

GOING HIGHER



**SCORE**  
State Collaborative on Reforming Education

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
INCREASING POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION  
AND STUDENT SUCCESS IN TENNESSEE**

SPRING 2021

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**BUILDING ON  
A PROMISE**

Tennessee has been a leader in education policy innovation and implementation for more than a decade in a quest to give more Tennesseans access to the educational and economic opportunities necessary to enjoy choice-filled lives. **Tennessee can build on its promising policy foundation by tackling the big challenges that remain: eliminating inequity in postsecondary opportunity, helping all students attain their credentials or degrees, and setting more Tennesseans on a path to economic mobility.**

Fundamental shifts outlined in the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 and the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act of 2014 addressed two of the most urgent challenges in higher education – credential completion and affordability. These efforts coincided with significant improvements in K-12 education to better prepare students for postsecondary success, laying a promising foundation for Tennessee to build a coherent education system that helps all students realize their potential from kindergarten to career.

These groundbreaking policies have improved college access and completion in Tennessee. After Tennessee Promise began, the state’s college-going rate climbed above 60 percent for the first time, and Tennessee extended its national lead in the percentage of high school seniors completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The six-year college graduation rate rose nearly 10 points over the last decade, reaching 61.8 percent for four-year universities and 33.2 percent for community colleges in 2019.

Despite the progress, the results have yet to yield widespread opportunity and success for all Tennesseans. Based on current outcomes, only one in ten of the state’s high school freshmen who are economically disadvantaged will successfully complete a postsecondary credential. Just two in four students who enter higher education earn their degrees in a timely manner, yet the majority of jobs will require postsecondary training when these students enter the labor market. At the current six-year college graduation rate, too many Tennesseans will be underprepared for an economy where two-thirds of new jobs are projected to require a postsecondary credential.

Tennessee students are not doing as well as students in the rest of the nation in earning degrees, and this is true for every student group. Tennessee students from historically underserved groups – Black and Hispanic students, students from low-income households, students who live in rural communities, and first-generation college students – trail White and higher-income students in degree and credential completion. Tennessee’s public postsecondary institutions – colleges of applied technology (TCATs), community colleges, and four-year universities alike – have more to do to ensure all students, regardless of their circumstances and background, succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

SCORE expanded its mission in 2019 to include postsecondary education after an assessment of Tennessee’s decade of innovative policy and practice transformation in K-12 education. While there was much to be proud of in raising the bar in expectations and results for students through high school, Tennessee had a glaring gap in preparing high school graduates for higher education and, subsequently, the workforce. Every student deserves a legitimate pathway to earn the postsecondary degree or credential that allows them to reach their full potential.

In Tennessee, we can no longer accept that a student’s economic, racial, or geographical background is the key predictor of whether they finish college, attain an industry certification, or hold a good job. We must champion an education system that defines its mission as supporting every student who enters higher education to complete higher education. Tennessee must put in place the policies that reflect that a student’s lifetime success and postsecondary completion are inextricably linked.

This report provides a blueprint for higher education in Tennessee to be a driver of the state’s success in navigating a changing economy and ensuring equitable opportunity for all Tennesseans. To inform these recommendations, SCORE reviewed the history and impact of Tennessee’s first-in-the-nation policy reforms and engaged and interviewed more than 100 state policy leaders, postsecondary institution leaders, national experts, and students. These discussions provided context to Tennessee’s postsecondary education improvements and identified trends that the state and its institutions will need to address in the next decade. Through the process, SCORE developed five recommendations for accelerating Tennessee’s postsecondary progress in this decade:

- 1. Focus on student equity through bolder and clearer goal-setting, reporting, and data transparency**
- 2. Align Tennessee’s postsecondary system to the future of the workforce**
- 3. Rethink credential delivery for Tennessee public higher education**
- 4. Improve Tennessee’s transfer pathways**
- 5. Maintain momentum for student success through key support programs**

A postsecondary credential or degree is more essential for success in life and career than ever before. Significant changes to the future of work and growing recognition of the need to address systemic inequities – accelerated and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – make improving student success in postsecondary education more important than ever. Now is the moment for Tennessee to finish the work that started more than a decade ago and ensure that all Tennesseans have real access to and success in the postsecondary opportunities needed to thrive in the 21st Century.

The image shows a large, modern building with a brick and metal facade. The building features the Tennessee College of Applied Technology logo, which consists of three stars inside a circle. The text "TENNESSEE COLLEGE OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY" and "NASHVILLE" is visible on the building's exterior. The entire image is overlaid with a solid orange color and numerous white diagonal lines of varying lengths and orientations, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern. The text "THE ECONOMIC DIVIDENDS OF POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION" is centered in the lower half of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**THE ECONOMIC  
DIVIDENDS OF  
POSTSECONDARY  
COMPLETION**

All Tennesseans benefit from an education system that supports more people to complete a postsecondary credential. Decades of research point out the significant impact of higher education on individuals and society – including improved health outcomes, stronger community vitality, and prevention of and recovery from interactions with the criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> Tennessee's own workforce needs suggest that more than half of the state's current workforce opportunities require some form of postsecondary credential.<sup>2</sup> Other statistics underscore why Tennessee needs more degrees and industry credentials:

#### A high school diploma is not enough.

- **\$13,000 a year:** The average annual wage for a Tennessee worker who graduated high school in 2017 and directly entered the workforce.<sup>3</sup> Before the pandemic recession,

about 13 percent of Tennesseans had household incomes that qualified them for government food assistance.<sup>4</sup>

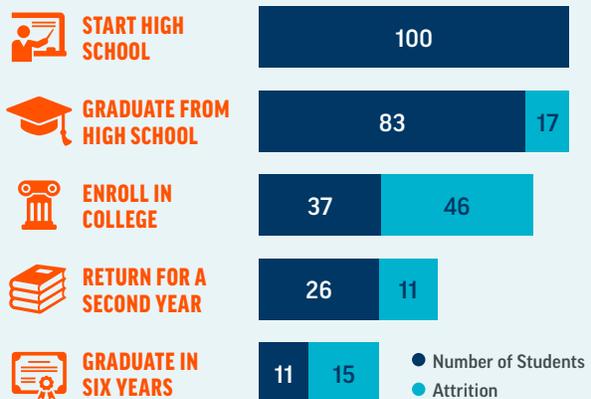
- **22 percent:** The proportion of Tennessee jobs that require only a high school diploma and pay more than \$35,000 a year.<sup>5</sup>
- **\$30,000 more a year:** The additional annual earnings for the average worker with a bachelor's degree can put more Tennesseans on a path to economic mobility and independence.<sup>6</sup>
- **4 in 10:** While more than 80 percent of low-income Tennessee high school freshmen will graduate high school, only 37 percent will enroll in higher education, and only 11 percent will earn a postsecondary degree in six years.

## TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM CURRENTLY WORKS FOR ONLY 1 IN 10 LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

At every step in the pathway from high school to college to career, economically disadvantaged students are progressing at slower rates than those who are not economically disadvantaged. Nearly nine out of ten economically disadvantaged students in Tennessee are at risk of ending their education without a degree or credential.<sup>7</sup> Put another way, success within the current system is not a function of the design but the result of herculean individual student effort. Here's the math, based on the 2018-19 success rates across public K-12 and postsecondary institutions in Tennessee:

- **High School Graduation Rate:** When 100 low-income Tennessee students begin high school, 83 of them will graduate and 17 will not finish high school, based on current state trends.
- **College-Going Rate:** Of the 83 who graduate high school, only about 37 students will enroll in postsecondary education, based on our college-going rate of 44.6 percent for low-income students, and 46 will not.
- **First-Year Persistence:** With a persistence rate of 69.5 percent for all students, only about 26 of the 37 low-income students who entered college will return for their second year.

- **Six-Year Graduation Rate, Across All Institutions:** With a six-year postsecondary graduation rate of 40.6 percent for the 37 Pell-eligible students who enrolled in college, only about 11 of those initial 100 high school freshmen will earn a postsecondary degree.



\*This visual and its conclusion are estimated from publicly available data. Definitions for economically disadvantaged are different between K-12 and higher education. In K-12, economically disadvantaged is defined primarily as students whose families receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or participate in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In higher education, economically disadvantaged is defined as students who were eligible to receive Pell funds at any time in their postsecondary career. Because of methodological differences, the underlying success rates may be different than the rates used to calculate the 11 percent figure.

