Portfolio Review Committee
Recommendations
Executive Summary

In spring 2019, the legislature amended T.C.A. § 49-6-111 to create a portfolio review committee. This committee was charged with reviewing the pre-kindergarten/kindergarten student growth portfolio model process, identifying expectations for the model and areas of improvement, and releasing findings and recommendations. The committee convened on July 23, 2019, and, with facilitation support from department of education staff, developed nine recommendations. The recommendations are outlined in the report below.

Key Findings

- Student growth portfolio models provide teachers in non-tested grades and subjects with individual growth data that is used in a teacher’s level of overall effectiveness (LOE). In making changes to the portfolio model and adding alternative growth options, it is critical that educators continue to have an individual contribution to their own LOE.
- In order to meet the state’s achievement goals in third grade, it is essential that the measures used to calculate growth for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers are valid, have comparability across districts, and provide clear feedback that can help improve instruction.
- To ensure strong statewide implementation, it is imperative that all communication with teachers and districts around the student growth portfolios and alternatives are messaged consistently and in a timely manner.

Committee Members

The portfolio review committee included the following members:
- Senator Dolores Gresham, Chair of the Senate Education Committee
- Representative Mark White, Chair of the House Education Committee
- Senator Mike Bell
- Representative Gary Hicks
- Commissioner Penny Schwinn
- Dr. Dale Lynch, Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents
- Kathy Hall, President, Tennessee School Boards Association
- Laurie Smith, Knox County Schools, East Tennessee Representative
- Kimberly Hayes, Sumner County Schools, Middle Tennessee Representative
- Megan Stanley, Dyer County Schools, West Tennessee Representative
**Background**

Following the implementation of TEAM teacher evaluation in 2011, teachers in non-tested grades and subjects requested the opportunity to receive an individual student growth score based on their contributions to their students' learning to be included in their level of overall effectiveness (LOE). The department worked with teachers from across the state to develop TEAM student growth portfolios. Student growth portfolio models provide qualitative and quantitative feedback to educators through integration with the statewide educator evaluation model. Additionally, the reflective nature of the portfolio process—in which teachers collect, review, and submit student work artifacts throughout the school year—leads to a deeper knowledge of standards and can provide a valuable professional learning experience for educators.

A portfolio is a collection of student work, aligned to state standards, selected and submitted by a teacher to demonstrate student growth. The student work selected demonstrates a student's understanding prior to (Point A) and after (Point B) instruction on certain grade-level or subject area standards. Student work artifacts are collected, scored using the scoring rubric, and categorized by the teacher as emerging, proficient, and advanced related to the standard(s) being taught. Scoring is done using a content-specific scoring rubric. The teacher conducts purposeful sampling to determine which student work sample pairs (points A and B) to submit that are representative of the growth demonstrated in that differentiated group. Various types of evidence can be collected in real time (at point A and point B) to determine student performance on a standard within each portfolio collection.

In Tennessee, all portfolio models were developed by teachers and administrators who piloted and revised scoring rubrics before they were submitted to the State Board of Education for approval for statewide implementation. Fine Arts was the first state approved model and provided the prototype for this work across the state. Currently, there are seven state board approved models: Fine Arts, World Languages, Physical Education K-5, Pre-Kindergarten & Kindergarten, First Grade, Physical Education 6-8, and Second Grade. Before school year 2017-18, all the student growth portfolio models were optional for districts. The original goal of the student growth portfolio model process was to provide a holistic and meaningful picture of the value a teacher adds to students using work that is already happening in the classroom.

In 2016, legislation passed (codified as T.C.A. §49-6-105(e)(1)) requiring that every district that receives Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) funding implement the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten portfolio models. To prepare for this statewide implementation, the department held trainings throughout the 2016-17 school year on the newly integrated English Language Arts (ELA) standards and procured a platform vendor, Educopia, for the statewide rollout in the 2017-18 school year. Challenges with the Educopia platform in 2017-18 and the scoring process resulted in the department developing a vacate process for
educators impacted to remove their portfolio score from their level of overall effectiveness. During this time, the department was also executing an RFP to determine the platform vendor for the 2018-19 school year, Portfolium. In the spring of 2019, legislation passed to allow the use of alternative growth models in lieu of the portfolio.

While the student growth portfolio models have several strengths, such as providing an individual measure of growth, requiring a depth of understanding of standards, and reinforcement of reflective instructional practices, the implementation has been challenging. Educators reported in a 2018 portfolio-specific survey that they have spent a lot of time on the portfolio process to collect, review, and submit student work, with additional time spent learning new platforms each year. The portfolio process is labor intensive at both the state and district levels requiring a significant investment of time and resources. Thirty percent of educators reported in a 2018 portfolio specific survey that they spend two or more days outside the classroom to work on portfolio-related issues. Communication differs across the state, and teachers report varied levels of engagement with both the state and their district. These concerns have led to the convening of a portfolio review committee to propose the below recommendations.

