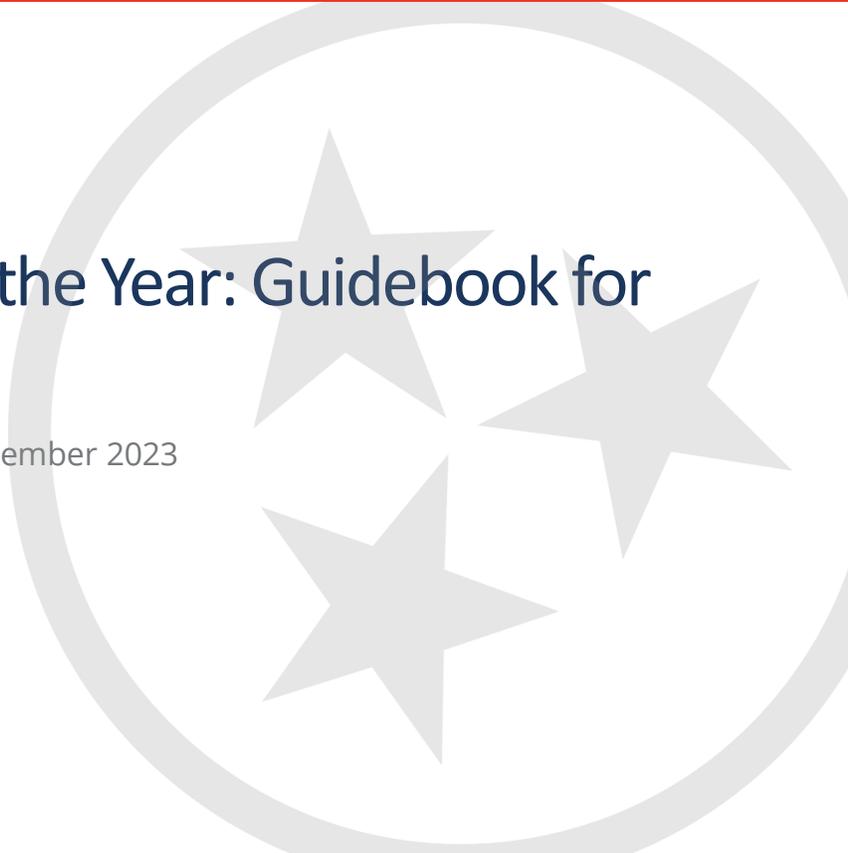


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Introduction

Congratulations on your nomination for Tennessee Principal of the Year!

Each year, an outstanding public school principal earns distinction as the Tennessee Department of Education Principal of the Year (POY). This honor is reserved for school leaders who demonstrate superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties;
- evoking high standards;
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence;
- implementing innovative programs; and
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.

In order to be considered for the state-level award, a Principal of the Year candidate must:

- have a minimum of three (3) years of professional experience in public schools;
- have a minimum of one (1) year of experience as a principal; and
- at all levels of recognition, must be employed as a principal in a Tennessee public school system.

This guidebook is provided to help you complete each component of the application process.

With any questions, please contact the Tennessee Principal of the Year Coordinator, Sarah Brown, at Sarah.Brown@tn.gov.

Sample Timeline

This timeline has been constructed based on the typical dates for the Principal of the Year process. To view the timeline for the current selection cycle, please visit the [Tennessee Principal of the Year website](#).

| Date | Action |
|-------------------|---|
| Dec. 17 | Principal of the Year nominees are submitted by Directors of Schools and designees. |
| Jan. 5 | Principal of the Year nominees receive notification email from state Principal of the Year coordinator. |
| Jan. 15 | Weekly Office Hours Begin |
| Jan. 30 | Webinar #1: Overview of the Principal and Supervisor of the Year Process |
| Feb. 6 | Webinar #2: Approaching the Part I Principal and Supervisor of the Year Application |
| March 17 | District-level Principal of the Year nominees submit the Part I application. |
| April 12 | 27 region-level Principal of the Year semi-finalists are announced, and semi-finalists receive Part II of the application. |
| April 23 | Webinar #3: Approaching the Part II Principal and Supervisor of the Year Application |
| June 2 | Region-level Principal of the Year semi-finalists complete and submit the Part II application. |
| June | 9 region-level Principal of the Year finalists are announced, and finalists receive instructions for completing the interview. |
| July | Finalist interviews are held. |
| November/December | Three Grand Division Principals of the Year and Tennessee Principal of the Year are announced at the annual Tennessee Principal and Supervisor of the Year Banquet. |

Benefits of Participating in the Tennessee Principal of the Year Selection Process

By participating in the Tennessee Principal of the Year program, school leaders have the opportunity to:

- be celebrated and honored for making exceptional gains with students,
- expand knowledge of education policy and participate in local, state, and national policy discussions,
- serve on state-level committees and consult on department initiatives,
- act as a spokesperson and advocate for the education profession, and
- become inducted into an amazing network of statewide awardees, and become connected to an impactful, ongoing body of work that engages you as a professional long after an awardee's service year.