Source: Calculations based on 2020 data from TDOE and THEC

## AN EDUCATION-EMPLOYMENT GAP EMERGED DURING THE 2001 RECESSION AND WIDENED DURING THE GREAT RECESSION



### Tennessee’s education-employment gap has been widening, particularly during economic recessions.

- Recessions often create economic changes that permanently alter workforce needs and opportunities. The employment gap that emerged in the 2001 recession between Tennesseans with and without postsecondary credentials grew even larger during the Great Recession of 2009. During the Great Recession, the unemployment rate for Black Tennesseans climbed from 14 percent to 21 percent.
- This issue takes on greater urgency as Tennessee navigates the COVID-19 pandemic and the prospect of an extended period of economic instability. With the pandemic exacerbating inequities in education, health, and workforce opportunities, an equity-focused recovery will be essential. Based on the most recent attainment rates, the state needs to support an additional 60,000 Black Tennesseans to obtain an associate or bachelor’s degree to close the gap with White Tennesseans.<sup>8</sup>

- Analysis of national data during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that 75 percent of households with a member planning to attend higher education changed those plans in fall 2020.<sup>9</sup> However, the pandemic’s impact on lower-income households was greater. Among households with incomes below \$25,000, 42 percent reported that a household member canceled postsecondary plans, compared with less than 19 percent for household incomes over \$200,000.

These current challenges are precisely why the state must accelerate its progress in supporting many more Tennesseans to earn a high-quality credential. Eleven years ago, Tennessee began building a forward-thinking, student-centered policy foundation that prioritized degrees and credentials and expanded access to higher education. These foundations uniquely positioned the state’s higher education institutions to become the bridges to carry students from their K-12 education to a high-wage, high-demand career. Charting the state’s path forward requires understanding the policies already in place, the extent of impact, and the opportunities for greater innovation.



A photograph of a surgeon in a blue-tinted operating room. The surgeon is wearing a blue surgical cap, a white face mask, and glasses. They are focused on a task, with their hands visible at the bottom right. The background shows medical equipment and a blurred operating room environment. Numerous white diagonal lines are overlaid on the image, creating a dynamic, high-tech feel.

# WHAT TENNESSEE DID AND WHY

## CENTERING A SYSTEM ON COMPLETION

While Tennessee is widely known and recognized as the first to implement statewide tuition-free college, five years earlier the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (CCTA) codified the state's core goal for higher education – student completion – and the key policies to achieve that goal. CCTA, signed into law by Governor Phil Bredesen in January 2010, introduced three major shifts:

**Credential completion focus:** The central goal of the Complete College Tennessee Act was to provide a greater return on investment to the Tennessee taxpayer by improving student completion rates.

“

We're spending well over a billion dollars a year of state dollars – that doesn't count the money that's being spent that comes from tuition and payments from those attending higher education – and our success rates are not very good. ...We're doing a relatively poor job with college completion in Tennessee.

**Deputy Governor John Morgan,**  
January 11, 2010 <sup>10</sup>

“

Whether it's looking at completion rates or at how we ensure that these reforms take place at some reasonable time, [looking at] the state of the state as it were, we must do better. We must do better.

**Senate Speaker Pro Tempore Jamie Woodson,**  
January 19, 2010 <sup>11</sup>

**Linking K-12 to higher education:** CCTA served as the postsecondary companion to the First to the Top Act of 2010, a comprehensive K-12 education reform initiative. The legislation cemented a commitment to building a cohesive education pipeline, from K-12 to postsecondary and through to the workforce.

“

In 2010, it's only natural that we focus on the entire education pipeline as we look to create a more skilled workforce. As we all know, it's not just about getting kids through high school anymore. It's also about students completing their degrees or certificates so they can get high-quality jobs and have a decent quality of life.

**Governor Phil Bredesen,**  
December 15, 2009 <sup>12</sup>

**Student access and student success:** CCTA changed the policy conversation in higher education from a focus on student access to a focus on both access and success. In the early 2000s, Tennessee had created the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships (TELS) program to make college more affordable to high-achieving students.<sup>13</sup> CCTA incentivized institutions to help more students to earn a degree.

“

The bill puts in the minds of our citizens: higher education in a higher place. There are barriers. If there weren't, why would we be the 43rd state in the nation in educational attainment? We do not have citizens that do not want to go to school. This is a first step in reprogramming and redeveloping our higher education system.

**Senate Minority Leader Jim Kyle,**  
January 21, 2010 <sup>14</sup>

The CCTA centered on six fundamental changes:

- **Outcomes-based funding (OBF) formula:** Prior to 2010, public colleges and universities received state funds largely based on the number of students enrolled by the 14th day of the fall semester. With the introduction of the OBF formula, more than 80 percent of the state's allocations for higher education institutions is awarded based on progression and completion of students, among other outcomes.
- **Unified community college system:** At Tennessee Board of Regents institutions, a more unified and comprehensive system was created through changes that included standardized cohort programming, block scheduling, and common course numbering.

These modifications aimed to improve the quality and transferability of course offerings across the system and give students an efficient, low-cost pathway to a credential.

- **Statewide master planning process:** The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) was required to develop a master plan that prioritizes coordination across institutions of higher education to promote degree attainment and improve completion, as well as institutional planning through mission statements approved by THEC.
- **Remedial coursework:** To address wide gaps in college and career preparation, remedial education moved from public four-year universities to community colleges.
- **Dual admission:** Institutions were required to enter into dual admissions agreements that provide students needing developmental education a clear pathway to transfer to a university by gaining admission to both institutions. Under dual admission, a student who meets the admissions requirements to a community college and a university can be admitted to both institutions at the same time and access the university functions (e.g., library, cafeteria) while studying at the community college.
- **Tennessee Transfer Pathways:** This change required creation of a 60-hour block of courses that would be guaranteed for transfer between community colleges and universities if approved within a “transfer pathway” for specific programs of study.

## WHAT IS THE OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING FORMULA?

Outcomes-based funding formulas are a form of performance-based funding centered on degree attainment. Tennessee was the first state in the nation to adopt performance-based funding in higher education in 1979 when it covered around 5 percent of the state’s postsecondary investments. Changes enacted by the CCTA in 2010 and subsequent implementation resulted in the lion’s share of the state’s annual higher education investments being directed through the OBF formula.

Tennessee’s OBF formula rewards higher education institutions for student persistence toward and completion of certificates and degrees. It also recognizes the **unique sector differences** between open-access community colleges and the four-year public universities. Community colleges are rewarded for improvements in job placements, dual enrollment, and transfer students. Four-year universities are rewarded for research and public service.

The OBF formula also identifies **focus populations** to recognize that students from historically underserved groups like low-income students and nontraditional students may require more resources to progress and complete a credential. Community colleges also have a focus population for academically underprepared students who either scored below specific ACT thresholds or need remedial coursework.

## WIDENING POSTSECONDARY ACCESS

Improving postsecondary access – the set of activities, conversations, and decisions students must complete to begin learning at a TCAT, college, or university – is essential to increasing postsecondary attainment. In 2013, Governor Bill Haslam elevated holding a degree or credential as a statewide priority through Drive to 55, which set a statewide goal for 55 percent of working age

adults to achieve a credential by 2025. The Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act of 2014, a key strategy of Drive to 55, widened college access by guaranteeing free tuition for high school seniors who attended TCATs and community colleges the fall following graduation.

During legislative debate and in 2020 interviews, key policy leaders discussed three key reasons for passage of Tennessee Promise:

**Improving the economy:** In 2014, the recent experience with high unemployment rates during the 2008-09 Great Recession and the skills gap that was highlighted by the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce in 2013 underscored the importance and urgency of increasing the number of skilled individuals entering the Tennessee workforce to provide a more prosperous state economy.

“

For many decades in the South, we had job growth based on low wages. We brought factories, people didn't make as much money, didn't cost employers as much. You didn't have to know how to read and write to do it – very simple tasks. That strategy will no longer work. As little as 10 to 12 years from now, 55 percent of the jobs that will be created will require at least a two-year degree. That's why the governor calls it the Drive to 55. Right now, just 32 percent are qualified. We need to get it up to 55 percent.

**House Majority Leader Gerald McCormick,**  
March 18, 2014 <sup>15</sup>

**Changing the college-going narrative:** Addressing college affordability – both the barriers to financial aid and the financial complexities of understanding the total cost of going to college – was essential at a moment when the national conversation on postsecondary education focused on rising tuition costs, student debt, and earnings.<sup>16</sup> Ensuring that students had an affordable pathway to and through college in Tennessee was repeatedly referenced in legislative discussion.

