

# SEIZING THE MOMENT

2022 STATE OF EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE



**SCORE**  
State Collaborative on Reforming Education



## CONTENTS

LETTER FROM SENATOR BILL FRIST AND DAVID MANSOURI	<b>03</b>
COVID-19 INTERRUPTS TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION PROGRESS	<b>06</b>
2022 PRIORITIES	<b>12</b>
Accelerate Student Learning	12
Close Tennessee's College Completion Gaps	20
Increase High-Quality Charter School Opportunities	28
Support Students To Be Ready For Careers	36
SCORE LEADERSHIP AND TEAM	<b>46</b>
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES	<b>48</b>



# URGENCY TO CREATE A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR TENNESSEE STUDENTS

Dear Friends,

For more than a decade, SCORE has issued annual *State Of Education In Tennessee* reports to examine education progress in the past year, lay out data that indicate challenges facing the state's students, and set the education policy priorities for the year ahead. As we conclude 2021 with a clearer view of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected student success, this year's report comes at a particularly urgent moment in Tennessee's education story.

Tennessee began 2021 acting boldly for students. In January, Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly took important steps to address the pandemic's early impacts on education. The Tennessee Literacy Success Act codified research-based early literacy practices and will help ensure that more Tennessee students build a strong foundation in reading in grades K-3. Policymakers supported extended instructional time for the state's younger students through summer learning camps to help students make up for lost classroom time. And recognizing the importance of statewide assessment data to understand COVID-19's impact on student learning, the state set high expectations for testing participation and granted one year of flexibility in the accountability system.

In April, lawmakers also acted to support students moving through our state's higher education system. The legislature provided critical funding to reward public colleges and universities for retaining and graduating students in the last year and launched a pilot completion grant program that will help Tennessee Promise students cover additional, nontuition costs so that they can persist and earn their degrees. The decisive policymaking provided much needed support for students and educators.

But the pandemic and its effects on students has lingered, causing fresh concerns for students, educators, and advocates at every level of education.

Between 2019 and 2021, student proficiency declined in nearly all subjects and grades. Community college enrollment and persistence have also declined steadily in the last two years, even as the state's economy continues to demand that Tennesseans hold postsecondary credentials to find success in the workplace.

Tennessee must again enact bold policies and investments that will both accelerate and reenvision student success from kindergarten to career. Strong policy solutions require clear definitions of the problem, and this report highlights the data that shed light on the most urgent challenges students face.

We have reached a pivotal moment for Tennessee students. Policymakers, educators, parents, advocates, and community members must seize this moment to develop consensus and adopt policy solutions to address these complex problems. At SCORE, one resolve has persisted throughout the uncertainty of 2020 and 2021: We can and we must do more for Tennessee students.

We Tennesseans have a strong record of doing the hard work to advance student outcomes. Almost 15 years ago, we came together and agreed that the state was in an education crisis after the US Chamber of Commerce report card gave us three F's for the performance of our education system. We identified solutions to these challenges and implemented them with success: a rigorous, annual assessment aligned to higher academic standards; an accountability system that meaningfully differentiates school performance based on student performance data; funding for higher education

based on outcomes; and increased financial aid to students pursuing college through Tennessee Promise. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to undo this great progress.

There is no time to wait. Tennessee must act with urgency across four student-centered priorities:

- **Accelerate Student Learning**
- **Close Tennessee's College Completion Gaps**
- **Increase High-Quality Charter School Opportunities**
- **Support Students To Be Ready For Careers**

Connected to each of these four priorities, Tennessee must take the critical step to modernize how we fund K12 education. Since 1992, our state has not meaningfully changed the way we fund education even as the learning needs of Tennessee students have changed significantly. To set students up to accelerate their learning, complete their postsecondary education, and enter a rewarding career, the state must envision a new formula that funds education according to each student's individual needs.

Tennessee students, educators, and families have experienced enormous, unforeseen challenges over the last two years, but we know that Tennesseans are resilient. COVID-19 has disrupted the state's education progress, but we continue to believe that Tennessee students can succeed at the highest levels in the nation. Moving into 2022, we have an opportunity to pave a path forward for students through accelerating learning, attaining postsecondary credentials, and aligning the education and workforce systems so that today's students are prepared for tomorrow's careers.

We invite you to join us as we advocate with urgency for a strong, solutions-oriented approach to creating a brighter future for students.



