

**Community-Based College
Success Programs:**

A PLAYBOOK FOR DATA-DRIVEN STUDENT SUPPORT

— SPRING 2021

SCORE
State Collaborative on Reforming Education



INTRODUCTION

The economic health of a community depends in large part on the skills of its workforce. In the 21st century, most jobs require that candidates have earned a college degree or career credential. Increasingly, communities that are eager to build a stronger economic base begin to explore how to increase the percentage of workers who have completed education beyond high school.

Current college enrollment and completion trends reveal that it is not easy to get students ready for college, enrolled in college, and through college.

Tennessee has been a leader in college access and completion policies over the past decade with Tennessee Promise and a higher education funding system that incentivizes institutions to focus on higher rates of completion. Within a decade, the percentage of adult Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential rose nearly 50 percent from just under 38 percent to just over 51 percent. At the same time, the state has large college completion disparities between White (54 percent), African American (35 percent) and Latinx (46 percent) residents.

Other trends also indicate more remains to be done to solve the degree-attainment problem. The first cohort of Tennessee Promise in 2015 set an enrollment record of new high school graduates at the state's community colleges. But these enrollment gains began dropping the next year, and in 2020 –when enrollment was deeply affected by the pandemic – the community college numbers were at about the same level as before Tennessee Promise. In the face of these trends, local leaders in education and economic development have started their own initiatives focused on helping students obtain the degrees and credentials needed for individual and community prosperity.

Several Tennessee communities have succeeded in increasing enrollment in and completion of college and career training with initiatives that use data to create and fine-tune student-focused programs. Another common trait of these community-based projects is a broad-based coalition of partners from government, K-12 education, higher education, and major employers

who bring a student focus to the work to increase the degrees and career credentials most needed in the local economy. These unified partnerships help communities zero in on the components that are essential for student success in higher education and careers: academic preparedness, support to navigate the transition from high school to college or career training, and assistance to persist in and complete college.

This report fills a gap in current postsecondary completion efforts. It compiles information about these cutting-edge initiatives to create a playbook for other communities that want to improve degree attainment and their economic foundations. This report identifies three common success principles, sets out a template for collecting and monitoring the data that will inform decision-making, and spotlights how Tennessee initiatives have used data and partnerships to show strong, positive signs of impact on students and their postsecondary success.

Community-based efforts are the next frontier in college access and completion work. The goal of this playbook is to foster collaboration within communities and accelerate progress across Tennessee. By learning from experiences elsewhere, more communities can jump-start their work and ensure that their own efforts are focused on students, strive for ambitious and measurable goals, and use data to support student success.



SUCCESS PRINCIPLES



All six partnerships highlighted in this playbook use data strategically to help students enroll and persist in postsecondary opportunities. Although these partnerships use varied approaches, they each are committed to three core principles:

- > Student focus
- > Measurable and ambitious goals
- > Actionable data

The following table lists the most promising practices used by one or more of these partnerships.

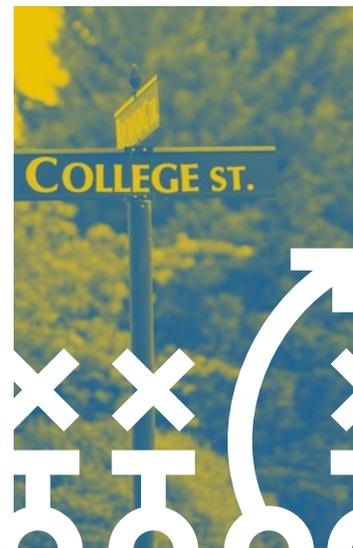
Principle	In Action
Student Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Staff use data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status to identify challenges and design student supports. > Designated staff specialize in college and career planning and preparation, freeing up guidance counselors to support high school students in other important ways. > Staff use a case-management approach to monitor and offer support to high school juniors and seniors. > Staff identify nonacademic barriers and connect students to community resources. > Staff implement early and targeted supports for students who are off track academically.
Measurable And Ambitious Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Leaders set and communicate a broad vision for postsecondary success that encompasses college, technical training, military service, and career. > Designated staff specialize in college and career planning and preparation, freeing up school counselors to support high school students in other important ways. > Leaders set measurable and ambitious goals that include a focus on students from historically underserved groups. > Leaders and staff engage in conversations about racial equity and how to achieve it for their students.
Actionable Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Staff use reports from the National Student Clearinghouse to track postsecondary attainment and completion by student subgroup, identify bright spots and challenges, and adjust programmatic supports based on historical trends. > Leaders and staff use trackers and dashboards to monitor progress toward short- and long-term goals. > Staff use an information-management system to store data and run reports. > Leaders and staff engage in regular meetings to review data, anticipate and discuss challenges, and celebrate successes.

Collecting Data And Monitoring Progress

Identifying the right data to collect and use to monitor progress toward larger goals is an essential step to building strong partnerships for supporting postsecondary success. [Education Strategy Group](#) (ESG) works with K-12, higher education, and workforce leaders to achieve better outcomes for students. ESG highlights a set of [Momentum Metrics](#) that K-12 systems can adopt to increase the number of students who enroll and succeed in postsecondary opportunities. These metrics are divided into three categories with individual indicators of student success:

- > **Preparing**
- > **Applying**
- > **Enrolling**

The information that follows gives an overview of the Momentum Metrics, as well as key questions to ask as you plan which metrics to adopt.



PREPARING: KEY INDICATORS

ESG Momentum Metric	Definition	Why It Is Important	In Action
Ninth-Grade GPA	The percentage of students who have achieved at least a 3.0 GPA at the end of ninth grade.	<p>Research shows that GPA is a strong predictor of postsecondary success, and GPA can be used for course placement at Tennessee Board of Regents institutions.</p> <p>Tracking ninth-grade GPA allows schools to design early and targeted interventions for students who are off track.</p> <p>Students in Tennessee are eligible for the HOPE Scholarship by finishing high school with at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA.</p>	Chicago Public Schools uses a freshman on-track reporting system to help high schools know when their ninth-grade students are falling behind academically. Schools then use tutors, mentors, and after-school and summer programming to intervene with students.
Potential For Advanced Coursework	The percentage of students identified with the potential to succeed in advanced coursework at the end of 10th grade who have successfully completed at least one Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or dual enrollment course by the time they graduate.	Participation in early postsecondary opportunities is linked to higher rates of high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary persistence.	The San Antonio Independent School District creates a customized report for each of its high schools that shows each student's potential for success in each Advanced Placement course offered by the College Board. Schools use this data to guide course offerings and scheduling.
High-Quality Pathway Participation	Of the students who participate in career and technical education coursework, the percentage that concentrate in an in-demand pathway, as defined by regional labor market data.	Low-income and male students who complete high-demand career and technical pathways are more likely to graduate from high school.	The Kentucky Department of Education tracks school districts' career pathway offerings. Districts are only permitted to use state or federal funds for programs that are aligned to high-demand pathways.