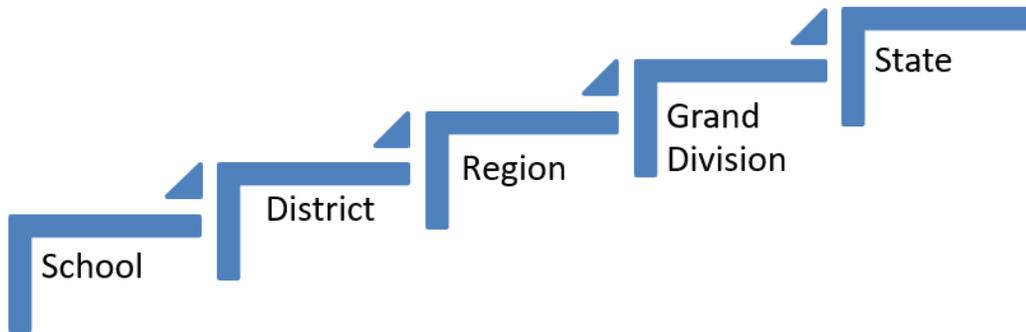
What are the benefits to schools and districts?

By participating in the Tennessee Principal of the Year program, districts and schools have the opportunity to:

- attract local, state, and national attention,
- allow the district's honorees to serve as a voice for the education profession, thus elevating the district and attracting educators and leaders to the district, and
- celebrate excellence in education by honoring hard working, successful school leaders.

Overview of the Tennessee Principal of the Year Selection Process

Principals of the Year are selected competitively through five cycles: district, region, grand division, and state.



District-Level Selection

To participate in the Tennessee Principal of the Year process, you will first need to be selected as your district Principal of the Year representative. Each district selects their Principal of the Year representatives through a unique process – if you are interested in learning more about your local process, please contact your district office.

Each district is eligible to nominate one principal to participate in the region-level selection process. Nominations are due in December each year.

Region-Level Selection

After you have been nominated at the district-level, you must complete the Part I application to continue to the region-level selection process.

You can find the Part I application on the Tennessee Principal of the Year [website](#), as well as in the direct email sent to you by the Tennessee Principal of the Year coordinator.

The Part I application contains four sections:

- basic information about you and your school,

- two written response questions,
- one video response question, and
- an optional opportunity to submit up to 5 pages of supporting documentation.

After all applications are submitted, regional scoring committees will identify three region-level semi-finalists in each of the nine regions. All region-level applicants will be notified of their application decision following the completion of scoring.

Grand Division-Level Selection

If you are selected as a region-level semi-finalist, the Tennessee Principal of the Year coordinator will provide the Part II application to you via email following region-level selection. To move forward in selection, you must complete the Part II application.

The Part II application contains:

- two new written response questions,
- one new video response question,
- an opportunity to submit additional supporting documentation,
- a professional resume,
- two letters of recommendation,
- a professional biography, and
- a professional headshot.

The Part II application will be scored by a statewide scoring committee who will identify one finalist in each region of the state for a total of nine region-level finalists. All applicants will be notified of their application decision following the completion of scoring.

State-Level Selection

The nine region-level finalists will then complete an interview, which may be held in-person or virtually. During the interview, finalists will be asked several questions regarding their leadership, educational philosophy, and key education issues.

A statewide scoring committee will utilize both the application and interview components to identify one school leader to represent each of the East, Middle, and West Grand Divisions as well as one school leader to represent the entire state as the Tennessee Principal of the Year.

Written Response Guidance

The written responses account for the majority of points available in application scoring; these responses represent your best qualities as an exceptional educator. This section provides several useful strategies for writing a compelling story. The tips, suggestions, and the exemplars included in this guidance document do not represent the sole way to address the written response prompts. Using these suggestions does not guarantee a specific outcome in the selection process. However, this guidance can help a candidate reflect on experience as an educator which will assist in the completion of the application.

The Application Extended Response Prompts

- How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders to support your school's mission, vision, and goals? *Do not exceed 750 words.*
- How do you define diversity within your school and community? In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader? How have you applied this commitment in your school and community? *Do not exceed 750 words.*
- The following questions pertain to the [Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards](#) (TILS) listed below:
 - Standard A: Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement
 - Standard B: Culture for Teaching and Learning
 - Standard C: Professional Learning and Growth
- Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength? How do you utilize this strength to ensure success? *Do not exceed 500 words.*
- Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth? How do you plan to improve within this area? *Do not exceed 500 words.*

Criteria Used to Evaluate the Prompts

Overall, each response question will be assessed according to the degree to which the response:

- provides a compelling narrative that speaks to the applicant's ability to serve as the Tennessee Principal of the Year.
- answers the question clearly and concisely; and
- adheres to standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation conventions.

Additionally, the application will be evaluated holistically to assess the degree to which the applicant demonstrates superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculty;

- evoking high standards;
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence;
- implementing innovative programs; and
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.

Though a strong response may look different for each extended response prompt, these guiding criteria can help ensure that the components of your application complement one another and give the most comprehensive view of your excellence as a leader.

Questions to Address Common Missteps

- Are you answering the question?
 - Take the time to unpack the question and think about what it is asking.
 - Ask someone else to read your response and ask if they can determine the question being addressed.
- Are you answering **all parts** of the question?
 - Use the unpacking strategy below to ensure that you plan for and address all parts of the prompt with sufficient detail.
- Are you giving a comprehensive picture of yourself as a leader throughout all responses?
 - Try to avoid using the same example or idea in your response to each question. Your goal is to give a complete picture.
- Are you writing to show what leadership and learning looks like in your school?
 - Write to **show not tell**. Use examples and tell stories of things that students, parents, or colleagues have said or done.
 - Show how your work influenced the learning and growth of others through examples and evidence. Highlight your accomplishments rather than being humble about them.
 - Write “through” the word count in your draft. Often, it takes writers some time to get to the best part of their responses, so begin by writing more than you need to and then strategically edit to meet the word count.

