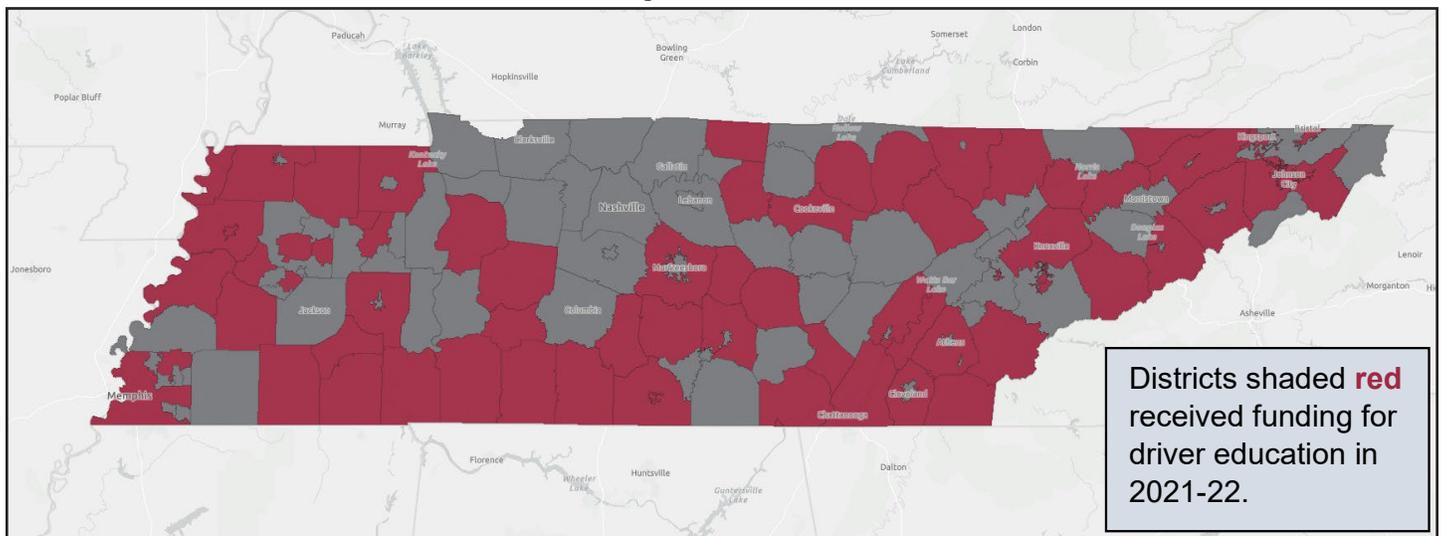


The Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has released a report on the availability and affordability of driver education in Tennessee public schools in accordance with Public Chapter 1090 (2022). Driver education in public schools, once a rite of passage for novice drivers, has diminished in popularity over the past few years. In 2021-22, 60 school districts in Tennessee received state funding for the 12,660 students enrolled in their driver education classes. This is a decline from the 2017-18 enrollment of 15,429 in 65 districts that offered driver education. The decline in offerings and enrollment may be due to a number of factors, including a lack of funding, lack of certified instructors, and competition from private driver education agencies. In spite of these factors, driver education is still offered to some degree in many districts across Tennessee.

### Exhibit 1: Driver education is offered in many Tennessee school districts



Source: Tennessee Department of Education.

### Key points

#### *Student participation in driver education varies by district and school.*

On an OREA survey of district superintendents, almost a quarter of respondents estimated that 11-20 percent of eligible students in their district (i.e., students who are 15-18 years old) participate in driver education offered by schools in the district each year. Similarly, on an OREA survey of Title I principals, nearly a third of respondents stated that 11-20 percent of their students participate in driver education. Superintendents and principals shared that they encounter some barriers to providing adequate driver education to their students, including a lack of funding or a lack of certified instructors.

#### *Most districts with driver education offer courses to students free of charge.*

On the OREA survey of superintendents, over three-quarters of respondents from districts that offer driver education (38 of 49 superintendents) reported that their districts offer the course free of charge to all students. In these cases, any costs associated with the course are covered by the district through its state or local funding. Similarly, on an OREA survey of Title I school principals, most respondents stated that their schools do not charge students for driver education.

*Continued on back.*

*A portion of litigation privilege tax revenue is earmarked for driver education.*

Districts that offer driver education receive state funding allocated from revenue generated by litigation privilege taxes, which are imposed in varying amounts on litigation instituted on all criminal and civil cases in the state. Current law mandates that 4.4430 percent of litigation privilege tax revenue be credited to a separate reserve account to be split 75 percent/25 percent, respectively, between the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDSHS) to promote and expand driver education through Tennessee public schools and to promote safety on the highways. Additionally, 2.7747 percent of the litigation privilege tax proceeds are credited to a separate general fund reserved for use only by TDOE to promote and expand driver education.

In FY 2022, TDSHS received just over \$191,000 for the promotion of driver education and highway safety. TDOE received \$1,050,136.10, which it distributed to districts based on their number of students enrolled in driver education. Rutherford County, with 3,141 driver education students, received the most funding at \$272,921.49.

**Exhibit 2: Ten districts with highest number of students participating in driver education | 2021-22**

District	Student count	Allocation
Rutherford County	3,141	\$272,921.49
Knox County	858	\$74,551.62
Sevier County	571	\$49,614.19
Washington County	438	\$38,057.82
Bradley County	370	\$32,149.30
Cocke County	317	\$27,544.13
Greene County	281	\$24,416.09
Bristol City	279	\$24,242.31
Bedford County	277	\$24,068.53
Dyer County	266	\$23,112.74

Source: Tennessee Department of Education.

See the full report for information on other possible funding sources for driver education, including Title I funds and dual enrollment grants, as well as information about private driver education companies.

OREA has included several policy options for the General Assembly and TDOE in its report. These include adjustments to driver license applications to strengthen data collection, adjusting the percentage of litigation privilege tax revenue that goes toward driver education, and gathering more information regarding driver education to allow for more complex data analysis.

To read the report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at [tncot.cc/orea](https://tncot.cc/orea).