**Senator Bill Frist, MD**  
SCORE Founder  
and Chairman



**David Mansouri**  
SCORE President  
and CEO



**At SCORE, one resolve has persisted throughout the uncertainty of 2020 and 2021: We can and we must do more for Tennessee students.**





# COVID-19 INTERRUPTS TENNESSEE'S EDUCATION PROGRESS

Through 2020 and 2021, Tennessee students, families, and educators have faced a public health crisis that has impacted our education system from top to bottom. Educators have provided instruction to students in person, in a hybrid format, and virtually – with limited resources and training at their disposal when the pandemic began. Administrators have faced staffing and scheduling challenges as the coronavirus pandemic spread statewide, requiring many students and educators to quarantine to recover from or to reduce transmission of the disease and miss valuable classroom time as a result. Whether they are in K-12 or postsecondary settings, students have experienced a dramatic shift in their daily lives.

The pandemic has made one thing increasingly clear: Education matters. Research shows that access to a high-quality education is key to having an economically mobile and choice-filled life, which is even more important as Tennessee's economy reacts to the unpredictable nature of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> **SCORE believes education is this state's most important priority and that every Tennessee student can learn, grow, and be ready to thrive in the workplace of tomorrow if we act with urgency and purpose today. In this report, we recommend four key priorities for the state to advance in the next year:**

- Accelerate Student Learning
- Close Tennessee's College Completion Gaps
- Increase High-Quality Charter School Opportunities
- Support Students To Be Ready For Careers

## 2021 DATA SHOW IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON K-12 AND POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted student learning across the world and in Tennessee, with K-12 students having limited and inconsistent instruction in the 2020-21 school year. Across the United States, K-12 enrollment decreased during this period, with a 13 percent drop among students in the early grades. There was a downturn in Tennessee as well, with a combined enrollment loss of 60,000 students.<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19 has also taken its toll on higher education. Most students learned in a virtual environment for most of the 2020-21 school year – with little in-person engagement with the campus, faculty, staff, and peers.<sup>3</sup> Fewer new high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education. Additionally, nationwide estimates show a 2-point drop in the percentage of students persisting in their postsecondary education from first to second year and in earning degrees. In Tennessee, these trends are similar: Tennessee's college-going rate decreased between 2019 and 2020, and fewer students have enrolled and persisted in the state's community colleges over the past two years. Continuing student enrollment decreased by 15 percent between 2020 and 2021.<sup>4</sup> The upcoming impact of the disruption may well be a decline in degrees earned.

### COVID-19 challenges have led to a drop in K-12 student achievement after the 2020-21 school year in Tennessee.

Before 2020, Tennessee had posted a decade of progress in student achievement. On the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), Tennessee climbed from being ranked among the lowest-performing states in reading and math proficiency to around the national average. Tennessee largely erased the "honesty gap" between statewide assessment and NAEP proficiency levels in 2017, indicating the results from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) are as reliable an indicator of student achievement as NAEP.



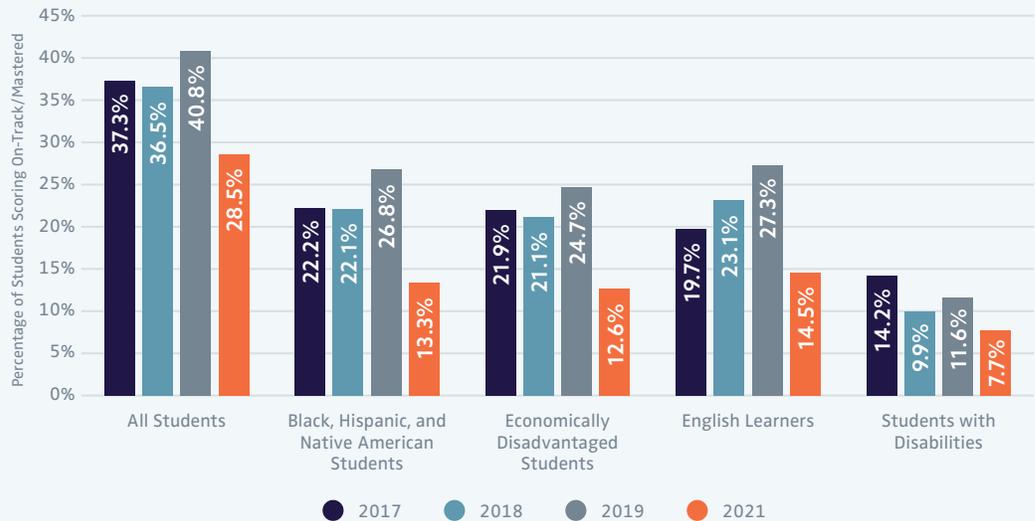
But the hard-won gains for students largely disappeared on the 2021 TCAP. In grades 3-8 reading and math, proficiency rates for White, Black, and Hispanic students dropped to below the levels of 2017. The biggest drops in student proficiency were in math. In nearly every student group, proficiency rates dropped by 10 or more percentage points. Pre-existing achievement gaps remain wide as well, with Black, Hispanic,