Unpacking the Application Prompts

Unpacking is a useful writing preparation strategy that can ensure you successfully plan for and address all aspects of a writing prompt with sufficient detail. Often, it can be easy to allocate a significant portion of your allotted word count to one aspect of the prompt, leaving the other aspects unanswered and ultimately sabotaging your success. A sample “unpacking” for each application prompt is provided below. Again, it is important to note that using this strategy and these samples will not guarantee a particular outcome in selection. Instead, this strategy should serve as a solid

foundation to ensure that the personal experiences and instructional practices you describe in each response are represented in a way that allows reviewers to focus on evaluating your innovation and excellence as an educator.

Question 1

How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders to support your school's mission, vision, and goals? Do not exceed 750 words.

[How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders?] What actions do I take to engage with the community around my school? I should describe any community engagement activities or strategies I employ. [...to support your school's mission, vision, and goals?] I should articulate my school's mission, vision, and goals. I should clearly connect the community engagement I described to the mission, vision, and goals. Where possible, I should include stories, anecdotes, data, and other types of evidence to show the impact of community engagement on my school.

Question 2

How do you define diversity within your school and community? In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader? How have you applied this commitment in your school and community? Do not exceed 750 words.

[How do you define diversity within your school and community?] I should clearly articulate what diversity means in my school and community, particularly for students and teachers. Is my school or community diverse in race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or disability? [In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader?] In my role, what does it look like to serve the population I described in the first part of the question? In addition to diversity, I should also address the themes of equity and inclusion, as well as why these themes are important to my context and education. [How have you applied this commitment in your school and community?] I should describe and provide evidence of specific actions I have taken as a result of my commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. What stories, anecdotes, data, or other evidence can I provide to show the impact of my commitment on my school and community?

Question 3

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength? How do you utilize this strength to ensure success? Do not exceed 500 words.

[Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength?] I should clearly identify a TILS that I particularly excel at. I should use this opportunity to articulate my strength with pride. I should thoroughly address how I exemplify each indicator within the standard using stories, anecdotes, examples, data, or other evidence. [How do you utilize this strength to ensure success?] I should articulate a clear relationship between the standard I chose and the success of my school. What evidence can I provide that my strength in this area has tangibly improved my school? I should use stories, anecdotes, data, and metrics to show the impact of my strength in this standard.

Question 4

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth? How do you plan to improve within this area? Do not exceed 500 words.

[Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth?] I should identify a TILS standard where I could continue to improve and grow. I should reflect on why this standard is an area of opportunity and connect to specific indicators where possible. I should describe in my response how I identified this standard as an area of opportunity, including external feedback and internal self-reflection. I should clearly articulate an understanding of why growth in this area would benefit me professionally and support the continued success of my school. [How do you plan to improve within this area?] I should describe a plan to improve within this standard that includes specific action steps I will take to grow.

Written Response Exemplars

The written responses below were taken from high-performing applications in the state selection processes. Following each exemplar, a commentary is provided to identify why the response is considered an exemplar.

Question 1 Exemplar

How do you strategically engage with community stakeholders to support your school's mission, vision, and goals? Do not exceed 750 words.

The following response was taken from the application of a 2021-22 Tennessee Principal of the Year finalist.

"Together with families and communities, we create a joyful, academically excellent school that prepares students with the skills and confidence to pursue the paths they choose - college, career, and beyond - so they can lead fulfilling lives and build a more just world."

The statement above is the mission of my school and serves as the basis for all decisions we make for our scholars. Embedded in this statement is the phrase "together with families and communities," as we believe that the voices of multiple stakeholders must be included in the work we do every day.

First, parents and families are made a priority in many decisions I make. As the principal, every year there are multiple opportunities for parents to attend input meetings where I share an upcoming initiative in order to hear parent perspectives. This year, for example, I engaged with multiple parents as I was making decisions on what our virtual school schedule and academic model would look like. It was important to me that parents were invested, as they would be major drivers of student success while learning from home. Parents also have multiple opportunities to fill out surveys throughout the year. Sometimes these surveys gather input on a specific topic, and other times they simply gauge the current pulse of how parents are feeling. Lastly, I believe in consistent and direct communication with parents. I send a weekly email to all families, and they have the opportunity to respond directly to me. All families have my cell phone number and are encouraged to reach out as needed. Parents are valued as true partners, and without their input, we would not be able to best serve their students.

Broader community stakeholders are also valued, as evidenced by our mission above. At my school, we recognize that every child's path after school may look different, and it is important we build their skillsets so they can go after any path they choose. In order to stay informed and broaden our students' experiences outside the walls of our school, I engage with community partners to both inform our school planning and provide additional opportunities. For example, this year we established a partnership with a local car dealership in order to provide a financial literacy curriculum and competition for students. This additional investment in our scholars would

not have been possible without the support of the community sponsor. Our school also works to bring in community voices to broaden the experiences of our students. For example, students in our Black Excellence club had the opportunity to hear from doctors and lawyers of color as they learn that people who look like them are spotlights of excellence in our community. Our students also heard from representatives of HBCUs as they learned about multiple college options and the power of attending an HBCU. Overall, every year I ensure I am connecting with community stakeholders in order to support the mission and goals of our school.