APPLYING: KEY INDICATORS

ESG Momentum Metric	Definition	Why It Is Important	In Action
College Application	The percentage of eligible high school seniors who submitted at least two college applications.	Submitting at least two college applications increases the likelihood of a student enrolling in a postsecondary institution by 40 percent.	Advisers for The Ayers Foundation's Scholars Program, which serves students in five rural Tennessee districts, encourage high school seniors to apply to a safety, target, and dream school.
Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion	The percentage of eligible seniors who complete FAFSA by the state deadline, usually February 7.	Completing the FAFSA helps students qualify for grants and loans that make postsecondary education more affordable and increases the likelihood that a student will enroll in postsecondary education after high school graduation.	The Better Together partnership between Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville State Community College, and tnAchieves, tracks and reviews FAFSA submission data that is disaggregated by high school, as well as student demographics, on a weekly basis. The data inform district- and school-level follow-up.
College Match	The percentage of high school seniors who are admitted to at least one "match" postsecondary institution.	Research indicates that students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to "undermatch" by enrolling in less selective institutions than their academic profile indicates.	Chattanooga PEF advisers receive training on match and fit and use historical undermatch data to inform their advising.

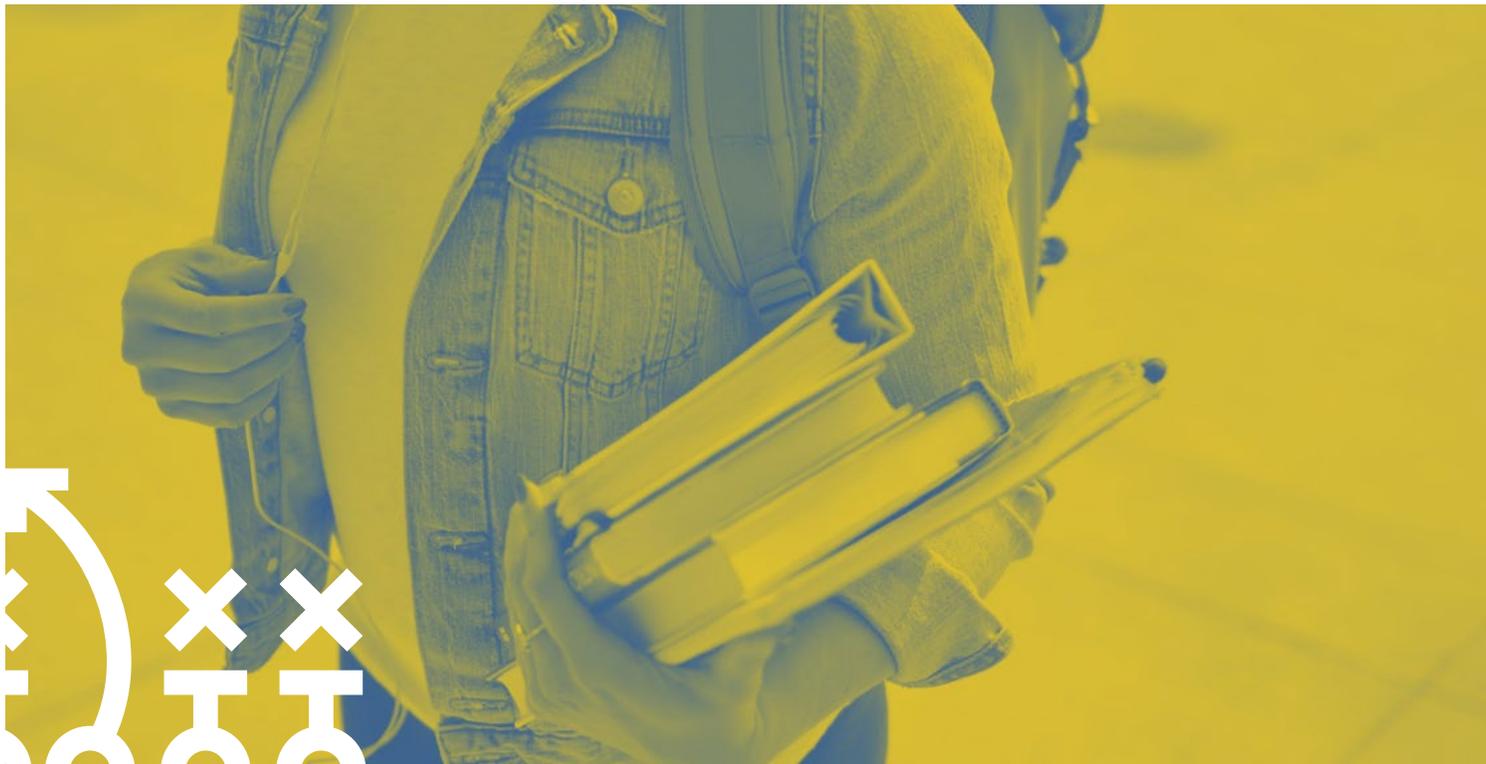
ENROLLING: KEY INDICATORS

ESG Momentum Metric	Definition	Why It Is Important	In Action
Seamless Enrollment	The percentage of students who enroll at a postsecondary institution directly after high school; percentage of students who enlist in the military, enter the workforce, or participate in a registered apprenticeship.	Students who do not enroll in postsecondary education directly after high school graduation are less likely to earn a degree or credential. In Tennessee, 41.9 percent of Class of 2019 students who completed the Tennessee Promise application did not enroll in college during the fall after high school graduation (a phenomenon known as "summer melt").	NiswongerCARE recruits and trains near-peer advisers to work in 30 high schools in Northeast Tennessee. Their Big Bright Future initiative combats summer melt by pairing advisers with select recent high school graduates who are at risk of not enrolling in postsecondary education in the fall. Advisers send weekly personalized text messages to students during the summer months and are available to provide in-person support.
Gateway Course Completion	The percentage of students at a postsecondary institution who complete "gateway" courses within their first year.	Twenty percent of students attending four-year institutions and 50 percent of students attending two-year institutions are placed in remedial courses, making their path to a degree much more challenging.	Tennessee Board of Regents institutions use a corequisite approach to course remediation that has led to increased retention rates for first-year students.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