and Native American, and economically disadvantaged students about 15 percentage points below the statewide average. These trends wipe out the historic gains in math proficiency made by Tennessee students in 2019 and illustrate the urgency of accelerating student learning now with intention and purpose, focusing on elevating policy and practice that will improve outcomes for all students today.

### MATH PROFICIENCY IS DOWN 10 OR MORE POINTS FOR MOST STUDENT GROUPS

Grades 3-8 combined math percentage of students scoring on-track/mastered by subgroup, 2017-2021

Source: TDOE, 2021



Student achievement drops in math proficiency are also double the drops in ELA. In 2021, the math proficiency rate for grades 3-8 decreased by 12.1 percentage points. These scores were also concerning for ELA, although the decrease was not as stark: ELA proficiency rates decreased by 5.4 percentage points in grades 3-8.

### DROPS IN MATH PROFICIENCY ARE DOUBLE THE DROPS IN ELA

TCAP ELA and math proficiency rate changes by grade level, 2019-2021

Source: TDOE, 2021

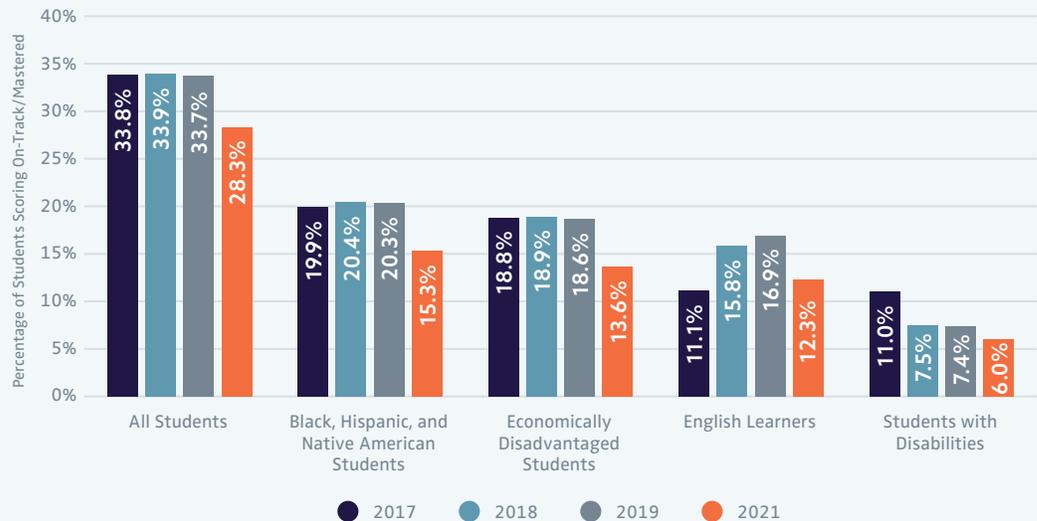


A deep look into the ELA assessment data shows that every single student group experienced a drop in reading and writing between 2019 and 2021. Just a third of students read and write proficiently overall, yet all students saw a proficiency decline of 5 percentage points. These declines were similar for students who are Black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged.

## EVERY STUDENT GROUP HAS LOST GROUND IN READING AND WRITING PROFICIENCY

Grades 3-8 combined ELA percentage of students scoring on-track/mastered by subgroup, 2017-2021

Source: TDOE, 2021



Of particular concern is how well the state has supported students who were underserved before the pandemic and make up roughly half of the student population in Tennessee: Black students, Hispanic students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English learners. The low percentages who were receiving the instruction and support they needed to meet academic expectations in 2019 fell even lower in 2021.

Importantly, Tennessee state leadership acted with urgency to accelerate student learning in a 2021 special legislative session. The Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act launched a host of summer learning programs to mitigate lost instructional time for students in grades 3-8.<sup>5</sup> These programs launched in summer 2021 and will continue into summer 2022 to provide students with critical instructional support in math and English moving forward.