Lastly, I cannot underestimate the importance of engaging our own students in the school's decision making process. Our students are the leaders of the future, and their voices are incredibly important as I ensure our school is putting strategies in place to best meet our goals. Similar to the parent strategies outlined above, I consistently take the time to ask students about their experience at our school, both in surveys and focus groups. For example, this year I checked in often with students about their virtual school experience and used their input to inform student engagement goals and strategies. After incorporating student voice and implementing strategies, I use concrete data to see if I have been successful. Our current average daily attendance is 97.7% and is higher than last year prior to the pandemic. This tells me that students are invested in coming to school, either virtually or in person, and that by engaging with them to make decisions, I've been able to serve their needs.

Overall, engaging with families, communities, and students in order to support my school's mission, vision, and goals is incredibly important. Students will not learn and grow unless I am gathering a true understanding of their needs through the eyes of multiple stakeholders. It is my role as principal to ensure I am driving this engagement and incorporating multiple voices into the decision-making processes. I look forward to continuing to strengthen our school by leveraging strategic engagement now and in the future.

Commentary:

The response begins by clearly stating the school's mission and how it guides the decisions of the applicant. The applicant then describes how they engage with families, communities, and students in pursuit of that mission by using numerous specific examples. The applicant even provides specific data to show that the engagement strategy is successful in furthering the school's mission. In addition to responding to each component of the question, this response also shows evidence of the Principal of the Year criteria:

- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in motivating students through engaging with students and valuing student voice in decision-making.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in implementing innovative programs as evidenced by the engagement strategies employed for families and community partners.

Question 2 Exemplar

How do you define diversity within your school and community? In this context, what does it mean to have a commitment to diversity as a school leader? How have you applied this commitment in your school and community? Do not exceed 750 words.

The following response was taken from the application of a 2021-22 Tennessee Principal of the Year finalist.

Diversity is the presence of differing cultures, races, faiths, genders, economic statuses, learning Differences, and other unique characteristics within a given population. As a principal and an invested community member, it is my responsibility to use the strengths of each to promote growth and learning among students daily. Emphasizing that same approach in our community promotes personal growth, social stability, and economic viability.

In the book *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn Singleton, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond asks, "How can we reinvent the system of public education in the United States so that it ensures a right to learn for all of its students, who will enter a world in which a failure to learn is fast becoming an insurmountable defeat?" This question is an excellent springboard for answering what it means to have a commitment to diversity in our school and community. I have two goals related directly to diversity. One is to celebrate and promote the positive characteristics of the diverse population from our school and community. The second is to eliminate the pattern by which our student subgroups predictably and disproportionately occupy the highest and lowest achievement and behavioral categories at school.

While these are two distinct goals, both follow the same problem-solving approach. We start with awareness of an issue, educate ourselves on the issue, analyze the challenges and opportunities, collaborate with colleagues and possible experts on the topic, plan for an intervention/enrichment experience, assess progress, reapply intervention/enrichment, seek feedback and repeat the process. It is a Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) approach to decision-making. Achieving the first goal requires knowledge and awareness. Those come with relationships and connections to students, staff, and the community. A desire to know what is important to stakeholders makes it easier to celebrate and promote non-mainstream endeavors. I have been involved in a variety of events during my career to promote diversity and inclusion at school and in the community. We celebrate Black History Month through announcements, scholarship opportunities, and a focus on the contributions of African Americans across the curriculum. Our school has had an active Gay/Straight Alliance for 10 years. The group has actively participated in TriPride events and have been supportive of all students at our school. We participate in events to support Hispanic culture, sponsor language awareness events, and our ELL teacher participates actively in student enrollments. Teachers develop personal relationships and communicate regularly with parents, provide professional learning opportunities for our staff, and are constantly learning about social emotional learning strategies. Regardless of the characteristic or the group, we seek to know what is important to our students and community, collaborate with key stakeholders, learn about the opportunities to promote positive

characteristics, evaluate successes, and improve any challenges. Embracing and celebrating differences in our school and community allows all students to thrive.

Achieving the second goal of closing gaps while improving achievement for all students is a challenging task for all schools. We follow the PDSA process and tackle academic challenges with the four essential questions coined by Rick DuFour. These are the foundation of every team meeting. Agendas address 1) What do we want all students to know? 2) How do we know if they know it? 3) What do we do if they don't know it? 4) How do we extend their learning if they do? We take this approach to a deeper level as we attempt to support groups who score on the lower end of the continuum. This often includes students with disabilities, students identified as low-SES and the BHN subgroup. Teachers use a spreadsheet that includes TVAAS projections, formative data, summative data, and group reflection to answer the four questions, plan for intervention and enrichment, support grouping assignments, and best support our students who historically underperform. Passion also serves as a driver to the process. Our passion is our unyielding belief in the ability that all students can learn and grow through engaging the heart, mind and soul.

We aspire to support our community in a similar PDSA fashion. The process starts with knowledge of the group and community, followed by the development of relationships, the promotion and celebration of unique and positive characteristics of all members in our community and a passionate persistence of supporting every person in moving forward. Celebrating and embracing diversity in our community, now more than ever, is critical to the planning of school, community and national-level successes. I am fortunate to be surrounded by educators and a community who rally in support of these endeavors.