School districts and organizations should carefully consider which of the Momentum Metrics will be most helpful to adopt and when. Start small by selecting two or three metrics initially. As you plan which metrics to begin using, consider questions related to **vision, prioritization, targets, and systems.**

Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What is the overall vision for postsecondary success? > What will program progress look like in the next year? > What will success look like in the next three to five years?
Prioritization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Which metrics are essential to tracking progress toward this vision? > Which metrics are most needed in the short term? > Which metrics can be adopted later?
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Which short- and long-term targets are needed for each metric? > How will targets be differentiated for student subgroups (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status)?
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What systems are already in place for collecting, tracking, and communicating about data? > What new systems will be needed to track the progress of each metric? > What systems will be needed to review, discuss, and act on data collected for the metric?



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

Communities across Tennessee have been using data to design college enrollment and completion programs that are helping more students achieve their higher education dreams. The six following spotlights illuminate how the success principles outlined previously can be put into action for students.

The Scholars Program: Starting Early With Data-Driven Advising

Service Region: Eight high schools and two community colleges in rural Tennessee

Students Served Annually: 10,000

Primary Focus: Early start, data-driven advising, seamless transition

The Scholars Program of [The Ayers Foundation](#) recruits and trains college and career counselors to work in eight rural high schools in Tennessee, as well as two high schools in Missouri. Counselors provide personalized advising to students and their families through the postsecondary-planning process. After students graduate from high school, counselors continue to support them through the postsecondary enrollment process and beyond.

AYERS COUNSELORS START EARLY

Counselors ensure that students and their families start their postsecondary planning early. During the spring semester, eighth-grade students and their families attend the Future Freshman Night. This event gives counselors the chance to introduce themselves, provide an overview of the planning process, and collect student contact information.

Counselors continue to make sure students receive information about postsecondary opportunities during their first two years of high school. To ensure they reach all freshmen and sophomores, counselors at each high school give periodic workshops on preparing for college during



students' regular English classes. Organizations, such as the [Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation](#), are also invited to give presentations on financial aid and other relevant topics during this time. Freshmen and sophomores attend an annual fall college fair hosted by their high schools. This event gives students the opportunity to interact with representatives from up to 50 colleges and universities.

Tenth-grade students begin to engage more deeply in college and career exploration by taking the YouScience assessment. This online assessment provides students with information about their individual aptitudes and interests. Counselors use this data to help students reflect on their

strengths, explore possible career interests, and identify job shadow opportunities. Counselors find YouScience to be a particularly valuable tool for supporting first-generation college students who may lack access to career exploration opportunities.

Juniors continue exploring their postsecondary options by attending the fall college fair, as well as a college summit in March. The college summit is a day-long event that gives students the chance to listen to 15- to 20-minute presentations from admissions representatives from up to 10 different colleges and universities. By the end of their junior year, students are prepared with the knowledge to start the intensive postsecondary-planning process with their counselor.

DATA TO SUPPORT SENIORS

Ayers counselors use data to support high school seniors through postsecondary planning. At the start of a school year, counselors create individual files for each senior on their caseloads. Each file includes a current transcript, immunization records, community service information, and log-in information to websites that will be used during the college application process. As the school year progresses, counselors continually add information to each student's file. Students can access the information in their file as needed throughout the school year and up to six years after graduation.

Counselors use the information in the files as a starting point for understanding the unique needs of each of their students.

After reviewing their files, counselors meet individually with each of the seniors on their caseloads to start the postsecondary-planning process. During these meetings, students begin identifying their best match and fit options by discussing their goals, reviewing institution-specific [admission requirements](#), and considering affordability. Counselors encourage students to apply to a safety, target, and dream school. This research-based strategy helps prevent undermatching, which occurs when a student attends a less competitive school than their academic profile would otherwise permit. Students also complete the Tennessee Promise application and sign up for Remind, the text message application counselors use to communicate with students throughout the school year.

In addition to providing students periodic one-on-one touch points throughout the fall semester, Ayers counselors also coordinate trips to colleges and universities throughout Tennessee. Students may register for up to two visits if they meet the school's admission criteria.

Counselors use the Salesforce data management platform to track students' progress on important postsecondary planning milestones. Data tracked in this system include:

- > GPA and ACT results
- > YouScience results
- > Tennessee Promise submission status
- > Submitted college applications
- > FAFSA submission status
- > Financial aid award letters
- > Final college decision

By scheduling a weekly time to input new caseload data, counselors systemize data collection and ensure that they are always using the most accurate information to support students. This weekly data input time also helps counselors avoid being overwhelmed by information, especially when students are submitting multiple college applications during the fall semester.

Using a shared data-management system promotes continuous improvement and collaboration. The system generates reports of data and trends across all 10 high schools that Ayers supervisors use to celebrate bright spots and identify common challenges. Counselors also meet quarterly to review data, discuss challenges, and plan.

ENSURING STRONG TRANSITIONS

During the spring semester, counselors meet with students to finalize their matriculation decisions and complete critical enrollment tasks. From February through April, counselors help students submit housing applications, navigate the financial aid verification process, sign up for summer orientation, and develop a plan for getting back and forth to their chosen campus. At the end of May, counselors mail final high school transcripts to each student's selected college. By ensuring that all these important technical tasks are completed before high school graduation, counselors reduce the likelihood that students will encounter barriers during the summer months that will prevent them from enrolling in the fall.

Because Ayers counselors are 12-month employees, they continue supporting students during the summer months after high school graduation. In addition to helping students navigate critical enrollment tasks, counselors also connect students to resources to address [nonacademic needs](#), such as housing, mental health, food insecurity, and childcare. In August, counselors check in with students to make sure they have registered for classes and to help them navigate any financial aid issues. Later in the fall, counselors use National Student Clearinghouse data to verify their students' enrollment. This information is tracked in the Salesforce system and used to analyze student cohort enrollment trends.