**Postsecondary education has also experienced disruption throughout the last year.** Fall enrollment at Tennessee’s community colleges has declined during the pandemic. Overall first-time freshman enrollment declined by 19 percent between 2019 and 2021. For Black and Hispanic first-time students, these drops were greater than the overall average: Black student enrollment decreased by 32.6 percent over the last two years, while Hispanic enrollment decreased 10.4 percent.<sup>6</sup> Enrollment drops were not limited to first-time freshmen: 15 percent of students who did not enroll in Fall 2021 were returning students. COVID-19 has led to many students discontinuing their education, with potential impacts on student readiness, workforce preparedness, and economic vitality for years to come.

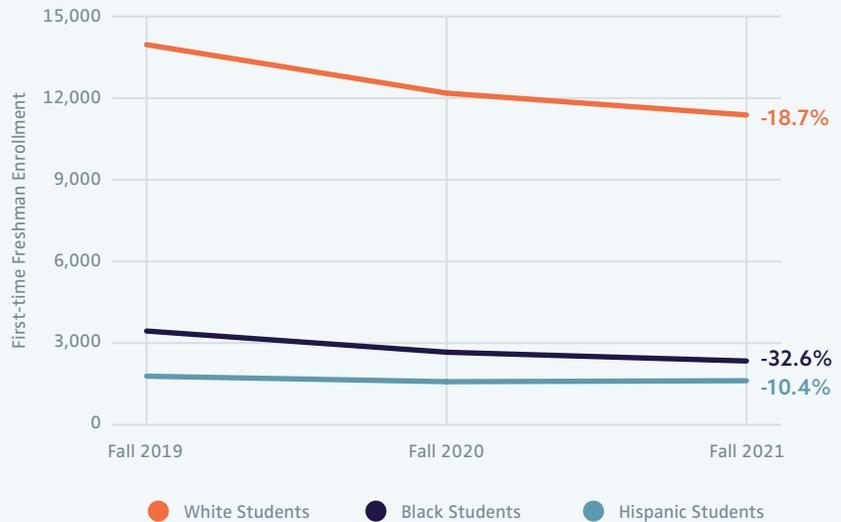


## COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT CONTINUES TO DROP AMID PANDEMIC DISRUPTIONS

Community college first-time freshman headcount (preliminary census data), fall 2019 to fall 2021

Community college enrollment includes students in for-credit courses. Preliminary Fall 2021 community college enrollment is based on unedited census (14th day) enrollment data. Prior years are reported with official end-of-term data. Historically, the end-of-term headcount is 1% higher than census, White end-of-term FTE enrollment is 2% higher than census. For Fall 2021, end-of-term data may be significantly higher than census data due to the increased prevalence of 7-week courses that start mid-semester.

Source: TBR, 2021



Amid these declines in community college enrollment, some data also show Tennessee’s postsecondary system is beginning to recover from the pandemic. For Fall 2021, the number of students registering for Tennessee’s colleges of applied technology (TCATs) increased by 9.4 percent. And the University of Tennessee System experienced a 4.9 percent increase in incoming freshmen compared to 2020.<sup>7</sup> While Tennessee’s postsecondary system was significantly impacted by COVID-19, these early signs of recovery are promising for a brighter future on the horizon for students.

Importantly, Tennessee’s education pipeline has begun to be disrupted as a result of COVID-19. At each critical point from high school to career, many students fall off the path to a postsecondary credential. COVID-19 created even more barriers to student achievement and career preparation, with all students – and particularly students of color – experiencing declines in student achievement in K-12 and in enrollment in postsecondary.