“

Through the Tennessee Promise, we are fighting the rising cost of higher education, and we are raising our expectations as a state. We are committed to making a clear statement to families that education beyond high school is a priority in the state of Tennessee.

**Governor Bill Haslam,**  
February 2, 2014 <sup>17</sup>



**Setting statewide goals:** Prior to launching Tennessee Promise, Governor Haslam worked with higher education and workforce leaders to identify a statewide goal for postsecondary attainment. The Drive to 55 gave the state and its many stakeholders in higher education a clarity of purpose on why the state should invest in college completion. Leveraging Knox Achieves as a proof point in creating a K-12 to postsecondary education pipeline, Tennessee Promise built awareness of higher education's critical role as a conduit between a K-12 education and high-quality career opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

The Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act contained two key elements:

- Coverage of tuition and mandatory fees. The state created a last-dollar scholarship, using excess Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship revenues, to cover tuition costs and mandatory fees for students entering a TCAT or community college the fall after high school graduation.
- Ongoing eligibility requirements to support students to completion. Research-supported momentum strategies – mentoring, an ongoing GPA requirement, and full-time enrollment – were established to increase the likelihood of a student completing their credential on time. To implement these momentum strategies, the state looked to two nonprofits, the Ayers Foundation and tnAchieves, that already had success running tuition-free college programs at the local level. The new state program used the Ayers Foundation and tnAchieves to determine student eligibility, recruit volunteer mentors, and support student applications for college-going statewide.

## DRIVE TO 55: MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO INCREASING DEGREE-HOLDERS

Tennessee Promise was the signature component of Governor Bill Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative to equip 55 percent of Tennessee adults with a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2025. Launched in 2013, the initiative elevated college completion as a statewide imperative by creating several interconnected programs to lower different postsecondary access barriers:

- **Tennessee Reconnect** – A last-dollar scholarship program for adults without a postsecondary degree to earn a credential at a technical or community college.
- **Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)** – A program developed at the state's community colleges that helps high school students identified as academically underprepared through ACT test scores to complete learning support coursework and access credit-bearing courses sooner.
- **Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP)** – A grant program that funded regional partnerships between technical and community colleges, industry partners, workforce leaders, and K-12 educators.<sup>19</sup>
- **Tennessee Pathways** – A program to create guided pathways aligned to high-quality employment opportunities for high school students by connecting college and career advising, advanced coursework, work-based learning opportunities, and clear linkages between postsecondary institutions, workforce, and community organizations.

Together, the CCTA, Drive to 55, and Tennessee Promise established Tennessee as a national leader in higher education policy. Beyond that, the six-year statewide graduation rate improved 21 percent and the overall state attainment rate rose 45 percent since these initiatives were implemented. Despite increasing the number of students persisting in and completing higher education over the last decade, still just one in two students attending a Tennessee public college or university will complete a credential over the course of six years. Students receiving state financial aid are more likely to succeed than those without these scholarships, but financial aid recipients still face financial and other barriers to completion. And importantly, students from historically underserved groups – Black students, Hispanic students, and students who are low-income – are even less likely to earn a degree or credential in the state's current higher education system.

Taking stock of Tennessee's postsecondary policy foundation, four key takeaways emerge:

### **TAKEAWAY 1: TENNESSEE'S POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT RATE HAS CLIMBED OVER THE LAST DECADE BUT REMAINS BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.**

Between 2008 and 2018, the portion of Tennesseans between ages 25-64 with a postsecondary credential increased more than 13 percentage points – which puts Tennessee in the top half of states for improvement during this period of time.

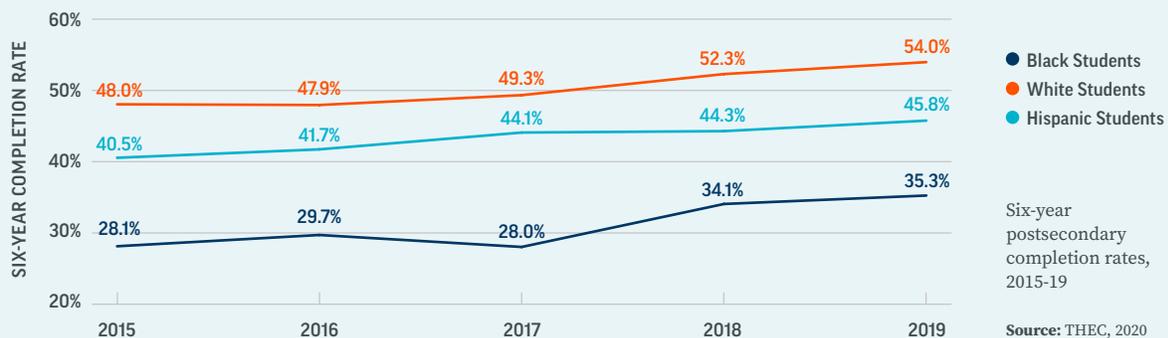
## ATTAINMENT INCREASES NEARLY 50 PERCENT IN TENNESSEE IN A DECADE



### TAKEAWAY 2: A WIDE GAP REMAINS BETWEEN POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION RATES FOR WHITE STUDENTS AND BLACK OR HISPANIC STUDENTS.

Tennessee ranks in the bottom half of the nation in postsecondary attainment. Completion rates have risen faster for Black and Hispanic students but remain below the rate for White students.

## DESPITE IMPROVEMENT, COMPLETION GAPS PERSIST



### TAKEAWAY 3: THE OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING FORMULA HELPED FOCUS INSTITUTIONS ON STUDENT COMPLETION BUT HASN'T RESULTED IN SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS TO SUCCESS.

Research on outcomes-based funding formulas from around the country often leverages Tennessee's experience because it was an early adopter of the approach. There are several positive trends:

- The funding formula increased the number of

#### shorter-term certificates during the 2010-15 cycle.<sup>20</sup>

Research using data from Tennessee's 2010-15 funding formula cycle indicated that the state's increase in credential production was from community college certificates. This research suggests that the formula's components and weights influenced institutional behaviors that led to more credentials for students.

- The funding formula likely contributed to improvements in both community college and four-year university student completion.<sup>21</sup> Research using

data from Tennessee found that full-time university students who enrolled in 2010 after OBF was put in place were 10.2 percent more likely to finish within four years and that community college students who enrolled full-time in fall 2011 were 13 percent more likely to attain an associate degree within three years.

- **Campuses are creating completion initiatives.**<sup>22</sup> These include student-focused efforts such as campus-wide strategic plans, mentoring programs, new advising software, and eliminated graduation fees, among others – examples which were echoed by stakeholders SCORE spoke with for this report.

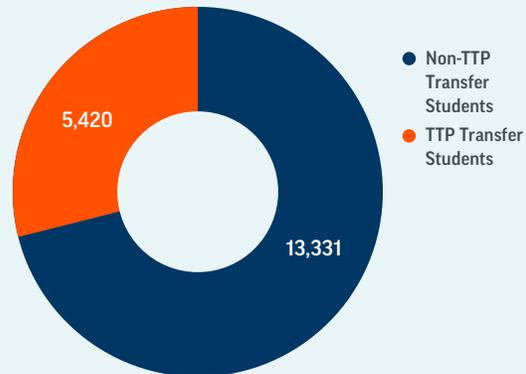
However, emerging research suggests that Tennessee's formula will be insufficient to close gaps in completion if the state does not design strategies and supports for students from historically underserved groups.<sup>23</sup> Analyzing data from 2010-15, the state's formula was more successful in increasing degrees for White students than for students of color. Additionally, Tennessee State University – the state's only public historically black college or university – saw a disproportionately large decrease in funding after the initial implementation of the formula in 2011.

#### **TAKEAWAY 4: KEY ASPECTS OF CCTA HAVE YET TO BE FULLY IMPLEMENTED OR REACH FULL POTENTIAL, SPECIFICALLY THE TENNESSEE TRANSFER PATHWAYS PROGRAM AND UNIFIED COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM.**

The Tennessee Transfer Pathway (TTP) was intended to ensure that when students transfer, their credits transfer, too. Making this mechanism work is essential for students who choose to start at more affordable community colleges before finishing a bachelor's degree at a public university. However, state data show that they are underused and underperforming. While 13,331 students transferred between public institutions in Tennessee in 2019, fewer than half were enrolled in TTP.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, fewer than half of TTP students completed a credential between 2012 and 2018.