Commentary:

The applicant begins by identifying a very clear definition of diversity and connecting the definition to his/her role as a principal. Next, the applicant describes how s/he shows a commitment to diversity, which is identified by two goals that are aligned to inclusion (celebrating and promoting diversity) and equity (reducing gaps between student subgroups). The applicant first describes how diversity is celebrated and promoted within his/her school through incorporating affinity groups. Then, the applicant describes the process by which the school staff and faculty work to reduce gaps among subgroups. Throughout the response, the applicant provides specific examples and connects the importance of diversity to school-wide success. In addition to responding to each component of the question, this response also shows evidence of the Principal of the Year criteria:

- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in managing and motivating students and faculties through specific engagement with affinity groups and professional learning to develop the faculty's understanding of diversity.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in evoking high standards through the goals set to reduce gaps among subgroups.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in demonstrating a commitment to excellence particularly as it relates to instilling diversity, equity, and inclusion in the school building.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in implementing innovative programs as evidenced by the specific strategies employed to maximize diversity, inclusion, and equity at

the applicant's school.

Question 3 Exemplar

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is your strength? How do you utilize this strength to ensure success? Do not exceed 500 words.

The following response was taken from the application of a 2021-22 Tennessee Principal of the Year finalist.

The TILS standard I have identified as an area of strength is TILS Standard A: Instructional Leadership for Continuous Growth. The most impactful thing I have done since becoming principal is to establish a school-wide data plan where educators collaborate to analyze and use multiple forms of data throughout the year to establish specific goals and strategies targeting student achievement and growth.

I strongly believe that when you look at data, you must first understand that every number has a name, every name has a story, and every story matters. To ensure a culture that values the whole child, I have put in place two teacher teams that meet bi-monthly to review behavior and social-emotional data collected through EdHandbook and research-based screeners. One teacher team focuses on school-wide data and interventions while the second team focuses on specific students. I also began having quarterly school-wide assemblies to reward students, classes, and grade levels for meeting behavior goals as well as share school-wide and grade-level goals for the new quarter. As a result, we have seen behavior problems decrease during transitions by 43%, earned the RTI2-B Model of Demonstration School Silver Level distinction, and seen countless students successfully implement behavior strategies to decrease problem behaviors using tools such as ROAR cards, where students suggest their own interventions and track their behavior.

Since becoming principal, I have refocused our PLC time on analyzing multiple sources of student (individual and subgroups), educator, and school-wide data, then collaboratively setting goals and creating interventions. I have also made it a priority for representatives from SPED, ESL, and our school counselors to be active participants in grade-level PLCs to build a culture of shared support and accountability. Interventions and goals are determined by these teams with input from students through student data tracking sheets. This tool teaches students to advocate for themselves and share what they can do to improve as well as where they need support from others. Each grade level is then given a 55-minute block every day where these specific academic interventions are provided including SPED and ESL services for those who qualify. In the case where academic goals are not being met, we have a Student Response to Intervention (SRTI) team that meets bi-monthly to offer additional supports and recommend a student for testing when appropriate. As a result of the academic portion of our data plan, we've seen students enter the school not knowing English move to on-track in all areas of TNReady,

earned reward school status for the first time in our school's 60-year history, and improved all of our reading subgroup scores. Most notably, our ESL reading scores grew from 0% on-track and mastered to 45%, and office referrals have gone down from 14% to 3%.

Our data and goals are shared during faculty meetings, PTA meetings, and with parents regularly to gather feedback and clarify how to offer support. All of these supports work to inform and involve everyone in the student growth process.

Commentary:

The applicant clearly identifies Standard A as an area of strength. The response indicates that the applicant collaborates with educators to analyze and utilize multiple forms of data throughout the year to target student growth and development. The response also indicates that the applicant leads educators to develop and execute interventions to address the needs identified through data analysis and PLCs. The applicant also systematically monitors, celebrates, and adjusts progress towards the established goals. The response could be made stronger by more directly addressing how the applicant builds the capacity of educators to provide all students with a rigorous curriculum aligned to state standards. The applicant provides clear examples of how the TILS standard is aligned to school success in addition to providing strong data evidence that the use of the standard has resulted in improved student outcomes. In addition to responding to each component of the question, this response also shows evidence of the Principal of the Year criteria:

- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in managing and motivating students and faculties through engaging both students and teachers in understanding data and setting data-related goals.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in evoking high standards through developing a culture of shared support and accountability.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in demonstrating a commitment to excellence regarding making data-informed adjustments to instruction.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in implementing innovative programs as evidenced by school-wide data plan developed by the applicant.
- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning as evidenced by student achievement gains for the ESL population.

Question 4 Exemplar

Which of the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) is an area of opportunity for your growth? How do you plan to improve within this area? Do not exceed 500 words.

The following response was taken from the application of a 2021-22 Tennessee Principal of the Year finalist.

I believe my professional area of opportunity is the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standard C, "Professional Learning & Growth." I am effective in the indicators related to

Differentiated Professional Learning and Evaluation. However, I am currently focusing my own professional growth on developing the indicators related to Teacher Leaders and Self-Practice. By improving in my ability to develop teacher leaders, my school and district will benefit from a larger group of education champions to lead improvement efforts. Additionally, growing within the self-practice domain will allow me to be a better leader and continually help me to grow as a mentor to teacher leaders within my building and district.