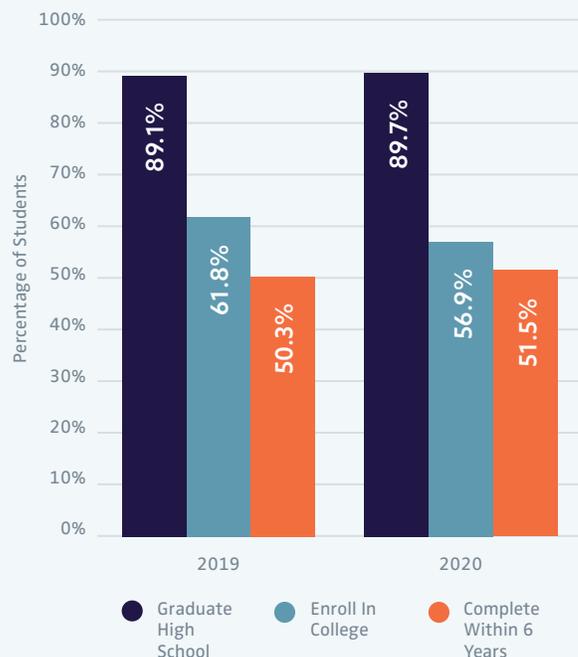
Between 2019 and 2020, about 89 percent of Tennessee students graduated from high school. Moving into 2020, the number of these graduates who immediately enrolled in college decreased by about 5 percentage points statewide from 62 percent to 57 percent. And perhaps even more concerning: Only half of the students who enroll in higher education go on to earn a credential at a public college or university in the state.

COVID-19 has disrupted the pathway for students moving out of high school and into college, where too few students were completing on time prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, COVID-19 continues to affect learning and success across the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, and current data do not fully capture the effects of lost instructional

## TENNESSEE STUDENTS ARE NOT SUPPORTED TO AND THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

Success rates through high school graduation, college enrollment, and completion by year

Source: TDOE and THEC, 2021

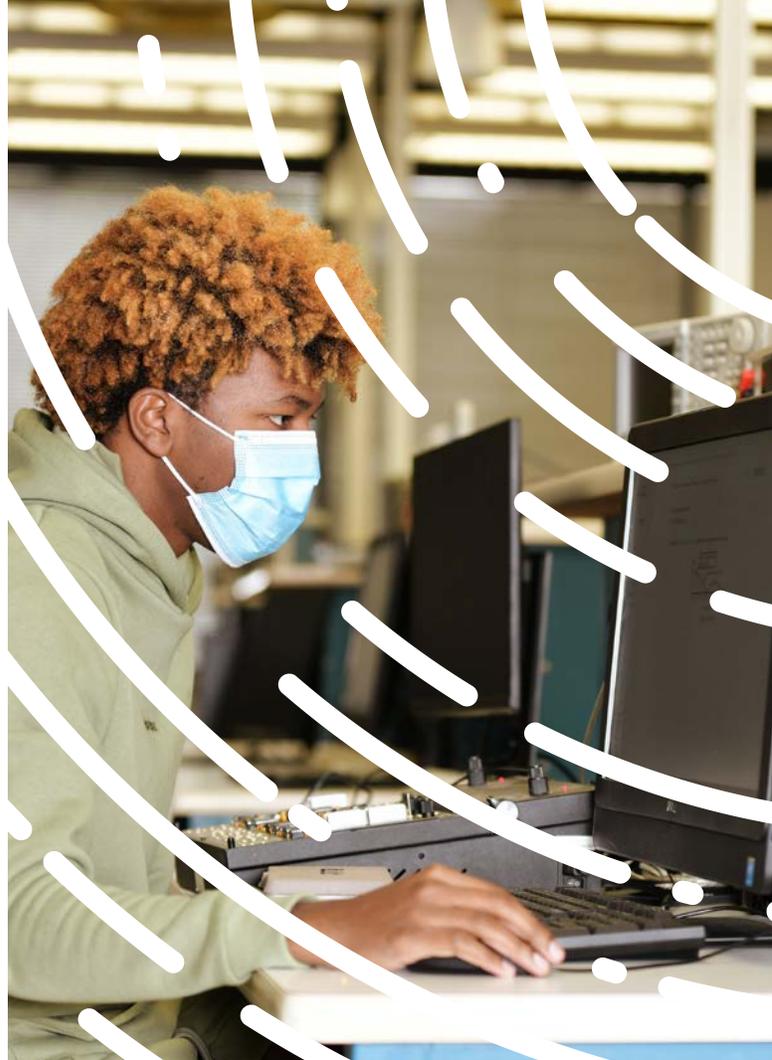


time on student academic readiness for higher education. Prior to 2020, half of the state's high school graduates who enrolled in community college needed remediation in math, and one-third needed remediation in reading.<sup>8</sup> With student achievement rates declining in 2021, it is likely more students may enter postsecondary education without the academic preparation to succeed in career and life.

