

How to Create Schools Where All Kids Thrive



IMAGINATION. LAUGHTER. CURIOSITY. POTENTIAL.

Across our district, students are learning and growing every day in small and big ways. Metro Nashville's students have made gains over the last several years in achievement and growth scores, the percentage of students prepared to pursue a college degree, and the decrease of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, among other areas.

Yet despite some successes, too many students are not yet thriving in our schools. Too many students are lonely, struggling. Perpetually behind.

Last year, the Nashville Public Education Foundation released the Thriving Schools framework to expand the conversation around school success and focus on conditions in schools that must be present for all students to thrive. We believe we can identify whether a school is on track and climbing to thriving, or falling behind.

We created this guide for two reasons: 1) to help you determine if a school is thriving and 2) to share concrete actions you can take to create schools where all kids thrive.



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How to Use this Guide

This guide provides stakeholders with a shared language and **set of priorities** that pave the way for student success, guided by the conditions that must be present in schools for students to thrive.

It also includes a **checklist** to help you know whether a school is thriving and identify needed changes to policies and practices. You can ask teachers, principals, or district staff for the answers to the questions in the checklist, or use the links that we provide for publicly-available information.

Finally, the guide also includes **18 things you can do today** to help create schools where all kids thrive.

Make sure to read the back page of the guide for step-by-step instructions on accessing some of the data referenced.



What Is a Thriving School?

Thriving schools center students in **inclusive and supportive school cultures**, learning through **engaging and relevant educational experiences**. However, these conditions do not occur by happenstance. They must be intentionally cultivated through **effective school leadership** and **ambitious instruction** and sustained by a **culture of collaboration** and the **equitable distribution of resources** necessary to support each unique school population. It is only then that what we want for all of our students—to thrive in school and in life—can occur.

Despite the correlation of these conditions with student success, our current accountability and assessment systems don't accurately measure them or reflect their importance. The result is that we know a lot about which schools are excelling and which schools are not succeeding but not very much about why those things are happening.

The use of a thriving schools framework allows us to highlight meaningful differences among school conditions and measure the ability of a school community to thrive, rather than focusing on characteristics of a school's population.

The magic happens through the interplay of these conditions that, when considered individually, are significant but not sufficient to create and sustain the experiences and outcomes we desire for all kids.



Checklist for Identifying a Thriving School

Effective Leadership

- ☐ Are effective leaders being retained? Ask a [principal](#) or the district's [HR division](#).
- ☐ Do teachers report positive working environments? See their responses by school on the latest teacher survey [here](#).
- ☐ Do teachers say that leaders are providing non-evaluative coaching and feedback that is allowing them to grow? Review teacher responses in the Coaching and Feedback category [here](#).
- ☐ Is student achievement improving? See each school's achievement data [here](#).
- ☐ Are all students experiencing academic growth? See students' growth data by school [here](#).
- ☐ Are leaders modeling the types of behaviors we want to see in our teachers and students?

Relevant and Engaging Educational Experiences

- ☐ Do teachers receive professional learning around developing and delivering culturally relevant curriculum that meets the needs of each student? Ask teachers.
- ☐ Are students excited about their learning activities at school? See student survey responses on School Engagement [here](#).
- ☐ Does the school engage community partners to bolster the school's curriculum? Ask the [principal](#).
- ☐ Are students engaged in co-designing learning experiences? Ask students and teachers.

Culture of Collaboration

- ☐ Is teacher turnover relatively low? Ask the [principal](#) or the district's [HR division](#).
- ☐ Do teachers have protected collaborative planning opportunities embedded in the school day? Ask teachers.
- ☐ Are there teacher leadership opportunities that allow teachers to stay in the classroom? Ask teachers.
- ☐ Are teachers encouraged to observe other teachers? Ask teachers and see their survey responses by school [here](#).

Ambitious Instruction

- ☐ Are the curriculum and learning materials relevant to the students in the school? Do images and experiences reflect the students in the school? Ask students and teachers in the school.
- ☐ Do students have access to meaningful early post-secondary opportunities? Check out students' access by high school [here](#).
- ☐ Are students auto-enrolled in advanced coursework? Ask the [principal](#).
- ☐ Do students report that teachers have high expectations for them? See students' reports of Academic Press by school on the most recent student survey [here](#).
- ☐ Is there a college-going culture at the school? Ask students and teachers at the school.



Checklist for Identifying a Thriving School

Inclusive and Supportive Cultures

- ☐ Does the school have enough mental health professionals and social workers? Ask the [principal](#) or the district's [HR division](#).
- ☐ Does the school have translation services and interpreters present in schools with EL students? Ask the [principal](#) or the district's [EL division](#).
- ☐ Does the school provide training on diversity, equity, and inclusion beginning for all school-based personnel? Ask teachers.
- ☐ Does the school perform social-emotional learning (SEL) walkthroughs? Ask teachers.
- ☐ Does the school solicit and act on stakeholder feedback? Ask the [principal](#).
- ☐ Does the school clearly communicate with stakeholders? Ask families.
- ☐ Do the educators in the school look like the students they serve? Ask the [principal](#) or the district's [HR division](#).
- ☐ Do teachers know and honor students' unique cultures and values? Ask students and see their survey responses in the Culture of Diversity category [here](#).