### **THE MAJORITY OF TENNESSEE TRANSFER STUDENTS DO NOT UTILIZE TRANSFER PATHWAYS**



Share of total transfer students enrolled in Tennessee Transfer Pathways, 2019

Source: THEC, 2020

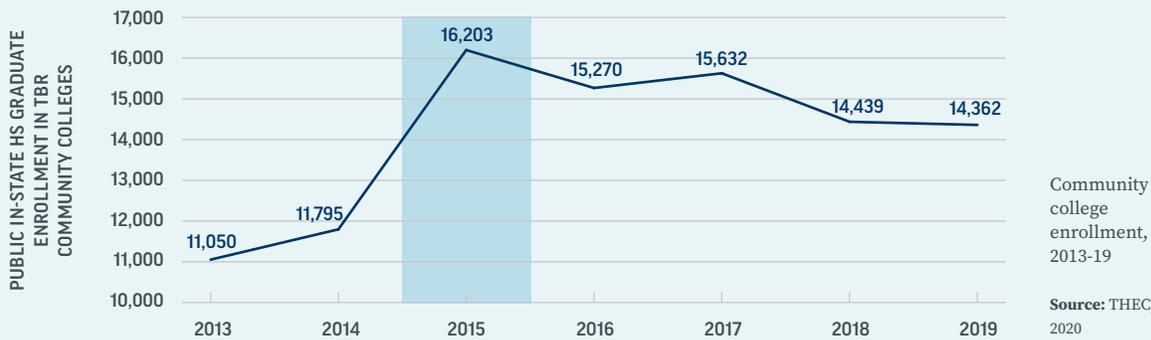
While the state continues to learn about the college-going intentions and career outcomes of its first cohorts of Tennessee Promise students, it also should explore and understand the barriers to accessing and successfully completing a credential through TTP. These pathways serve as an important advising tool to help community college students efficiently transfer to many of Tennessee's universities by creating fully transferable sets of courses – totally 60 credit hours – that contribute to a bachelor's degree. State leaders should identify actionable solutions across the entire student experience – from the advising students receive to the fidelity of implementation at four-year universities – to address undersubscription as well as the low completion rates for students in a transfer pathway.

While not enough students are following the TTP, there is emerging evidence that the state's community college systems have implemented key guided pathway reforms – a set of practices that clarify the end goals, supports, and learning quality of the institution's programs of study. Researchers from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University noted that “among state community college systems, Tennessee Board of Regents is probably the furthest along in implementing” those reforms.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Tennessee community colleges have made nationally leading advances to remove remediation as a barrier to completion by adopting a co-requisite model that allows students to complete credit-earning college-level courses while getting needed academic support.

**TAKEAWAY 5: TENNESSEE PROMISE CHANGED THE CONVERSATION ON COLLEGE-GOING IN THE STATE, AND MORE MUST BE DONE TO HELP STUDENTS FROM ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR TO ACHIEVE PROMISE'S PROMISE.**

In the first years of Tennessee Promise, community college enrollment dramatically increased with nearly 5,000 more students enrolled in 2015 than the previous year. And the scholarship is supporting student success, with Promise students persisting and completing on time at higher rates than non-Promise students.<sup>26</sup>

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES SPIKED WITH FIRST TENNESSEE PROMISE COHORT**



**DESPITE POSITIVE TREND, CONCERNING OPPORTUNITY GAPS PERSIST BETWEEN TENNESSEE PROMISE APPLICANTS**



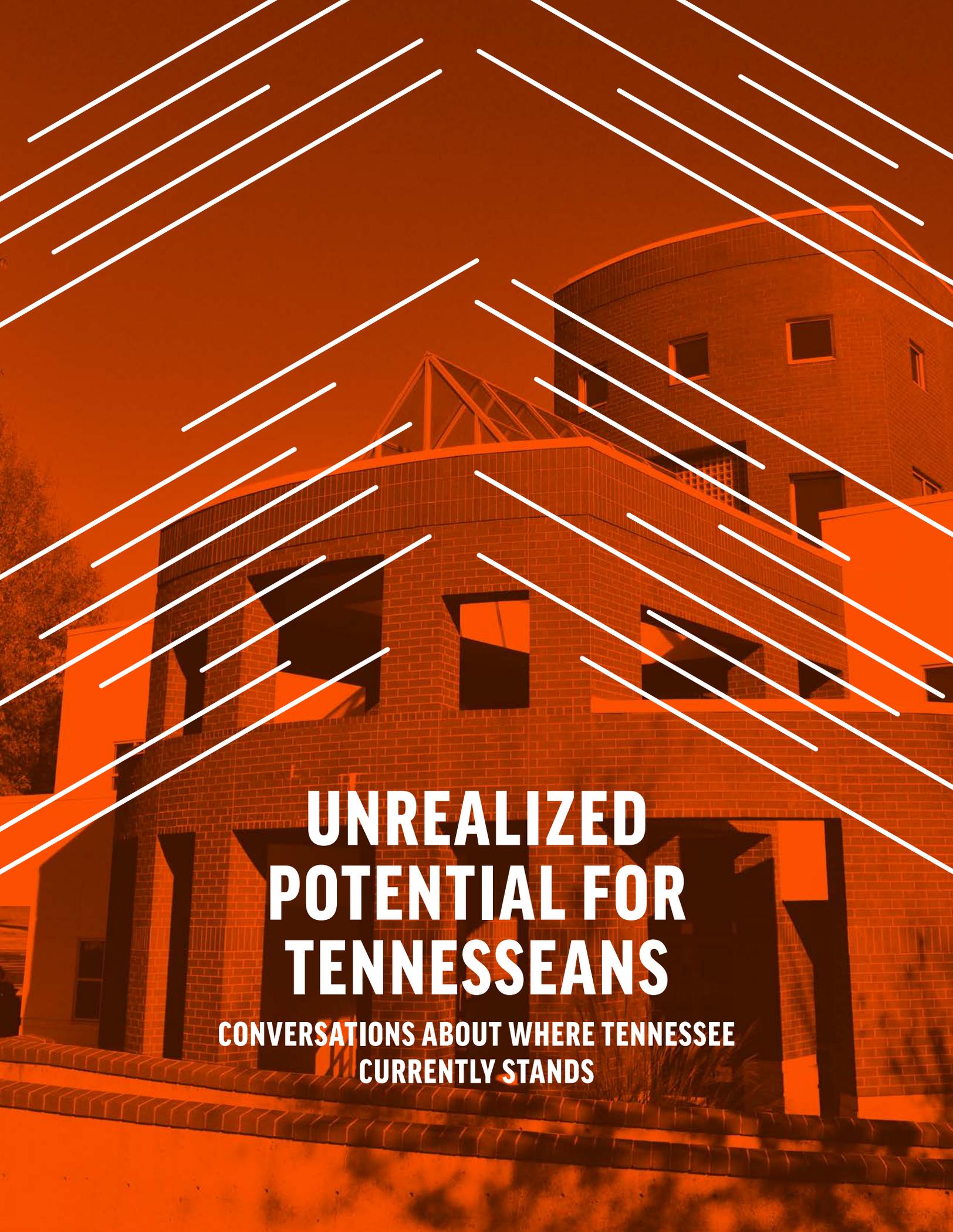
However, there are several signs that additional support and attention for students will be needed:

- **Not all Promise applicants become Promise students – and there are inequities in who receives a Promise scholarship.** While high numbers of high school seniors apply for Tennessee Promise, there is considerable drop-off at each successive step: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the mandatory community service and meeting requirements. Ultimately, less than one-third of all Promise applicants enroll at an eligible postsecondary institution. Promise applicants who do not become Promise students are disproportionately students with lower ACT scores, from low-income backgrounds, or Black or Hispanic.<sup>27</sup> One possible challenge is summer melt, the loss of students during the transition between the end of high school and the start of college. State data show that the melt rate for Black and Hispanic students is approximately 10 points higher than for White students, suggesting that students of color are less likely to have support to enroll in postsecondary despite applying to Promise.
- **Low-income students eligible to receive Tennessee Promise are less likely to receive Promise funds.** Designed as a last-dollar scholarship, Tennessee Promise covers the remaining cost of student tuition

and fees after all other state and federal aid has been disbursed. Low-income students are often eligible for other need-based scholarships, such as the federal Pell Grant and Tennessee Student Assistance Award, and thus receive little to no funding directly from Tennessee Promise. According to research from the Tennessee state comptroller, more than 60 percent of Promise funds went to students from households with annual incomes over \$80,000.<sup>28</sup> Put another way, economically disadvantaged students are not benefiting from these state resources as much as students from wealthier households.