The Ayers Foundation Scholars Program maintains strong partnerships with local postsecondary institutions that help students transition successfully onto their campuses. Recently, in response to low community college persistence rates, the program added retention coaches at Columbia State Community College and Jackson State Community College. Additionally, the program has worked closely with the local Tennessee College of Applied Technology campuses to expand popular programs and schedule additional evening classes.

The Scholars Program continues to have a positive impact on the postsecondary attainment and completion rates of the students it serves. The Ayers Foundation reports average postsecondary enrollment and completion rates of 85 percent and 75 percent, respectively.

RESOURCES

[Operations Manual](#)

[Counselor Job Description](#)

[Resource Guide For Students In Decatur County](#)

[College Requirement Worksheet](#)

[College Planning Night Presentation](#)



NiswongerCARE: Combatting Summer Melt With Near-Peer Advising

Service Region: 30 high schools in northeast Tennessee

Students Served Annually: 27,000

Primary Focus: Near-peer advising, summer melt

Established in 2015, [NiswongerCARE](#) works with 30 high schools in northeast Tennessee to increase degree completion rates for all student groups. Following the [College Advising Corps'](#) near-peer adviser model, NiswongerCARE recruits and trains recent college graduates to serve as college and career advisers to approximately 6,000 high school seniors each year.

NiswongerCARE's 10 full-time college and career advisers and three part-time graduate interns provide personalized postsecondary planning support to high school juniors and seniors. Each adviser supports a caseload of students from three different high schools, while interns support students from just one school.

NEAR-PEER ADVISING

Using the [Appreciative Advising Model](#), advisers prioritize building strong relationships with students in order to help them explore postsecondary opportunities and develop a plan for after high school. Advisers work one-on-one with students to help them research and evaluate their best match and fit postsecondary options. Students then receive ongoing coaching and support from their adviser through the college application, FAFSA, and scholarship submission processes. Students considering the military or an industry certification are still encouraged to apply for Tennessee Promise and submit the FAFSA to ensure they have the widest range of options. Advisers use shared Google spreadsheets to log notes and track students' progress toward these milestones.

In addition to supporting students through the college application and FAFSA submission process, CARE advisers are also responsible for academic coaching and family engagement. Advisers regularly work with students to develop the behaviors and skills needed for postsecondary success, including self-advocacy,



time management, and organization. Advisers also conduct regular outreach to parents to share updates and discuss goals for their child. In the spring, advisers meet with students and their families to review postsecondary options and finalize a matriculation decision.

TACKLING SUMMER MELT

NiswongerCARE's [Big Bright Future](#) initiative provides intensive summer support to recent high school graduates. Each November, advisers identify high school seniors most at risk for summer melt, the phenomenon where students who intended to go to college graduate from high school but do not enroll for the fall semester. Advisers keep more detailed records of their interactions with these students, and beginning in January focus on having these students complete the [Big Bright Future enrollment form](#) that is emailed to them as a Google form. This process provides advisers with additional information about each student's postsecondary intentions and their progress toward critical transition tasks.

The enrollment form also requires students to sign an agreement and commit to:

- › Staying in touch with their assigned adviser over the summer
- › Doing their best to prepare for the transition to college in the fall
- › Consenting to an adviser contacting their chosen postsecondary institution regarding any outstanding enrollment tasks

After students complete the enrollment process, advisers add them to Signal Vine, the communication platform NiswongerCARE uses to send personalized text messages to students. Students are then assigned to an adviser's caseload based on the postsecondary institution they will be attending in the fall. Last summer, advisers supported students at 38 different colleges and universities.

Organizing caseloads in this manner has two primary benefits. First, it facilitates the development of the institution-specific expertise that advisers need to help students navigate the transition onto a new campus. Second, it increases adviser efficiency because they are helping students who are working through the same enrollment tasks.

When advisers receive their finalized summer caseload during the first week of June, they begin communicating with students via Signal Vine. Advisers send out general greetings and announcements every Monday. During the rest of the week, they send students reminders about completing time-sensitive enrollment tasks, along with messages that are meant to be fun and encouraging. To **ensure that communication is personalized, productive, and engaging**, advisers use the following guidelines to craft text messages and communicate with students through the Signal Vine platform:

- › Reference students' completed milestones before crafting messages to ensure they are as personalized as possible.
- › Embed a link in the message to make it easy for students to find information or complete a task.
- › Embed videos, emojis, and GIFs in the message to capture students' interest.
- › If multiple students are asking the same question, send out a text that addresses the question to all students on your caseload.

- › Make sure to respond quickly. If you have just sent a text, students think you are ready for a conversation.

Advisers also are available to provide one-on-one support to students during the summer months. While advisers have the flexibility to set their summer work hours around student schedules, they must be available at least 6.5 hours a day. Students may request a virtual or in-person meeting with their adviser through NiswongerCARE's website. Virtual meetings are held through Zoom or Google Hangouts, while in-person meetings typically take place on a college campus or at a coffee shop.

After a student schedules an in-person meeting, they are reminded by the adviser to send a confirmation text prior to the meeting. If the student does not follow this guideline, then advisers do not attend the meeting. This guideline helps students practice the kind of communication they will need to use when they start on their campuses in the fall and protects advisers' time.

NiswongerCARE's Big Bright Future initiative continues to demonstrate positive results. In 2019, NiswongerCARE reports that 225 students signed up to receive summer support and 329, or 74 percent, enrolled at a postsecondary institution in the fall after high school graduation. In 2020, they report that 481 students received summer support and 317, or 66 percent, enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the fall after high school graduation. While there is not an exact statewide comparison due to the opt-in nature of this program, across Tennessee only 58.1 percent of college-intending high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education the fall after their graduation.