In my first year as administrator, I relied heavily on a core group of teachers to help drive and support the transition to more effective practices in our school community. These teachers were chosen in a more traditional approach based on longevity and prior leadership experiences. This school year, I have been more strategic about identifying and supporting emerging teacher leaders within my building and the district. I encouraged one of my teacher leaders to advance her degree through the Kern Family Foundation program offered at Lipscomb University. She is currently enrolled and pursuing her administrative licensure. Additionally, I serve as a leadership mentor for our school's lead educator and an elementary teacher within the district who are both pursuing advanced degrees and administrative licensure. My goal for this summer and the coming school year is to have individualized conferences with every staff member I lead to discuss their own professional goals and plan opportunities for specific development.

In the area of self-practice, I need to be more accountable and transparent to myself as well as the staff I serve. Specifically, I am committed to using data from multiple sources to reflect on self-practice. I need to do a better job of intentionally using staff survey data such as the Tennessee Educator Survey to determine areas of growth for myself and the school. Also, I have requested our Supervisor of Leadership and Accountability and Director of Schools to identify mentors within the district to observe me and provide additional objective feedback about my leadership practice.

In Fall 2019, I was accepted and enrolled in the Lipscomb University Doctor of Education program. I specifically chose this program due to its cohort model and the ability to collaborate with other educators in private, independent, and higher education institutions throughout Tennessee. I hope to better hone my craft as I seek a degree in organizational leadership and strategic change.

Commentary:

The applicant clearly identifies two indicators within Standard C as areas of opportunity. The response indicates that the applicant has deeply reflected about his/her practice to identify these indicators as areas of opportunity. Additionally, the applicant identifies how improvement in these areas will benefit both the school's success and the applicant's professional growth. The applicant clearly articulates steps that have already been taken to grow within this domain as well as future actions that will be taken. In addition to responding to each component of the question, this response also shows evidence of the Principal of the Year criteria:

- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in managing and motivating faculties through engaging as evidenced by the preliminary steps the applicant has taken to develop teacher

leaders.

- The applicant demonstrates superior abilities in demonstrating a commitment to excellence as evidenced by reflecting on the need to improve within the teacher leader and self-practice indicators.

Video Response Guidance

The video response accounts for approximately one quarter of the points available in application scoring. This section provides several useful strategies to ensure your video best captures your story in addition to exemplars from previous application cycles.

The Application Video Response Prompts

- What is the story of your school and what role do you play in that story? Include evidence to support your response. *Please ensure the video does not exceed 5 minutes.*
- The Tennessee Principal of the Year is an ambassador for educators and for public education. If selected as the 2024-25 Principal of the Year, you will be a representative for the principals of Tennessee and may be asked to participate in a variety of events.
 - In 2019, the department unveiled new strategic priorities that guide Tennessee’s work in education. The strategic plan, titled “Best for All,” includes the following priorities:
 - Academics: All TN students will have access to a high-quality education, no matter where they live.
 - Student Readiness: TN public schools will be equipped to serve the academic and non-academic needs of all students in their career pathways.
 - Educators: Tennessee will set a new path for the education profession and be the top state to become and remain a teacher and leader.
 - Please share a brief message regarding your professional philosophy, how it is aligned to one of the strategic priorities, and how you use this philosophy to ensure each decision made at your school is best for all students. *Please ensure the video does not exceed 2 minutes.*

Criteria Used to Evaluate the Prompts

Overall, each video response question will be assessed according to the degree to which the response has the following desirable qualities:

- Delivery is made according to instructions (topic and time limit).
- Candidate displays qualities of confidence, optimism, and sincerity.
- Message is well organized, easy to follow and understand, and relevant.

Additionally, the application will be evaluated holistically to assess the degree to which the applicant demonstrates superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties;
- evoking high standards;
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence;
- implementing innovative programs; and
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.

Though a strong response may look different for each video response prompt, these guiding criteria can help you ensure that the components of your application complement one another and give the most comprehensive view of your excellence as a leader.

Video Recording Best Practices

It is important to note that the video response will **only be scored based on the message shared**, rather than the visual content of the video. However, the best practices below can help you ensure that your video can be easily accessed and scored by the review committee.

- Ensure reviewers have viewing access throughout the review period.
 - To create a link to your video, consider uploading to [YouTube](#), [Google Drive](#), [Dropbox](#), or a similar file-sharing website. Set the viewing privacy settings and/or permissions to “Anyone with a Link” to ensure reviewers can access your video. **Do not delete or move your video until you have received a notification from the Principal of the Year coordinator that scoring has been completed.**
- Maximize the quality of your audio.
 - Clear audio is critical to a great video. If possible, be sure to record in a quiet room and utilize earbuds with a microphone. If you are not able to use an external microphone or earbuds, stay within 12 inches of the microphone on your recording device.
- Follow all school- and district-level media policies.
 - If you choose to include photos or videos of students, please ensure you are following all school- and district-level media policies. Students featured in your video must have a current media release on file.

Questions to Address Common Missteps

- Are you answering the question?
 - Take the time to unpack the question and think about what it is asking.
 - Ask someone else to listen to your response and ask if they can determine the question being addressed.
- Are you answering **all parts** of the question?

- Use the unpacking strategy below to ensure that you plan for and address all parts of the prompt with sufficient detail.
- Are you giving a comprehensive picture of yourself as an educator throughout all responses?
 - Try to avoid using the same example or idea in your response to each question. Your goal is to give a complete picture.
- Are you telling the story of what leadership and learning looks like in your school?
 - Again, it is important to **show not tell**. Use examples and things that teachers, students, parents, or colleagues have said.
 - Show how your work influenced the learning and growth of others through examples and evidence. Highlight your accomplishments rather than being humble about them.