- **Tennessee Promise policies and life circumstances may be barriers to student success.** The continuing eligibility requirements for Tennessee Promise students impact a student's pathway to a degree. All Promise students are required to enroll in 12 credit hours (or at least four courses) a semester. Full-time enrollment sets students on a path to complete on time, but many students are unable to meet this requirement because they work full- or part-time, care for dependents, or balance other life circumstances – a theme SCORE heard through discussions with active Tennessee Promise students. Research has also identified nontuition costs (e.g., fees and textbooks) and ineligibility during the summer term to be barriers to on-time completion.<sup>29</sup>





# **UNREALIZED POTENTIAL FOR TENNESSEANS**

**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WHERE TENNESSEE  
CURRENTLY STANDS**

SCORE interviewed students, institution leaders, state policymakers, and state and national education experts during fall 2020 to better understand what Tennessee might do to accelerate postsecondary persistence and completion. These conversations happened with the COVID-19 pandemic in the backdrop and, among other conversations and engagement with leaders, included discussions with:

- 6 national experts in postsecondary education
- 15 technical and community college leaders
- 11 university leaders
- 11 state policymakers and nonprofit leaders
- 20 students

Emerging trends from the pandemic – such as a 19 percent drop in community college freshman enrollment for Fall 2020 from Fall 2019 and the unpredictable nature of the accompanying recession – suggest that the state should be deeply concerned about the headwinds Tennesseans will face in the coming years.<sup>30</sup> All participants acknowledged that long-standing education inequities have worsened and offered insights on how the postsecondary education system might be strengthened urgently amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these challenges could be better met in the future if the state’s public postsecondary institutions could equip more Tennesseans with the skills and tools to economically advance in life. The following themes emerged from these conversations.

## LEADERSHIP CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

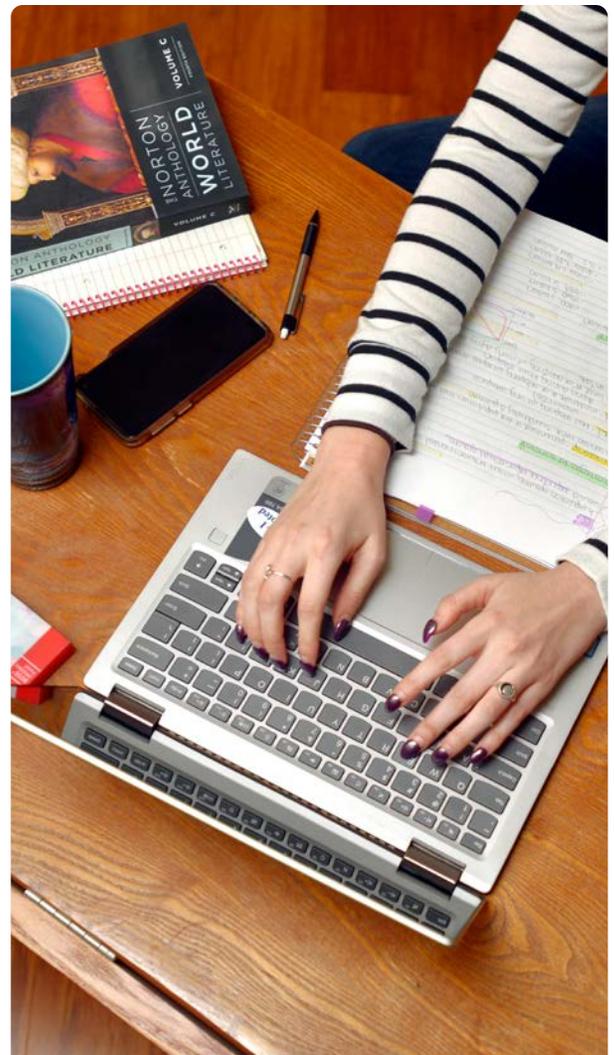
Both state and national experts point to how Tennessee has done some of the nation’s most innovative policy work related to higher education access and completion now being adopted elsewhere. As of 2020, almost 40 states in the country have outcomes-based funding in some form, and nearly 20 states have some form of statewide college promise programs.<sup>31</sup> Much of what needs to happen next in Tennessee requires state and local leadership to implement and design the programs and policies that benefit each student, particularly when it comes to issues of education equity.

One community college leader provided a powerful example and described setting the tone at the institution’s start of school meeting:

“ Two or three years ago now, at our opening in-service, I presented the demographics of our community, the demographics of our incoming freshman class, then the demographics of our graduating class. You

could see the gaps in equity and could hear the gasps in the room, because people had not yet confronted that data. It was hard for some people, but I don’t know how you move forward if you don’t know where [students] are starting.

Discussions with other institution leaders and students illustrated how work could move beyond a surface understanding of student demographics. Several institution leaders described making hard choices to prioritize programs and opportunity for students. They reallocated resources from old programs to create the support services students needed, developed faculty academies to change teaching practices, and opened one-stop shops for campus services. Several leveraged macro-opportunities – for example, capping undergraduate tuition after the first 12 credit hours – and micro-opportunities – such as removing graduation or technology access fees – to improve affordability and completion rates. Students who felt well supported at their institutions often named specific services and the people who provided them as key to their success.



## MAKE DATA USE SYSTEMATIC AND PROACTIVE AT INSTITUTIONS

Being clear about the state's direction and opportunities to improve data use was a repeated theme for the state policymakers who helped shape Tennessee's foundational postsecondary policies. One example state and national leaders talked about was Tennessee Promise as part of Governor Haslam's larger Drive to 55 initiative to close the postsecondary attainment gap. By casting a clear, data-driven vision for the state linked to a wider set of initiatives, institution and nonprofit leaders organized and built their own work to support reaching the goal.

Data use, however, is not just the domain of the state. Institution leaders shared examples of how outcomes-based funding improved institutional focus on data metrics related to student persistence and completion. Many of the community and technical leaders cited the technical assistance that the Achieving the Dream network – which all Tennessee community and technical colleges are part of as of 2020 – provided in building institutional capacity and learning to proactively design interventions. Many of the interventions echoed nationally leading best practices found in institutions in New York, Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina – including providing nontuition financial supports and completion coaches.<sup>32</sup> As one leader who has done this work for years described it:

“ Data awareness is where we started, and we are getting to data use. In the grand scheme of things ... we are still a baby. Data awareness, data use, and then data maturity.

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ALIGNMENT IS THE NEXT STAGE OF THE WORK

National experts who have studied and monitored Tennessee's postsecondary reforms noted that while the state had important policies encouraging degree completion and student transfer, that work must lead many more students to complete credentials for high-wage, high-demand careers. This was particularly important given the relative success of the TCATs in improving short-term credential completion rates. Emerging research from Virginia suggests that these types of credentials can improve employment rates and wages if they are aligned to high-demand fields and connected to stackable opportunities for working adults to return to postsecondary institutions for additional training later in their career.<sup>33</sup>

Labor market needs vary from one region to another, making acceleration of postsecondary completion a regional issue as well as a statewide challenge. Institutional leaders across the TCAT, community college, and university sectors shared their eagerness for this work. They also expressed a desire for more leadership and collaboration across sectors at the local level. As one community college leader described it:

“ We have conversations in silos – K-12, higher ed, university, community college, technical, workforce. But it's really a system. I don't know that we currently all know each other's issues. ... It would be great if we all came together and process mapped across the systems ... and saw how we are losing folks ... because we haven't looked at the gaps. We frequently blame K-12 for not getting them ready, and universities blame [community colleges] and then workforce says the same about us. Everyone is working hard – but they need to be brought together.

## STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS MUST BE MADE TO DELIVER OPPORTUNITY EQUITABLY

Equitable student opportunity was the most frequently discussed topic among all stakeholders. University leaders described a renewed focus on “C” students and having tough conversations with rural Tennesseans about the need for a postsecondary credential in the modern workforce. Community college and TCAT leaders shared their work to expand advising and completion coaching. Students shared stories of how life circumstances, such as the need to support their families or the lack of sufficient career advising and goal-setting, prevented their peers from completing credentials. These students also noted the key role completion coaches, student support staff, and faculty played in their own success.