Equitable Resource Distribution

A Note about Resource Distribution

Unlike the other conditions in this checklist that allow for monitoring directly at the school level, equitable resource allocation is more often driven by district-level decisions. While MNPS has taken significant steps towards allowing school-based decision-making by implementing a [student-based budgeting](#) model, the funding that flows to schools does not fully represent the true needs of our students. A true equitable distribution of resources considers not only currently accessible resources, but advocates for the funding required to meet the needs of students and the outcomes our community desires.

Educating the community on gaps that exist and helping them envision an appropriately funded MNPS is crucial to equitably distributing resources. Sharing this information allows stakeholders to engage in productive conversations around identifying community priorities and aligning resources to achieve our desired outcomes for students.

Because of these reasons, we haven't included a checklist for Equitable Resource Distribution as we did with the other conditions. Instead, we emphasize the importance of stakeholder awareness and advocacy around increasing funding to our schools in **18 Things You Can Do to Create Thriving Schools** on the following page.



18 Things You Can Do Today to Create a Thriving School

- 1 Attend a webinar or event hosted by a local organization about public education in Nashville; Check out [NPEF's webinars](#) and visit Conéxion Americas, Education Trust in Tennessee, the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance, the Tennessee Education Research Alliance, and SCORE for more events and resources
- 2 [Write an oped](#) about your support for increasing funding for schools, ensuring all students have the same access to opportunities in our schools, or improving teacher pay in MNPS
- 3 Sign up for newsletters from regional and national education resources such as [Chalkbeat](#), [Hechinger Report](#), [Education Week](#), [NPR Ed](#), [New Teacher Center](#), [TNTP](#), [Edutopia](#), and [The 74](#)
- 4 Understand the history of how federal and local policies shape neighborhood schools by reading [Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and its Limits](#)
- 5 Volunteer to be on a School Improvement Planning team by contacting your [principal](#)
- 6 Join your school's [PTA](#)
- 7 Attend the [Chamber Report Card](#) event
- 8 Visit schools that demonstrate best practices such as [Whitsitt Elementary](#) and [LEAD Cameron Middle](#)
- 9 Ask to meet with your [school board member](#) or [council member](#) to talk about school funding
- 10 Learn about the [conditions that need to be in place](#) for students to thrive in school
- 11 [Write a letter](#) to the Metro Council [Budget Committee](#) or [Education Committee](#) chair in support of increasing teacher pay
- 12 Watch a past [school board meeting](#) and plan to [attend a future meeting](#)
- 13 [Sign up to speak at a school board meeting](#) and ask the school board to increase teacher pay
- 14 Ask to be on the district's [Parent Advisory Committee](#)
- 15 Tell a realtor that you are willing to talk to interested families about your neighborhood school or host a meeting to introduce new neighbors to your school
- 16 Review the [Mayor's education agenda](#) and write an [email to the Mayor](#) about it
- 17 Start a book club about education and check out these titles to get you started: [Savage Inequalities](#), [I Got Schooled](#), [How the Other Half Learns](#)
- 18 Listen to [WPLN's The Promise](#) and then visit [Warner Arts Magnet Elementary](#)



How to access student and teacher survey data

Following these steps is important because if accessed directly through Panorama's site or otherwise, you may be asked for a password. Using the steps below will not require you to have a password.

Step 1: Click [here](#), which will take you to an MNPS web page.

Step 2: Scroll down until you see the button "View Survey Results" and click it,

Step 3: To view data for a specific school, click "140 schools" and scroll to find your school's name or type it in the search bar. To see student responses, make sure the "Students" tab is selected at the top left corner. To see teacher and staff responses, make sure the "Teachers & Staff" tab is selected. Click any category to see the list of questions and detailed responses.

How to access student performance and growth data

Step 1: Click [here](#), which will take you to the Tennessee Department of Education's State Report Card.

Step 2: Scroll down and enter "Metro Nashville Public Schools" in the search bar, which will display a list of all schools in MNPS. You may also search for your school directly in the search bar on the right hand side of the page labeled "search by school name."

Step 3: Click the name of the school you wish to view. You can navigate to additional schools using the page navigation at the bottom of the list.

Step 4: When you get to the school page, click the drop down menu under "Performance Indicators" to see data about the school including academic performance and growth data, chronic absenteeism data, discipline data, and more.



We believe that it's up to all of us to ensure our students are thriving in our schools every day.

At NPEF, we support teachers and leaders to build schools where all kids thrive. We advocate for the elimination of inequities, particularly access to highly effective teachers and leaders and engaging and inclusive school cultures, and an increase in school funding that is commensurate to the responsibilities placed on schools.

Join us.



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