RESOURCES

[Student Resources](#)

[Delivery Of Service Template And Advisor Job Description](#)

[Big Bright Future Enrollment Form](#)



tnAchieves: Targeted Communication And Data-Driven Coaching At Scale

Service Region: 90 counties and 601 high schools across Tennessee

Students Served Annually: 85,000

Primary Focus: Data-driven coaching at scale, seamless transition

Originally launched as knoxAchieves in 2008, [tnAchieves](#) serves as the partnering organization to Tennessee Promise in 90 counties and 600 high schools in Tennessee. It seeks to expand postsecondary access and completion for students across the state by using several high-impact strategies. All Tennessee Promise students are paired with a volunteer mentor who regularly checks in and provides guidance in the college process. tnAchieves also maintains targeted communication with students, families, school districts, and other stakeholders across the state to share critical information about the college-going process, highlight data, and celebrate successes. Additionally, tnAchieves provides intensive summer programming and ongoing one-on-one coaching to students identified as needing additional academic and social support.

TARGETED COMMUNICATION

tnAchieves provides targeted communication about Tennessee Promise, FAFSA, and the college-going process to students, families, school districts, and other stakeholders throughout the school year and summer months.

Meetings are one important way to communicate with students. tnAchieves staff host three meetings for each Tennessee Promise cohort. During the fall Tennessee Promise assembly, high school seniors receive a copy of the [tnAchieves Handbook](#) and an overview of eligibility requirements. The spring mentor meeting gives students and their assigned mentors the opportunity to meet and complete a goal-setting activity. The fall mentor meeting gives new first-year college students the chance to complete a time-management activity with their mentor and review requirements for maintaining their Promise eligibility. Students who attend all three of these meetings are 31 percentage points more likely to persist into their second year of college than students who do not.



Text messages and emails are another way tnAchieves provides targeted communication to stakeholders. Each year students receive a total of 45 personalized messages, including 28 emails and 17 text messages, reminding them about FAFSA and other Tennessee Promise deadlines. These personalized reminders have contributed to a 90 percent FAFSA completion rate by students who have submitted a Tennessee Promise application.

Every Monday, an email blast goes out to more than 140,000 stakeholders across the state, including parents, counselors, principals, district leaders, colleges, and partner organizations. Over the course of a year, tnAchieves sends out more than 9 million emails and 1 million text messages to stakeholders across Tennessee.

SUMMER SUPPORTS FOR UNDERPREPARED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

To provide more support for underprepared high school graduates and to close existing equity gaps in college enrollment and completion, tnAchieves

hosts three [summer programs](#) each year. Summer Bridge is a three-week bootcamp for students who require academic remediation and support. Students receive instruction in reading, writing, math, and college success. At the conclusion of the program, students take the College Board's [ACCUPLACER test](#). A qualifying score on this assessment may eliminate the need for remedial coursework in the fall semester.

Because of COVID-19, tnAchieves partnered with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and 11 community colleges in 2020 to launch an online Summer Success Course that served as an alternative to the in-person Summer Bridge program. Instead of offering the same program again this summer, tnAchieves will offer an online Summer Bridge program. This 18-day program gives students the chance to improve their reading, English, and Math skills in order to test out of remedial coursework in the fall.

A more intensive option offered by tnAchieves is the 10-week Summer Institute, which aims to address summer melt for students who may be the most underprepared for college. Students take 18 hours of corequisite instruction that uses high-impact practices, including student cohorts, prescriptive scheduling, academic tutoring, and intrusive advising.

tnAchieves summer programming continues to demonstrate impressive results. Since 2012, nearly 4,000 students have participated in the Summer Bridge program. More than half of these students have come from low-income backgrounds, while more than a third have been the first in their family to attend college. Although the average ACT composite score is 16 for Summer Bridge students, 88 percent of students have tested out of remedial coursework at the conclusion of the program.

Summer Institute also produces strong results for some of the most vulnerable Tennessee Promise students:

- › 72 percent of students who have attended Summer Institute are from a low-income background
- › 39 percent of students have been first-generation college students
- › 98 percent of the 111 students who have attended Summer Institute have successfully completed the program and earned college credits

DATA-DRIVEN COACHING AT SCALE

tnAchieves provides personalized coaching and support that is driven by data. Starting in 2018, tnAchieves created COMPLETE, a proactive, data-driven coaching model designed to increase college retention and completion of the most at-risk Tennessee Promise students. While all Tennessee Promise students receive ongoing communication and mentoring, students with an estimated family contribution of zero on their FAFSA receive additional support from a dedicated Success Coach. These COMPLETE students make up approximately 14 percent of all Tennessee Promise students.

Each Success Coach is responsible for a caseload of approximately 400 COMPLETE students. Coach communication with students is defined by interventions and connections. An intervention is defined as an attempt to reach a student by phone, text, or email. A connection is defined as having a conversation with a student that results in acquiring new knowledge that can be stored and used to inform outreach to the student. Coaches also use information gained from a connection to rank students on the COMPLETE scale:



Coaches use rankings on the COMPLETE Scale to identify challenges and prioritize interventions to students. Each coach has a goal of intervening with at least 75 students weekly and connecting with 70 percent of their caseload each month.

Because tnAchieves provides personalized coaching at scale, most coach-student interactions are virtual. As a result, coaches prioritize reaching out to students in the most personable way possible. Usually, this means calling first, then texting, then emailing, and, finally, sending a message through social media.

Coaches log their interventions and connections, key milestones, COMPLETE scale rankings, and student contact information in real time in the Salesforce student database. Coaches meet monthly and are expected to share data with their colleagues and supervisor. Each coach is responsible for being prepared to report out on the following data:

- › Number of students on their COMPLETE caseload
- › Number of interventions each month
- › Number of connections each month
- › Monthly connection rate

Coaches who do not meet their goals of intervening with at least 75 students weekly and connecting with 70 percent of their caseload monthly are required to provide documentation to their supervisor that explains the following:

- › Why expectations were not met
- › Steps taken to reach expectations
- › Barriers that prevented them from meeting expectations
- › Plans to meet expectations moving forward

Clear goals and expectations for student outreach and data tracking help make coaching more frequent, which is key to the program's evidence-based model that regular, frequent interactions with coaches keep more students on track for college.

IMPACTING PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

Since 2014, the targeted communication, summer programming, and data-driven coaching provided by tnAchieves continues to positively impact the college persistence and completion of Tennessee Promise students. First-time full-time students receiving support from tnAchieves persisted through their first year at a community college at a rate of 67 percent. This compares to 53 percent of students who are not receiving support from tnAchieves. Moreover, students attending community college and receiving support from tnAchieves have a six-year graduation rate of 51 percent, nearly double the rate of students not receiving support from tnAchieves.