While Tennessee's attainment gaps between different student groups are not unique, national experts who helped design completion initiatives suggested that the easy work to improve equitable opportunity is over. As one expert put it:

“ I actually still don't think Tennessee gets enough credit for the unique position it holds across the entire higher education space in the country. But here's the rub – all the low-hanging fruit is gone now. This is going to be very important, as a Southern state, for Tennessee

**to show leadership on issues of equity. To really get to the levels of college attainment that we always hope for in these initiatives, you have to [improve support for] Black students, Hispanic students, and first-generation students.**

While Tennessee's focus on community and technical colleges for tuition-free college may make sense from an affordability standpoint, experts recommend that the state add new supports for the students who have not been served well by the system as it currently exists – Black and Hispanic students and students who are low-income, rural, or first-generation – and who attend community colleges that experience historically lower completion rates.

Conversations with Tennessee students and leaders surfaced several practices that are well-supported by research:

- **Nontuition financial supports.** While Tennessee Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees, students often face other costs, such as books and transportation, that could impede their path to completion. Emerging research suggests that every additional \$1,000 of nontuition financial support per student may improve completion rates for the lowest income students by 4 to 6 percentage points.<sup>34</sup>
- **Summer bridge programs.** With the transition between high school and college continuing to

be a major drop-off point for students, summer bridge programs are a vital way to support students immediately after high school graduation.<sup>35</sup>

- **Learning communities.** Once students arrive on campus, learning communities can help support first-generation students. Students travel through classes together and build relationships to support each other to have a stronger start in college. Research shows that these communities contribute to strong student completion rates.<sup>36</sup>
- **Completion coaching and advising.** A trusted guide can help students navigate the complex higher education systems and find solutions to ongoing academic, financial, or life challenges.<sup>37</sup>

Tennessee also has emerging examples of how this work can take shape in communities. Knox Promise provides completion coaches and grants that cover the nontuition costs of going to college to Knox County high school graduates. The Better Together partnership between Metro Nashville Public Schools and Nashville State Community College leverages shared data across the institutions to monitor progress and intervene as students transition from high school to postsecondary. The Ayers Foundation provides consistent advising from high school through college to ensure that students have advice and support to complete a credential.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

For more than a decade, Tennessee led the nation in developing policies and initiatives to open doors to a postsecondary education while incentivizing postsecondary institutions to focus on student completion. While that work has shown promising impact for students, too many Tennessee students are not earning a postsecondary credential – and too many of those students belong to

groups that have not been served well by postsecondary institutions. The state should renew focus on addressing inequitable outcomes by creating student-centered systems of support, ensuring stronger implementation of the state’s postsecondary policy framework, and preparing students for the workforce opportunities available today and in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

1

**FOCUS ON STUDENT EQUITY IN GOAL-SETTING, REPORTING, AND DATA TRANSPARENCY**

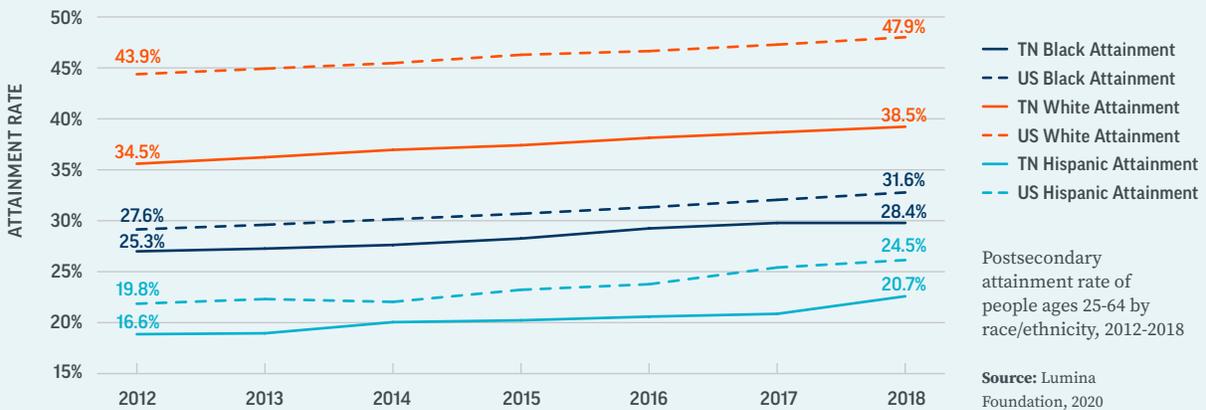
If Tennessee rests on its laurels and accepts the status quo as good enough, generations of Tennesseans will lack the education and skills to meet the state’s changing workforce needs or to advance economically. Tennessee has the policy foundation in place to promote student completion, but the new frontier requires a significant increase in completion rates coupled with narrowed attainment gaps for students from historically underserved groups. Some states have set equity goals that will focus institutional attention on closing gaps. Since setting equity goals in 2013, Indiana has

cut in half the college achievement gaps between Black and Hispanic students and White students and low-income and higher-income students.<sup>38</sup>

While THEC has analyzed some of the state’s gaps previously, Tennessee has not yet adopted a formal equity goal. With a clear vision and more accurate data to align efforts across sectors, Tennessee can be better positioned to monitor progress and intervene if there is inadequate progress for students.

**TENNESSEE TRAILS NATIONAL POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT RATES**

With such wide opportunity gaps even before postsecondary education, Tennessee lags the rest of the country in postsecondary attainment across all racial and ethnic groups. Tennessee has not yet invested the resources or adopted innovative practices that would create a coherent system that students can easily navigate to degree completion.



“ Tennessee can tell the truth about where it needs to go while still celebrating its successes. – National Expert

RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Articulate a statewide goal focused on increasing postsecondary completion rates for Black, Hispanic, and Pell-eligible students.	Tennessee should double completion rates for Black, Hispanic, and Pell-eligible students by 2028. Completion rates should be the same for all student groups by 2035.	Governor, in collaboration with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THEC</li> <li>• Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE)</li> <li>• Nonprofit advocacy organizations</li> </ul>
Create individualized, system- and institution-wide completion plans for how each will improve completion rates.	System- and institution-wide plans include evidence-based completion strategies with disaggregated data and goals by student group. Plans should be made in coordination with THEC and available to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Tennessee (UT)</li> <li>• Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR)</li> <li>• Locally Governed Institutions (LGIs)</li> <li>• THEC</li> </ul>
Add a focus population premium for Black and Hispanic students in the outcomes-based funding formula.	Institutions are rewarded through the funding formula for increasing the number of completers who are Black or Hispanic, with consideration for the proportion of an institution's population that are Black or Hispanic.	THEC
Strengthen the postsecondary reporting process in public reporting on student outcomes.	THEC Fact Book adds data about retention, on-time completion, and completion in 150 percent of expected time for two-year institutions. This data is reported by student groups (race/ethnicity, income, gender, nontraditional).	THEC