## THROUGH IT ALL, TENNESSEE HAS A TRACK RECORD OF RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

COVID-19 has put Tennessee's education progress on pause after a decade of significant improvements in student achievement and success. This is not the first time that Tennessee has faced a steep uphill climb in education. Since 2010, the state has blazed the trail to build an improved, student-focused education system centered on foundational policies that:

- **Raised expectations in the classroom and created accountability** through strong college- and career-ready academic standards, an assessment aligned to these standards, and a rigorous accountability system.
- **Strengthened educator evaluations** with a multiple-measure teacher evaluation system that provides regular feedback to teachers and school leaders and emphasizes how an educator impacts a student's academic achievement and growth across all student groups.
- **Invested in high-quality public charter school opportunities** by creating the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission as an independent, state-level entity to focus on authorizing high-quality nonprofit charter schools that meet student needs. In the last year the state has invested over \$30 million in federal and state funding to expand charter schools and to support charter schools with funding for facilities.
- **Refocused higher education on completion rather than enrollment** through an outcomes-based funding formula that rewards public colleges and universities based on supporting students to completion rather than just enrolling students. Importantly, the state created the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, which covers tuition and fees to Tennessee's community colleges and TCATs for new high school graduates.



These student-focused policies have led to tremendous gains for students. Over the last decade, national researchers identified Tennessee as one of the fastest-improving states for K-12 student achievement. Tennessee also has increased the number of students who score proficient on NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card. Additionally, college completion rates have climbed steadily over the last several years as well – a testament to the student-focused policies championed in both K-12 and higher education systems.<sup>9</sup> Yet now, the COVID disruption is threatening to undo much of this progress with Tennessee data highlighting a pause on the state's progress for students.

**Our mission is clear: Tennessee must act now to resume progress to ensure all students continue to succeed even as the pandemic continues to present hurdles to students, families, and educators.**

The 2021 data for K-12 and postsecondary students are troubling, but the moment has not passed – Tennessee can move with intention and purpose to propel students to succeed. Whether through high-dosage tutoring that has proved to accelerate student learning or through summer support for students graduating high school and entering postsecondary education, this moment sets the stage for Tennessee to advance student-centered policies so that all students reap the benefits that a high-quality Tennessee education has to offer.



# PRIORITY: ACCELERATE STUDENT LEARNING

Tennessee is at a critical juncture as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to adversely affect students, families, educators, and communities. Too few students were proficient in math and English language arts prior to the pandemic, but outcomes were steadily improving. Now, according to the 2021 TCAP results, hard-won gains in math proficiency have been lost during the pandemic, and the state's third-grade reading and writing proficiency levels are the lowest since 2017. And importantly, students of color and students from lower-income backgrounds have seen the greatest drops in proficiency over the last year. These achievement decreases have significant effects for students now and will for years to come.

SCORE believes that our K-12 system must accelerate student learning to overcome these disruptions and return students to a trajectory of college and career success. **Tennessee has three policy opportunities to advance this priority:**

1. Harness data to support students moving forward from the pandemic
2. Expand research-supported strategies, including high-dosage tutoring and summer learning
3. Reimagine education funding to improve student outcomes today

## ELA and math proficiency declined because of the pandemic's impact on student learning and engagement.

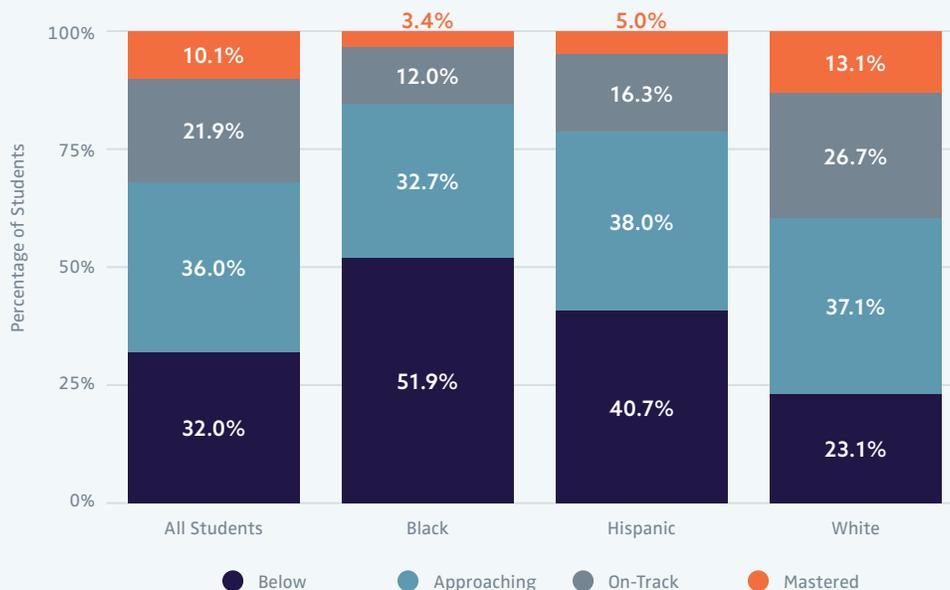
COVID-19 has scrambled the education environment across Tennessee, forcing students, families, and educators to continually adjust to balance learning and safety. Undeniably, most students have missed critical learning opportunities since March 2020. Additionally, the spring 2020 assessment and all associated accountability measured were canceled. The 2021 assessment was administered to ensure the state could understand and make critical insights about the pandemic's impact on student learning but included considerable flexibility to the state's accountability system to recognize the disruption during the 2020-21 school year.