RESOURCES

[tnAchieves Overview](#)

[tnAchieves Summer Programs](#)

[tnAchieves Student Handbook](#)

Knox Promise: Personalized Coaching And Microgrants

Service Region: Knox County

Students Served Annually: 2,400

Primary Focus: Personalized coaching, nontuition financial supports

Launched in August 2019 through a partnership between The Haslam Family Foundation, tnAchieves, and SCORE, Knox Promise empowers Knox County high school graduates who enroll in Tennessee Promise with additional coaching and financial supports needed to persist in college and earn a credential or degree. In addition to receiving one-on-one support from a tnAchieves coach, Knox Promise students are eligible to receive need-based microgrants to cover nontuition expenses that may arise during their first five semesters of college. Ultimately, Knox Promise aims to remove barriers to postsecondary success and ensure more students are equipped with the skills and experiences needed to thrive in the workforce upon graduation.

KNOX PROMISE COACHES PROVIDE PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

Knox Promise employs five coaches dedicated solely to working with approximately 1,600 students. Each coach's caseload consists of 215 students. Coaches connect weekly with students via phone, text message, and email. They provide additional coaching and support through in-person and virtual meetings. Coaches log all communication with students in tnAchieves' Salesforce database.

The following interventions were conducted by Knox Promise's five completion coaches during the 2019-2020 school year:

- › **14,924 attempted interventions:** An attempted intervention is logged when a coach reaches out to a student via phone call, text, or email.
- › **7,217 successful connections:** A successful connection is logged when a coach and student have a conversation that results in the coach learning something new about the student.
- › **2,043 in-person meetings:** Coaches use meetings to build relationships with students and help them work through specific challenges.



- › **382 virtual meetings:** Since the start of the COVID-19, coaches pivoted to supporting students virtually.

MICROGRANTS FOR EXPENSES BEYOND TUITION

Knox Promise uses a microgrant fund to provide students with textbook stipends and completion grants that address other nontuition related expenses. Students who graduate from a Knox County high school and remain eligible for Tennessee Promise receive a \$250 stipend per semester for up to five semesters. Students with an annual household income of \$75,000 or less also are eligible to receive a completion grant of up to \$1,500 per semester for up to five semesters. Completion grants can be used to cover a range of nontuition expenses, such as food, housing, transportation, childcare, medical care, books and supplies not covered by the book stipend, and class-specific fees.

Often, one or more of these expenses may arise unexpectedly and prevent a student from attending class or completing assignments. Unforeseen financial hardship can cause significant stress or otherwise lead directly to a student dropping out of school. Most recently, when college campuses across the state pivoted to virtual instruction because of COVID-19, these completion grants were critical to helping provide students with the laptops needed for online coursework.

Flexible and nonbureaucratic disbursement processes, along with proactive communication from Success Coaches, continue to ensure Knox Promise's microgrant funding quickly addresses students' financial challenges before they become barriers to completion.

Prior to the start of a semester, tnAchieves receives a list of students who are eligible for the textbook stipend. Funds are first used to cover electronic textbook charges on a student's account. Any portion of the \$250 stipend remaining after the electronic textbook charge is made available at the campus bookstore for the student to use to cover additional textbooks or supplies that may be needed. Any funds not used by the end of the semester are added to a student's charge balance for the next semester.

All funds are disbursed by Knox Promise to institutions through a third-party contract. Overall, this process takes the burden of securing and coordinating stipends off students and helps ensure they have the books and supplies they need to start a semester.

Knox Promise coaches' **proactive communication** and **strong relationships** with their students are key to identifying student needs and disbursing completion grants efficiently. Coaches proactively reach out to students at the start of a semester to identify who may have expenses that are eligible to be covered by a completion grant. Strong coach-student relationships also are key to this process. Because discussing financial challenges can be deeply personal, students must trust their coach to be able to engage in this kind of conversation. As coaches discuss these challenges, they also utilize the [Knox Promise resource guide](#) to help connect students to community-based resources related to health care, housing, and childcare.

After a coach has a discussion with a student and confirms that their expenses may be covered by a completion grant, the student is directed to the tnAchieves website to complete a brief [application form](#) explaining the reason for their request. As part of the application, the student must upload documentation to verify their expense and current class schedule. The tnAchieves executive director is responsible for approving all requests of \$1,500 or less. Requests that exceed \$1,500 must be reviewed by a committee of representatives from tnAchieves, SCORE, and the Tennessee Board of Regents.

Completion grants are disbursed quickly, usually within 24 hours after a student submits their application. Whenever possible, funds are disbursed directly to a vendor instead of the student. This direct disbursement of funds requires trusting students to spend funds wisely to address their own challenges. Krissy DeAlejandro, executive director of tnAchieves, notes that this direct disbursement requires trusting students to spend funds wisely to address their own challenges. Ultimately, this **flexibility** and **trust** ensures the disbursement process is student-centered.

During the 2019-2020 school year, Knox Promise disbursed more than \$466,000 through more than 2,200 textbook and supply stipends. Approximately 86 percent of eligible Knox Promise students took advantage of the textbook stipend. In the same year, students submitted more than 200 completion grant requests; nearly \$47,000 in funding was disbursed to support eligible needs. Most completion grant requests were for transportation, books and supplies, and housing. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the spring of 2020, grant requests shifted to focus on technology needed for virtual learning and groceries needed to address food insecurity.

KNOX PROMISE SHOWS EARLY IMPACT

A recent evaluation of the first year of Knox Promise conducted by the University of Tennessee Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research indicates the program is having a positive impact on first-year persistence rates. Overall, 81.1 percent of Knox Promise students who began college in Fall 2019 persisted through Spring 2020. This compares to a statewide first-year retention rate of 53 percent for first-time full-time freshmen at community colleges. Moreover, the same evaluation found students who received completion grants had first-year persistence rates of at least 95 percent.

RESOURCES

[Resource Guide For Students In Knox County](#)

[Knox Promise Completion Grant Application](#)

Better Together: Data-Driven Coordination Between District And Community College

Service Region: Metro Nashville

Students Served Annually: Approximately 4,000 high school seniors

Primary Focus: K-12 and higher ed coordination, targeted student supports, seamless transition

Traditionally, there has been little coordination between K-12 systems and local institutions of higher education to ensure more students enroll in postsecondary opportunities directly after high school. Recently, Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and Nashville State Community College (NSCC) forged a partnership focused on supporting greater postsecondary enrollment and completion for MNPS graduates.