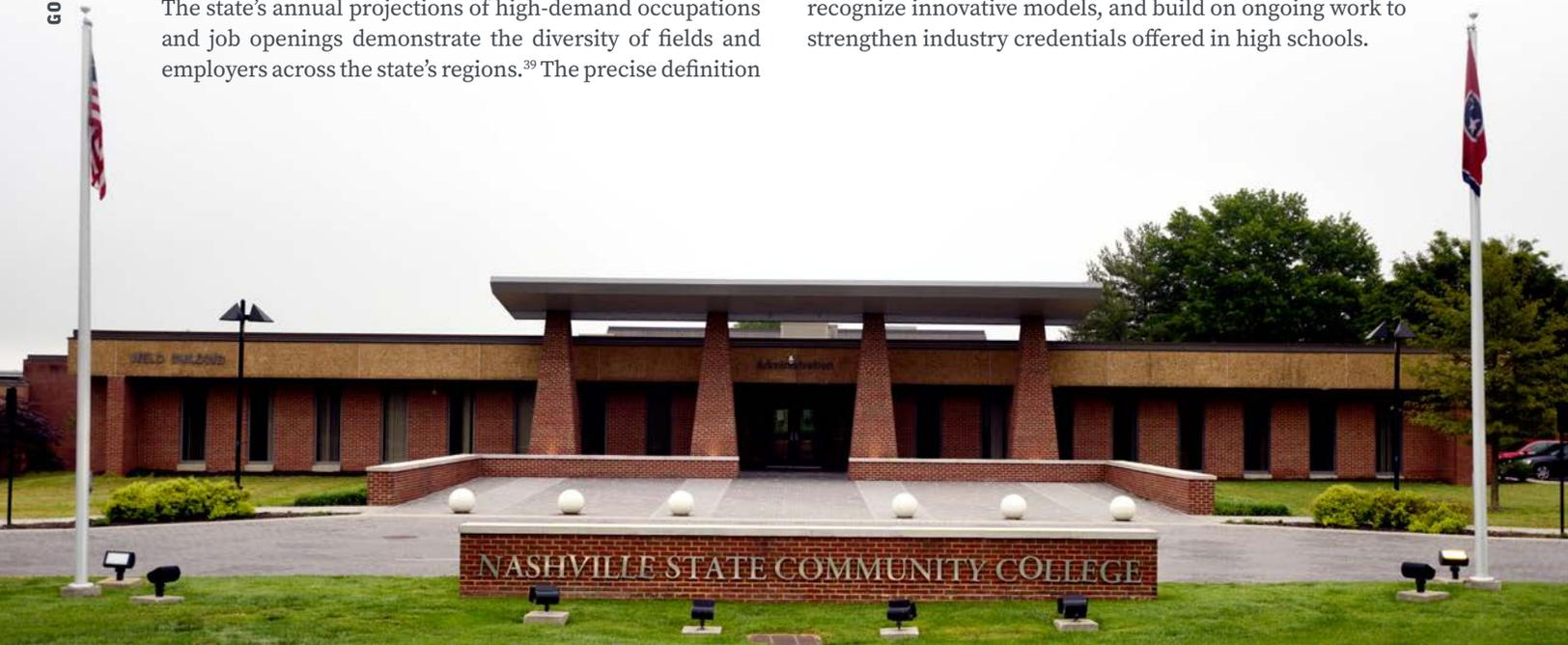
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## RECOMMENDATION

## ALIGN TENNESSEE'S POSTSECONDARY SYSTEM TO THE FUTURE OF THE WORKFORCE

Because regional workforce needs are unique, the state has an important convening and supporting role to align higher education institutions with employment opportunities. The state's annual projections of high-demand occupations and job openings demonstrate the diversity of fields and employers across the state's regions.<sup>39</sup> The precise definition

of high-quality credentials should be tailored to regional workforce conditions and as localized as possible. The state must ensure the efforts use comparable statewide data, recognize innovative models, and build on ongoing work to strengthen industry credentials offered in high schools.



## TENNESSEE TRAILS SOUTHEASTERN STATES IN POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT



“ I don’t see education and workforce development as two separate activities. I believe that all we do in higher education is workforce development, and when we don’t look at it that way we are missing a mark. – Community College Leader

RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Develop a statewide strategic plan for education-workforce alignment that prioritizes high-quality credentials.	State has a usable definition of a high-quality industry credential that rates quality, incorporates wage data, and improves credential stackability. Short-term credentials, registered apprenticeships in high school and college, and employer-led credentials should be included.	<p>Governor, in coordination with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Workforce Development Board</li> <li>State Board of Education (SBE)</li> <li>THEC</li> <li>Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD)</li> <li>Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD)</li> <li>Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tennessee Business Roundtable, and local chambers and business community</li> </ul>
Create regional alignment advisory councils across the state’s nine economic development regions.	<p>Regions have tailored alignment, economic recovery, and postsecondary attainment plans that also support the state’s strategic plans.</p> <p>Regions develop more high-quality noncredit workforce training, short-term credentials, apprenticeship programs, and other postsecondary training that complements traditional postsecondary credentials.</p>	<p>Governor, in coordination with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tennessee Pathways Regional Coordinators</li> <li>Regional workforce development boards</li> <li>THEC outreach specialists</li> <li>CORE Offices, TDOE</li> </ul>

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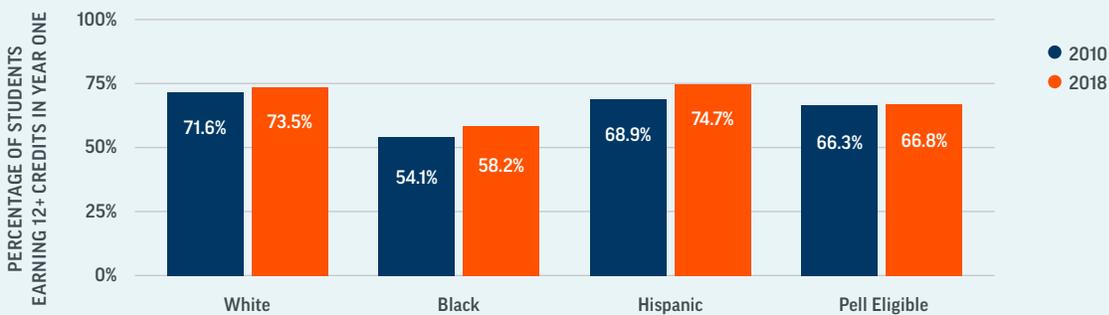
RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Create a Governor's Certificate for Future Readiness that recognizes economic development regions that align education and workforce systems.	Certificates are based on linked education and workforce data to identify how students in specific programs of study fare in the workforce after completion. Innovative credit- and noncredit-bearing programs aligned to projected workforce needs in the region are launched.	Governor
Create data dashboards that link education and workforce data.	Data dashboards identify how students within specific programs of study at specific institutions fare in the workforce post-graduation.	Office of Evidence and Impact within the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, in collaboration with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THEC</li> <li>• TDOE</li> <li>• TNECD</li> <li>• TDLWD</li> </ul>

### RECOMMENDATION 3 REINVENT CREDENTIAL DELIVERY FOR TENNESSEE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

To respond to COVID-19 disruptions in instructional modality and degree delivery, the state should encourage institutions to embrace competency-based approaches to receiving credentials. Building on Tennessee's investments in community and technical colleges as an affordable pathway to a postsecondary credential, the state should encourage those institutions to introduce competency-based learning and adopt practices that strengthen their ability to serve students cohesively.

Community and technical colleges give students with varying levels of academic preparation the opportunity to earn credentials of value. Smoothing and shortening the path to enrollment and completion will increase the value of community and technical colleges in the state's higher education system. Student learning – not seat time – should be the priority.

#### FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES, NOT ENOUGH PROGRESS TO ENSURE STUDENTS CAN COMPLETE ON TIME



Community college students earning 12 or more credits in year 1, 2010 and 2018

Source: TBR, 2020

“ There is this culture in some areas of ‘I can’t do that’ about community college, technical college, or four-year university. We have got to address that culture.   
 - University Leader

RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Launch a competency-based network among the state's TCATs, community colleges, and universities.	THEC launches a competency-based network using state funding and/or federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars.	THEC TBR UT LGIs
	Students attending institutions in this network benefit from systemwide, shared programs of study that lead to meaningful credentials by 2025. These programs of study include flexible entry and exit points for students and are built in partnership with education-industry advisory councils. This work contributes to a strategic plan to develop stackable credential pathways by 2025.	
Renew CCTA's charge to establish a unified, comprehensive community college system.	All TBR institutions fully implement best practices on common course numbering, cohort programming, and block scheduling.	TBR
	Students use a common application process for community colleges and a one-click registration process for their chosen program of study.	

RECOMMENDATION

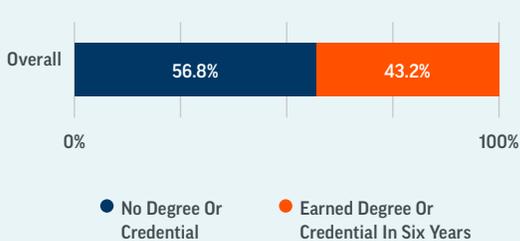
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**INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS WITH TENNESSEE TRANSFER PATHWAYS**

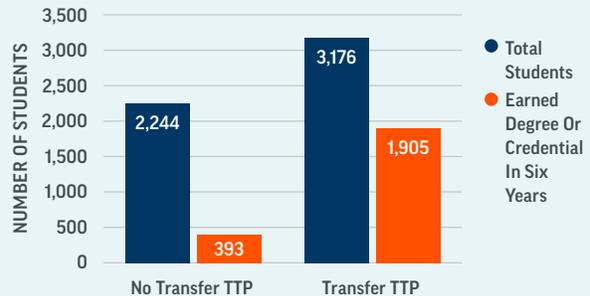
Many more students aspire to transfer to a university and earn a four-year degree than succeed in doing that. Tennessee should analyze why it is so hard for students to

navigate TTP and introduce solutions that enable thousands more students to earn four-year degrees.