Assessment data from 2021 show that Tennessee student achievement dropped in two important markers for later student success: third-grade English language arts (ELA) and seventh-grade math. Before the pandemic began, most Tennessee third graders were below grade level in reading and writing, and Black and Hispanic students were even further behind. After a year of interrupted instructional time, these numbers have worsened. While only four out of ten White students are proficient in third-grade ELA, Black and Hispanic students are still less likely to score proficient. An early foundation in reading and writing is essential for a student's success in later grades, college, and career.

### MOST THIRD-GRADERS ARE BELOW GRADE LEVEL IN READING AND WRITING

2021 TCAP Grade 3 ELA performance categories by subgroup

Source: TDOE, 2021

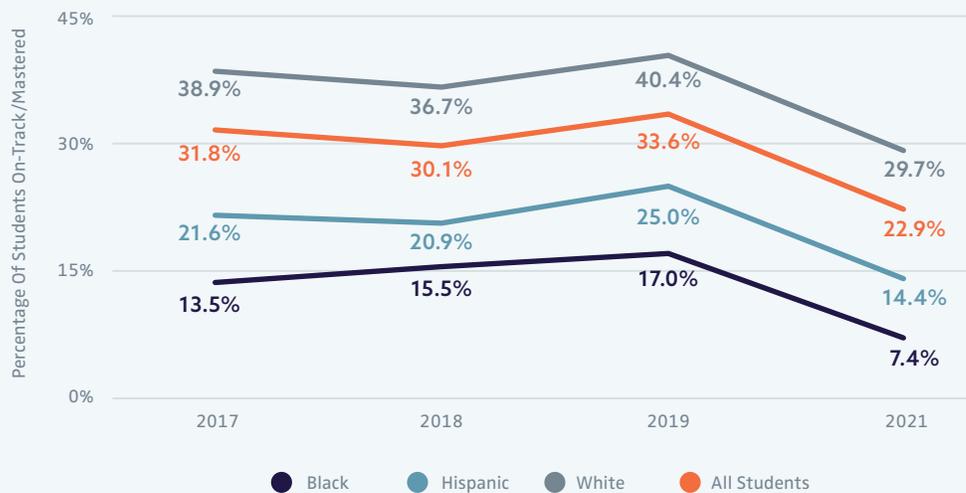




## GRADE 7 MATH PROFICIENCY FELL AND GAPS REMAIN WIDE

TCAP Grade 7 Math performance by subgroup, 2017-2021

Source: TDOE, 2021



Between 2019 and 2021, seventh-grade math proficiency rates decreased for all student groups. Black and Hispanic students remain less likely to score proficient in math than White students, with just 7.4 percent of Black seventh-grade students scoring proficient compared to 29.7 percent of White students. Despite these alarming disparities between student groups, these gaps did not increase significantly during the pandemic.

In addition to the adverse academic effects of COVID-19, Tennessee students have also experienced high levels of disengagement from school over the last year. More students were classified as “chronically absent” by missing more than 10 percent of instructional days during the school year. These numbers were higher for Black and Hispanic students. Research shows that chronic absenteeism contributes to lower levels of student achievement, showing that when students are absent it has long-lasting effects on their academic growth.<sup>10</sup>

Tennessee should start harnessing state and local data to more effectively target research-backed supports to narrow opportunity gaps for the state’s historically underserved students as we recover and move beyond the pandemic’s effects. High-dosage tutoring is one highly effective strategy for improving student achievement, providing a student with an average of 3-15 additional months of learning.<sup>11</sup> This strategy has also been shown to be particularly impactful in improving low-income student achievement and student self-efficacy. Extended learning programs during school breaks, over the summer, and after school are another approach where school districts can provide small-group programming to help students regain critical instruction time. Both these approaches also provide one-on-one support through tutoring and mentorship, keeping students engaged and on track to succeed.