Announced in February 2020 by Metro Nashville Public Schools Director Dr. Adrienne Battle and Nashville State Community College President Dr. Shanna Jackson, the Better Together partnership aims to remove roadblocks along the path from high school to higher ed, increase college access and college completion among Nashville's students, and better prepare students for the current and emerging workforce needs of Nashville's growing economy. This partnership believes in a theory of action based on strategic data-sharing, coordination, and targeted student supports.

DATA-DRIVEN COORDINATION

Ambitious goals and strategic data-sharing help drive effective coordination between MNPS and NSCC leaders. Better Together has set ambitious goals focused on college access, persistence, and completion. Each goal is disaggregated by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. These goals drive ongoing reflection and discussion about how to best support students.

The partnership is working toward a formal data-sharing agreement between MNPS, NSCC, and tNAchieves to allow student-level data to be shared, organized, and analyzed to support students and evaluate the effectiveness of programming. Until that agreement is finalized, tNAchieves manages shared data with a customized Salesforce dashboard that is updated in real time. Access to this data helps NSCC better recruit, prepare for, and advise students from MNPS high schools. Likewise,



this data helps MNPS better understand the impact of its programming on its graduates' performance at NSCC and allows them to refine supports for the next cohort of students.

Maintaining a structure for ongoing communication and collaboration has been another key to the success of the Better Together partnership. Dr. Jackson, Dr. Battle, and other members of the Better Together team meet every Friday for one hour to review data, celebrate successes, plan for upcoming initiatives, and address challenges. Typically, the first half of the meeting includes quick updates and celebrations with all partners present while the second half is reserved for in-depth planning or problem-solving with the senior leadership team. Although this weekly meeting requires a significant commitment from busy leaders at NSCC and MNPS, it continues to be invaluable for maintaining the momentum and direction of the partnership.

Several organizations participate in the weekly meeting and support Better Together on an ongoing basis, including:

- › **tnAchieves:** Manages the shared data dashboard. Uses student contact information and preferences from Tennessee Promise applications to send personalized text and email “nudges” to MNPS students and parents about next steps for enrolling at NSCC.
- › **BrightPath:** Recruits and trains tutors to work with MNPS graduates who are headed to NSCC. Current high school students in dual enrollment classes with NSCC also have access to BrightPath tutors.
- › **Nashville Public Education Fund:** Plans weekly meetings and manages the process

of connecting new initiatives to existing community efforts.

- › **SCORE:** Assists with planning for weekly meetings, manages ongoing communication, and provides general technical support. SCORE also helped facilitate the initial launch of the partnership.

TARGETED STUDENT SUPPORTS REMOVE ROADBLOCKS

Since last May, Better Together has launched several targeted student support initiatives to eliminate roadblocks and support students on their path to postsecondary education. The following table summarizes each of these initiatives.

Key Initiatives to Date	Description
Data Dashboard	tnAchieves has constructed a shared data dashboard for Better Together that reports key information about students' journeys from MNPS to and through Nashville State, for the purposes of targeted interventions for students.
Targeted Nudges And Outreach	Using student contact information and college preferences from Tennessee Promise applications, tnAchieves sends personalized text and email messages, reminders, and “nudges” to MNPS students (and their parents) about the next steps they need to take to apply and enroll at Nashville State, as well as opportunities for additional support.
Expanded Dual Enrollment	Because current state policy requires a 3.6 GPA for dual enrollment courses, less than 5 percent of NSCC-bound grads from MNPS have traditionally been eligible for dual enrollment in high school. In the 2020-21 school year, MNPS and NSCC advocated to become part of a pilot waiver to lower the GPA requirement to a 2.8 with a recommendation, expanding dual enrollment to more students at more high schools.
BrightPath Tutoring And Mentoring	BrightPath provides MNPS high school students and recent graduates with free one-on-one virtual tutoring from near-peer college students and graduates.
Nashville GRAD	Aimed at removing the nonacademic barriers to college retention and completion for NSCC students from Nashville, the Nashville GRAD program offers money for textbooks and transportation, a laptop computer, direct advising, and career development support. Nashville GRAD is supported by the Mayor’s office and community partners.

EXPANDING STUDENT SUCCESS

Although the Better Together partnership is still new, it has nonetheless achieved several early successes:

- › **BrightPath Tutoring:** In the fall of 2020, 100 students who enrolled in an NSCC dual enrollment course received one-on-one tutoring.
- › **Expanded Dual Enrollment:** In the fall of 2020, students across 18 MNPS high schools took more than 600 NSCC courses as part of the new pilot to expand dual enrollment eligibility. Approximately 100 students who otherwise would not have been eligible were able to participate in dual enrollment because of this pilot.
- › **FAFSA Completion:** Even though high school students were learning virtually because of the pandemic, the FAFSA submission rate for MNPS students was greater than the statewide average.
- › **Nashville GRAD:** The Tennessee Board of Regents recognized Nashville GRAD as a promising public-private partnership by honoring the program with the TBR SOAR Partnership Award on March 25, 2021.

The Better Together partnership continues to look for ways to build on its current successes and deepen its impact on students' postsecondary success. MNPS and NSCC are finalizing plans for a Faculty Collaborative that would create a shared model for teaching and learning. This initiative would also expand high-quality dual enrollment and dual credit opportunities for MNPS students, as well as develop strategies to improve persistence rates for MNPS dual enrollment students and NSCC students.

Additionally, the partnership is planning intensive summer programming for Class of 2021 students who are underprepared for college, including a college success course, summer bridge program, and summer bootcamp.