**THE MAJORITY OF TENNESSEE TRANSFER PATHWAY STUDENTS DO NOT COMPLETE ON-TIME...**



**BUT THOSE WHO SUCCESSFULLY TRANSFER ARE MORE LIKELY TO COMPLETE**



Tennessee Transfer Pathways success rates overall and by pathway, 2019

Source: THEC, 2020

“Transferring was pretty much my plan from the start going in. Tennessee Promise was the only reason I was even in college because I couldn’t afford it and I didn’t do too hot grade wise. So I always wanted to do four years as long as I could do it with financial aid. - Tennessee Promise Student

RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Support students to better utilize and succeed in Transfer Pathways.	Funds are appropriated for eligible Promise students that enroll in a pathway to receive additional funding.	General Assembly
	Tennessee Promise students utilizing a Transfer Pathway receive a financial aid premium to cover books and transportation fees, and institutions receive additional funding for increasing the number of completers who are TTP students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Assembly</li> <li>• THEC</li> <li>• Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC)</li> </ul>
	High school and college advising staff receive ongoing professional training to increase the number of students who successfully use the Tennessee Transfer Pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TDOE</li> <li>• THEC</li> <li>• TBR</li> </ul>
	TTP students can easily indicate intent to transfer – such as a simple check of a box during the enrollment process – and institutions offer consistent support on individualized completion plans.	TBR
Analyze and monitor the efficacy of Tennessee Transfer Pathways.	Tennessee has a mixed methods study that provides an evaluation of TTP effectiveness and notes specific barriers students and institutions face in implementing these pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• THEC</li> <li>• Tennessee Postsecondary Evaluation and Analysis Research Lab (PEARL)</li> <li>• University of Tennessee Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research</li> </ul>
	Dashboards exist to monitor TTP student progress on pathways, credit articulation, and post-graduation outcomes at each institution.	THEC, Institutions
	Best practices of community colleges and universities that have successful articulation outcomes for TTP students are being shared.	THEC, TBR

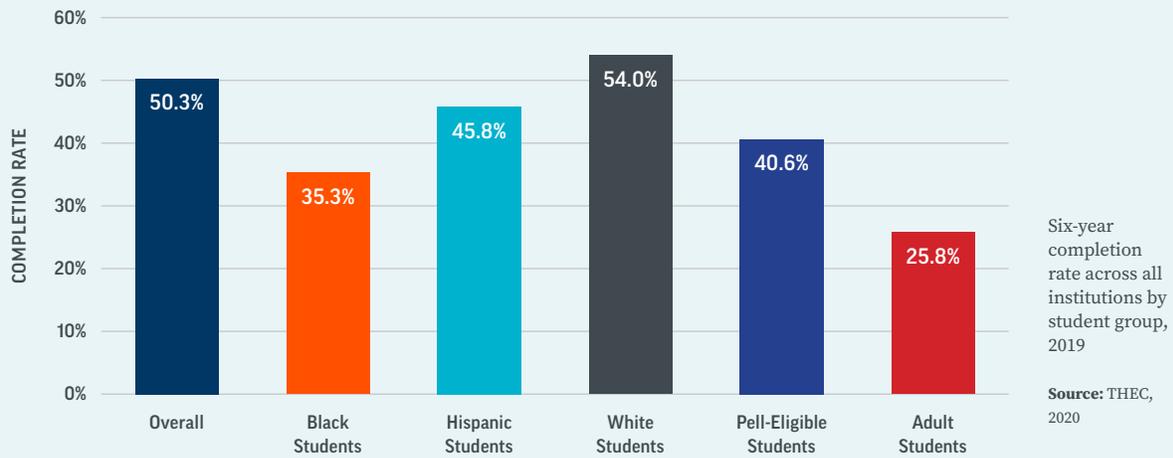
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## RECOMMENDATION MAINTAIN MOMENTUM FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The last decade has confirmed Tennessee's belief that a postsecondary credential is the entry to more economic opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted student pursuit of higher education just as a postsecondary credential is even more essential for starting a high-quality career. However, these gaps were present even before the pandemic, and the state needs to support initiatives and investments that increase support and flexibility for specific

student groups. The state cannot be satisfied with only one in ten low-income high school students successfully completing a postsecondary credential. Tennessee must embrace innovation to increase completion. The next decade will be as important as the previous decade for helping Tennessee and Tennesseans realize the benefits of postsecondary credentials.

## POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION GAPS REQUIRE ATTENTION



“ My least favorite thing that I hear from postsecondary is, ‘We’re already doing that.’ I struggle with that. Sure fine, you’re doing it. But at what scale? With what students? - Nonprofit Leader

RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Create a first-to-finish initiative that supports institutions to support student success with evidence-based programs.	All Tennessee institutions implement systematic, evidence-based programs to support student success – providing nontuition supports, high school transition supports, cohort-based learning communities, completion coaching, and responsive data systems tied to intervention strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor</li> <li>• General Assembly</li> <li>• Local Philanthropy</li> <li>• Nonprofit partnering organizations</li> </ul>
Improve Tennessee Promise to enhance student credit earning and remove barriers for eligibility.	Tennessee Promise students can take part-time courses during the summer term without counting toward the five-semester limit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Assembly</li> <li>• TSAC</li> <li>• Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association</li> <li>• TBR</li> </ul>
	Mandatory meetings for Tennessee Promise students do not become barriers for eligibility.	
	High school juniors who apply early for Tennessee Promise can access related supports for earlier application.	
	Institutions receiving education lottery scholarships offer first-time, full-time freshmen a one-hour student success course during the first semester. The requirement is waived for students who took a success course in high school.	
Require a review of community college compliance with the CCTA.	The state takes any remaining steps to fully implement CCTA at community colleges.	General Assembly Comptroller’s Office

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RECOMMENDATION	WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE	KEY ROLES
Increase the number of students who are dual admitted.	Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, and Tennessee Transfer Pathways students are automatically dual admitted to a student-selected four-year institution and are provided an opt-out option.	THEC
	Institutions are rewarded in the OBF formula for increasing the number of dual-admitted completers.	
Invest in better college and career advising across K-12 and postsecondary continuum.	All high school students have flexible options – virtual and/or in-person – to meet annually with a counselor or adviser to complete an individualized graduation plan that matches their college and career aspirations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor</li> <li>• General Assembly</li> <li>• SBE</li> <li>• Local Philanthropy</li> <li>• Local Nonprofit Organizations</li> </ul>
	The state has a virtual college and career planning platform that enables all students to receive college and career planning at least annually in middle and high school. Students submit and update their individual graduation plan on the platform.	

## ACCELERATING TENNESSEE'S PROGRESS THROUGH STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP

In 2021, the Tennessee General Assembly should act in three key areas to ensure students can transition into and through the state's postsecondary system smoothly:

- **Fully fund the outcomes-based funding formula growth**, rewarding public colleges and universities for the improvements made on the formula's outcomes in the 2019-20 academic year.
- **Launch a completion grant program**, providing additional financial assistance to Tennessee Promise students beyond tuition and fees to ensure students are equipped to persist and complete and certificate or degree.
- **Direct school districts to develop an advanced coursework policy**, ensuring that every student has equitable opportunity to enroll in rigorous coursework in math, English language arts, and science, and is academically prepared for postsecondary coursework.

## GOING HIGHER

Tennessee as a state is well positioned to lead the nation in forward-thinking higher education policy that begins with the end in mind. Our state can build on the policies already in place and help our students leapfrog to the top of the nation in degree attainment. To do this, Tennessee must foster a higher education system that centers every level of its work on the mission of supporting all students

who enter higher education to attain their degrees. We can provide the opportunities and supports that increase degree attainment for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students and eliminate the gap with White and wealthier students by the end of the decade. When we as a state do this, we as a state can realize the benefits of a citizenry that is prepared for the economic future.

## ABOUT SCORE

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit education policy and advocacy organization based in Nashville, Tennessee. SCORE was founded in 2009 by Senator Bill Frist, MD, former US Senate majority leader, and works to transform education in Tennessee so all students can achieve success in college, career, and life.



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1207 18TH AVENUE SOUTH, SUITE 326  
NASHVILLE, TN 37212  
615.727.1545 • INFO@TNSCORE.ORG

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