**Recommendations**

To support the student growth portfolio model and any alternatives across the state, the portfolio review committee proposes the following to the department of education and other stakeholders to support implementation of the portfolio and alternative growth models:

1. **Ensure that the technology platform provides teachers an easy-to-use and error-free environment in which to submit and score student work artifacts.**

One of the greatest areas of concerns from educators and districts across the state has been related to the technology platforms used for portfolio. For educators who were implementing portfolios prior to the statewide rollout in 2017-18, they may have experienced three different platforms in three years. The platform used in 2017-18 provided particular difficulty because the platform was unable to streamline standard selection for teachers resulting in collections that could not be scored. This instance damaged the trust educators across the state have in the portfolio process. Teachers have reported that the latest platform, Portfolium (used in 2018-19 and forward), is easier to use. However, the platform could not handle the load when educators were uploading student work artifacts at the submission deadline and during the peer reviewer scoring convening. It is vital that the department plans for statewide implementation that includes platform load testing and other technology solutions that mitigate risks associated with building platforms during the implementation process.
2. **To ensure consistency in scoring and increase reliability, consider reducing the size of the peer reviewer pool to a core team charged with scoring student work artifacts.**

The issues in 2017-18 led to decreased confidence in the scoring process including concerns about the qualifications of peer reviewers chosen to score student work artifacts. There has been a lack of clarity among peer reviewers about how portfolios should be scored, further reducing the trust in the accuracy of the scoring process. To reduce the chance of mixed messages, the peer reviewer pool size should be reduced. A rigorous application process with more training would result in a smaller group of peer reviewers and consistency around how to score collections. Another option would be to allow districts to nominate administrators for the peer reviewer process.

3. **Ensure that teachers receive consistent messaging about training and all support resources.**

In survey and stakeholder feedback, educators across the state have communicated that they receive varied messaging about the portfolio process and scoring. In a 2018 survey, educators reported concerns about questions not being answered, contradictions in communications, and the timing of materials being released. Multiple methods of engaging educators should be explored to ensure that all teachers are receiving clear, relevant messages about the portfolio process. It is also important that district portfolio leads receive and transmit consistent messaging. Lastly, the department should work to ensure that educators are aware of the existing resources that are available.

4. **Simplify the scoring rubrics to reduce misunderstandings about standards-aligned tasks.**

The current rubrics contain wording that some peer reviewers and educators find subjective and unclear. Scoring rubrics should reduce confusion and limit misinterpretation. Teachers consistently report needing additional support in creating standards-aligned tasks. Therefore, the rubrics should also provide clear expectations for teachers on performance tasks to ensure that scores reflect accurate student growth.

5. **Ensure that the current portfolio model and any future approved models provide teachers with an individual growth score to their level of overall effectiveness (LOE).**

One consistent message from stakeholders remains: Any model should continue to generate an individual contribution to a teacher’s level of overall effectiveness (LOE). Educators appreciate having their own growth data factor into their level of overall effectiveness. Generating an individual level of effectiveness was a key goal in the portfolio development process and remains a priority.
6. **Provide districts with alternative growth options and develop an approval process.**

T.C.A. §49-6-105(e)(1) allows for a comparable alternative measure of student growth to be approved by the State Board. Additional alternative growth options must be explored as well as a clear process for districts to submit alternative growth options for review and approval. In light of the implementation challenges, districts have requested to use measurement tools that are already in place in their districts as alternative growth options. Any alternative growth options should be evaluated for validity as a growth measure and for comparability across districts. The department should curate a list of alternative growth options to be available by 2020-21, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, that meet the requirements of a valid measure of student growth. The department should also create a process for districts to submit alternate growth measures for approval.

7. **Ensure that there is a grievance process in place for student growth portfolios.**

The concerns around technology and the scoring process in 2017-18 required a one-time option for educators to vacate their portfolio scores. However, teachers expressed concerns that the existing evaluation grievance policy does not clearly reference student growth portfolios. A grievance process for portfolio should be defined, easily navigable, and communicated to districts and educators.

8. **Consider reducing the number of collections that teachers are required to submit.**

Teachers consistently report spending excessive time compiling portfolio collections. While the process was designed to gather evidence on existing practices, many educators report spending additional time assessing students, identifying which student work samples to use, and uploading samples. Reducing the number of collections of student work artifacts required for submission would free up additional time.

9. **Develop the capacity at the department and in districts to monitor the validity and quality of data throughout the process.**

Given that 35 percent of an educator’s level of overall effectiveness (LOE) is calculated through the student growth portfolio measure or any approved alternative model, it is crucial that the data is valid and reliable. Regular data checks should be implemented throughout the process, and district leads should have the ability to monitor the data as an additional check. Capacity at both the district and state levels should be devoted to data quality for portfolio and alternative models.
**Final Thoughts**

Tennessee is innovating to provide more educators with individual growth measures. To ensure that all students are given the opportunity to grow, districts, educators, and other stakeholders must collaborate to pursue comparable, valid measures that provide educators with accurate feedback and continue to improve the portfolio model implementation process.