Unpacking the Video Prompts

Unpacking is a useful preparation strategy that can ensure you successfully plan for and address all aspects of the video prompt with sufficient detail. A sample “unpacking” for each prompt is provided below.

Question 1

What is the story of your school and what role do you play in that story? Include evidence to support your response. Please ensure the video does not exceed 5 minutes.

[What is the story of your school...] How would I describe my school to someone who is unfamiliar with it? I should provide a basic description of my school: What is the community like? What are the students like? What are the faculty like? I should identify relevant history of my school, including specific challenges or barriers that my school has faced or is currently facing. [...and what role do you play in that story?] I should articulate how I have played a part in that story. This may include information about how my role has changed if I started in a different position before becoming principal. I should aim to articulate how my school’s story has changed for the better as a result of my leadership. [Include evidence to support your response.] Where possible, I should include stories, anecdotes, data, and other types of evidence to show the impact of my leadership on my school.

Question 2

EDUCATION ISSUES AND TRENDS: *It is essential that leaders be knowledgeable of current state and national issues.*

- a. *What do you see as a major education issue today?*
- b. *Identify an issue that you consider to be the highest priority or most important for your school.*
- c. *Share with us any ideas or strategies that you have for both bringing attention to the issue and addressing it.*

Please ensure the video does not exceed 2 minutes.

[What do you see as a major education issue today?...] I should clearly identify and articulate an issue I see in education today. What is the root cause of that? How does it impact students? What is my role as an educator and leader to help resolve or alleviate this issue? [...Identify an issue that you consider to be the highest priority or most important for your school...] What is an issue my school struggles with? What is my role in resolving this issue? Why is it important to focus on this issue? How will focusing on this issue help students? [... Share with us any ideas or strategies that you have for both bringing attention to the issue and addressing it]. What are some strategies that I have implemented to address these issues? How have they helped? What issues have I run into?

Additional Documentation Guidance

Additional documentation accounts for the remainder of the points available in application scoring and encompasses all application materials submitted outside of the written responses. Additional documentation is evaluated holistically to assess the degree to which the applicant demonstrates superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties;
- evoking high standards;
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence;
- implementing innovative programs; and
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.

This section provides several useful strategies to ensure your additional documentation complements your written responses and presents a comprehensive picture of your excellence as a leader.

Optional Supporting Documentation

Supporting documentation is permitted to provide additional evidence for references made in your extended responses. Some examples of supporting documentation include student success data, project plans, parent or community communications materials, etc. Please ensure all supporting documentation adheres to your school and/or district's privacy policies (i.e. media releases).

Supporting documentation is completely **optional** and choosing not to submit supporting documentation will **not** penalize the applicant in any way. If you choose to submit supporting documentation, documentation is limited to **5 pages maximum**. Any documentation over this maximum will not be provided to reviewers. To submit supporting documentation, upload one single PDF file in the space provided on the online form.

Additionally, applicants should consider the following best practices when compiling supporting documentation:

- ***Directly connect supporting documentation to the written responses, but do not rely on supporting documentation to make your case:*** Supporting documentation should not be a substitute for high-quality explanation in the narrative nor stand alone as extraneous information. Further, it is not required that applicants “prove” any of the information provided in the narrative, such as significant accomplishments. Therefore, effective supporting documentation should **extend** a reviewer’s understanding of your written responses by directly

connecting to aspects of the narrative where additional evidence (such as a communication plan or teacher handbook) may make your writing clearer.

- **Ensure each page of the supporting documentation demonstrates the Principal of the Year criteria:** In some cases, you may identify that the written response prompts do not permit you to share characteristics of your leadership or specific experiences that fully demonstrate your ability to serve as Principal of the Year. Like the best practice above, effective supporting documentation can serve to **expand** your reviewer’s understanding of your ability to meet the Principal of the Year criteria. To ensure reviewers understand what they are viewing and why it is important, be sure to provide notes with relevant information and context for any materials not directly addressed in the narrative.

Resume

Approaching the resume for the Principal of the Year application requires a different perspective than tailoring a resume when seeking a new job opportunity. The primary goal of the resume is to provide information about how your previous experiences have positioned you as a strong candidate for Principal of the Year. With this goal in mind, you should think strategically about which of your experiences (and further: what aspects of your experiences) align to the Principal of the Year criteria, and your resume should highlight these experiences.

At a minimum, the professional resume includes the following required components:

- **Education:** In this section, you should list any degrees that you have earned or are currently completing.
- **Licenses/Endorsement Areas:** In this section, you should list your valid license and all valid endorsements (*based on the information listed in [TNCompass](#)*).
- **Professional Experience:** In this section, you should list your most recent jobs and associated responsibilities. Be sure to note significant accomplishments in each role as well as key features of each position.
- **Professional Leadership:** In this section, you should list any professional leadership positions you have held. Professional leadership may include district-level responsibilities such as leading professional development or region-level responsibilities such as serving on your area’s Principal Study Council.
- **Community Leadership and Involvement:** In this section, you should list any leadership positions you have held or community organizations you have been involved with. This might include non-profits, faith-based organizations, or service organizations.

- **Awards and Recognition:** In this section, list any awards or recognition you have received for your work as an educator. This may include your district-level Principal of the Year award, any published articles, presentations, or featured news items.