RESOURCES

[Better Together Summary](#)

[Better Together Student Supports](#)



Chattanooga Public Education Foundation: Personalized Advising And Making Data Actionable

Service Region: Hamilton County

Students Served Annually: 12,079

Primary Focus: Personalized advising, data tools

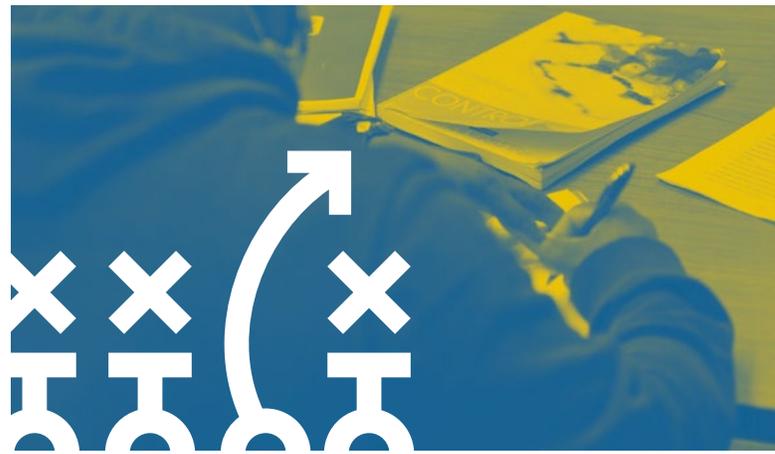
Over the last 15 years, the [Chattanooga Public Education Foundation](#) has partnered closely with Hamilton County Schools and community leaders to improve the postsecondary success of its students. Three core tenets – a shared vision for postsecondary success, putting students at the center of the work, and a commitment to sharing and using data to drive continuous improvement – continue to support this partnership.

A SHARED VISION FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Chattanooga PEF, Hamilton County Schools, and partners from across the region are committed to a broad vision for postsecondary success that includes two- and four-year degree programs, certifications, apprenticeships, and military service. All students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, deserve the preparation and support needed to pursue the postsecondary opportunity that best aligns to their goals, hopes, and dreams. To make this vision a reality, Chattanooga PEF and its partners are committed to confronting the systemic barriers that have disproportionately impacted students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Aligning partners around ambitious goals is another critical component of Chattanooga PEF's success. Two big goals currently guide the organization's postsecondary success work:

- › Within six months of graduating from high school, 85 percent of all Hamilton County public school students will enroll in college, a program that grants a certificate with value in our market, or the military.
- › Low-income, first-generation college students from Hamilton County will enroll, persist, and graduate at the same rate as other student groups students or at an even higher rate than all students.



STUDENT FOCUS

Advising that helps students find their postsecondary path is central to the strategy. Starting in 2005, Chattanooga PEF began placing part-time college and career advisers in select Hamilton County public high schools as part of a concerted effort to increase the number of students enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary opportunities. By 2009, PEF had expanded this effort and placed an adviser at every high school in the district. The success of this initiative led Hamilton County Schools in 2019 to fund a full-time college and career adviser at each high school.

College and career advisers with Hamilton County Schools focus solely on postsecondary planning and preparation, freeing up high school counselors to focus on supporting students in other important ways. Managing a caseload of 200 students, advisers provide small group coaching and one-on-one support to juniors and seniors. Advisers build deep relationships with students and seek to understand their strengths, goals after high school, current supports, and any barriers to postsecondary success. As advisers build a holistic understanding of their students, they use institution-specific persistence and completion data to help inform the college search and application process. Ultimately, advisers want students to find the postsecondary opportunity that is the best match for their academic profile and best fit for their specific needs and wants.

One adviser in Hamilton County Schools described the role this way: "We are specialists, advisers, and advocates for the children. Often we are their last point of contact before going off into adult life."

While college and career advisers ensure high school students have access to postsecondary opportunities, College Advancement Mentors help college freshmen and sophomores enroll, persist, and succeed in higher education. As recent college graduates, College Advancement Mentors serve as near-peer advisers to their caseloads of approximately 100 students who attend local colleges. These mentors help students navigate challenges related to initial enrollment, class registration, and financial aid.

ACTIONABLE DATA

Chattanooga PEF partners with Hamilton County Schools and leaders from across the region to collect and leverage data to support students on their path to postsecondary success. Beginning in 2005, Chattanooga PEF used National Student Clearinghouse data to track Hamilton County School graduates' enrollment into two- and four-year colleges. This tracked data is packaged into district- and school-level reports that included matriculation, persistence, and completion data by gender, race, and ethnicity. High school principals get a copy tailored for their school so they can make data-informed decisions to drive improvement.

Chattanooga PEF's efforts to make data accessible and actionable took off with the establishment of the College Access Network within Hamilton County Schools in 2007. This network continues to bring together staff from across the district to review postsecondary access and persistence data and discuss strategies for improvement. The data and information from these meetings are shared with postsecondary institutions, the chamber of commerce, and local business and foundation leaders.

Formal data-sharing agreements are also essential to Chattanooga PEF's ability to use data to inform college and career advising. A 2017 agreement between Chattanooga PEF and Hamilton County Schools allowed PEF to link P-12 data with persistence and completion data from the National Student Clearinghouse. Around the same time, Chattanooga PEF partnered with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to build a college and career advising dashboard and to use data analytics to better understand the factors that lead Hamilton County Schools' graduates to succeed in two- and four-year colleges.

As a result of strong data-sharing agreements and partnerships, Chattanooga PEF has been able to build a variety of student-centered advising tools,

including:

- › Freshmen on-track for high school graduation
- › Rising seniors on-track for success through their first year of postsecondary, as determined by GPA, behavior, and attendance
- › An Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System dashboard designed for college and career advisers
- › A dashboard for college and career advisers to use with high school students to determine postsecondary fit and match options for colleges and universities from across the country

To ensure that the most complete and accurate student data is being collected and shared, Chattanooga PEF works closely with college and career advisers through an annual data reconciliation process. After receiving initial college enrollment and persistence data from the National Student Clearinghouse in October, Chattanooga PEF sends a list of recent high school graduates who are not showing up as enrolled in college to the individual advisers who know them best. Advisers contact students and families to get an update on their current plans. This process allows advisers to correct any inaccurate Student Clearinghouse data, and to account for students who may have enlisted in the military or are pursuing a specific career pathway program.

Chattanooga PEF's student focus and push to leverage tools and processes to make data actionable has led to positive outcomes for students. Since 2005, the percentage of Hamilton County graduates who have enrolled in a postsecondary opportunity, including a certification program, two-year college, or four-year college, has increased from 58 percent to 75 percent.

RESOURCES

[College And Career Adviser Annual Timeline](#)

[College Advancement Mentor Job Description](#)

[Example Of Annual Postsecondary Pathway Results](#)

[Example School Data Packet](#)

[Example School Profile](#)

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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