Applicants should also consider the following best practices when completing the resume:

- Because your contact information is included elsewhere in the application, you can save space by leaving out your address and contact information on the resume.
- Similarly, since the process includes letters of recommendation, you can also save space by leaving out any references.
- Emphasize skills and experience related to the Principal of the Year criteria.
- Write your responsibilities using the Action + Results format and begin with an action verb to describe the type of work you did. For example: Led school improvement team to analyze and accelerate student learning, which resulted in a 15% increase in student proficiency on the TNReady.
- Be sure to define all acronyms. For example: School representative for the Tennessee Education Association (TEA).
- Proofread carefully to ensure your resume has no spelling, grammar, or formatting errors.

Letters of Recommendation

The letters of recommendation serve as a critical external perspective of your excellence from colleagues, supervisors, parents, students, and community members. Applicants should think strategically about who will provide the most compelling and clear evidence that the applicant demonstrates the qualities of a Principal of the Year awardee. It is recommended that applicants share the Principal of the Year criteria with those who will be writing the letters of recommendations as well as identify several key criteria for each letter writer to focus on.

In general, every letter should:

- Be one page in length.
- Be typed.*
- Be a PDF.
- Include evidence of the applicant's strength in on or more of the Principal of the Year criteria.

*Applicants may submit handwritten, translated, or transcribed letters if the letter is from a student, parent, or adult caregiver. Transcribed/translated letters must include the name and signature of the transcriber/translator and may not be transcribed/translated by the applicant.

Reviewers will pay special attention to how an applicant's accomplishments have impacted student success. In the letters of recommendation, student success can be documented either anecdotally or with statistical evidence. A mix of both makes for a stronger application. Student success can come in many forms. Some examples are:

- Increased academic achievement
- Decreased disciplinary referrals
- Increased enrollment in challenging curriculum
- Increased participation in enrichment activities
- Increased student confidence and self-esteem
- Increased time spent in service to the community

To reduce the impact of implicit bias on our awards and recognition programs, we may redact identifying information from letters of recommendation before the selection committee begins their review. To support this effort, we encourage applicants and recommenders to use words and phrases like "our school," "our community," "a colleague," etc. instead of naming particular places or individuals.

Professional Biography

The professional biography is used by the Tennessee Department of Education when responding to requests for information about finalists as well as in public releases and promotional materials. The professional biography should articulate your influences for entering the teaching profession and your greatest contributions and accomplishments as an educator. The professional biography must not exceed 250 words and must be written in the 3rd person.

When writing the professional biography, consider the following questions:

- Why did I seek a career in education?
- What experiences led me to the place I am today?
- What is my leadership philosophy?
- What degrees do I hold?
- What are my greatest contributions to the profession of education?
- What are significant accomplishments I have made in the profession of education?
- What awards or recognition have I received?

Example:

As a first-generation college graduate, Dr. Leneda Laing developed a passion for the education profession at an early age. Her parents instilled a love of school and a desire to be the best that she could be. After her first day of first grade, she declared to her parents that she was going to become a teacher. She followed her high school assistant principal's advice which was to get a teaching degree in mathematics because she would always be employable. She began her teaching career in the elementary school she attended and for over twenty years taught middle school mathematics. Her love of teaching mathematics resulted in her being awarded the Presidential Award for Teaching Mathematics. Further evidence of her passion for mathematics was her willingness to undergo the rigorous application procedure for national board certification. In 2006, Dr. Laing became a nationally board-certified teacher in the area of early adolescent mathematics. After two decades of teaching math, she transitioned into administration as a mathematics coordinator at Cleveland Middle School. During this time Dr. Laing developed a desire for training teachers and school leadership. An outgrowth of this stage of her career led to an interest in full school leadership resulting in her being both an assistant principal and principal at Cleveland Middle School. Dr. Laing's love for education has guided her many career aspirations, however the most significant accomplishment in her varied career is when she sees a student's excitement after reaching an educational milestone.

Additional Opportunities for Support

To further support Principal of the Year applicants, the department will offer a webinar series as well as weekly office hours throughout the application period. Leaders can register [here](#) to attend any of the webinar sessions below. All webinars will be recorded and available on the Principal of the Year [website](#).

- **Jan. 30 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. CST:** Overview of the Principal and Supervisor of the Year Process
 - This one-hour webinar will orient applicants to the Principal and Supervisor of the Year process. Applicants will also hear from the 2020-21 and 2021-22 Tennessee Principals of the Year and Supervisors of the Year. Lastly, applicants will have an opportunity ask the Principal and Supervisor of the Year coordinator any questions.
- **Feb. 6 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. CST:** Approaching the Part 1 Principal and Supervisor of the Year Application
 - This one-hour webinar will dive more deeply into the components of the part 1 Principal and Supervisor of the Year applications.
- **April 23 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. CST:** Approaching the Part 2 Principal and Supervisor of the Year Application
 - This one-hour webinar will dive more deeply into the components of the part 2 Principal and Supervisor of the Year applications.
- **Weekly Office Hours:** Held on Mondays from 3:30-4:30 p.m. CST from January 22 to June 27. **Access office hours [here](#).**

Additional Resources

Please visit the Principal of the Year [website](#) for the following additional resources:

- **Selection Process Timeline:** This document contains important dates and deadlines for the current year selection cycle.
- **Part I Application:** This document contains all questions listed in the electronic application. Applicants are encouraged to use this document to draft and revise application responses prior to submitting via the online form.
- **Part II Application:** This document contains all questions listed in the electronic application. Applicants are encouraged to use this document to draft and revise application responses prior to submitting via the online form.