## ACCELERATING SCHOLARS: HIGH-IMPACT TUTORING FOR NASHVILLE STUDENTS

Accelerating Scholars is an initiative at Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) that provides a high-quality, high-dosage tutoring program focused on accelerating learning for students.<sup>12</sup> After a year of slowed progress across the district, MNPS launched Accelerating Scholars with the goal of providing more than 7,000 students with a trained, high-impact tutor in English language arts or math by the end of the 2021-22 school year. This research-supported program should ensure students have the opportunity to accelerate their learning after a year of disrupted instructional time.

To maximize impact, the program is strongly aligned to what the research says about effective high-dosage tutoring. Tutors, who include a mixture of educators, college students, and community volunteers, provide at least three 30-minute virtual tutoring sessions every week for at least 10 weeks. This model is designed based on research from the Annenberg Institute's research on high-dosage tutoring. This research shows that high-dosage tutoring can significantly increase student achievement in early literacy and eighth- and ninth-grade math for a wide variety of students, and students from lower-income backgrounds in particular.<sup>13</sup>

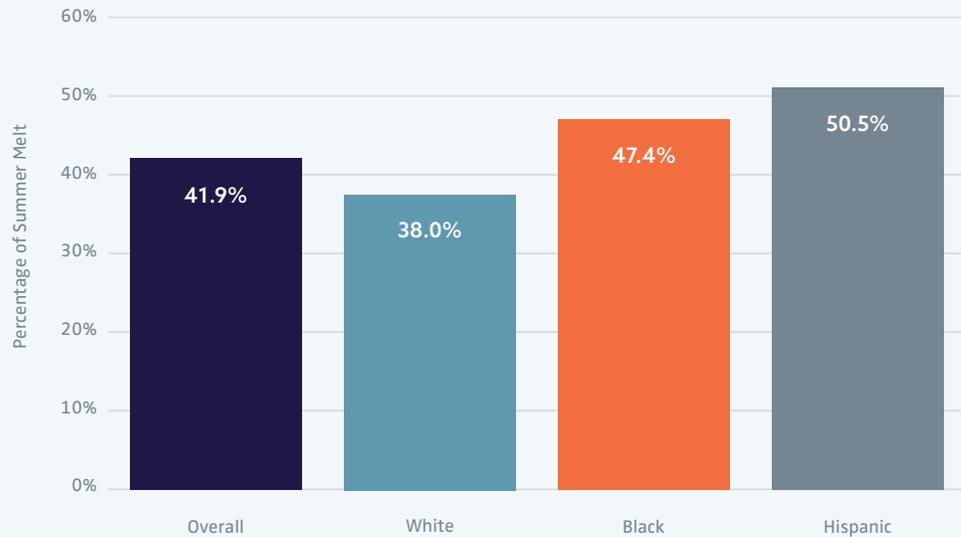
Accelerating Scholars is a great example of how school districts can utilize available resources to design research-supported initiatives that promise to significantly improve student learning outcomes. Additionally, MNPS has partnered with Brightpath Tutoring and the PENCIL Foundation to enhance available resources and capacity – showing the value of coupling research-supported approaches with community partners to improve student opportunity at scale.

**The pandemic has also disrupted postsecondary preparation for middle and high school students as they approach graduation.** Assessment data from 2021 show that Tennessee student proficiency decreased in ELA, math, and science in grades 9-12.<sup>14</sup> These drops in scores could have long-lasting effects on student success beyond high school, with already one-third of the state's high school graduates requiring reading remediation in college. These students may also be more likely to experience "summer melt," the phenomenon when a student who plans to go to college drops out of the pipeline between high school graduation and higher education enrollment. In an August 2021 report, SCORE found that summer melt affects roughly 40 percent of Tennessee high school graduates based on pre-pandemic data from 2019. And this concerning phenomenon is more likely to affect Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students.<sup>15</sup> It will be critical for state leaders and educators to consider innovative initiatives and policies so that this number does not increase moving forward.

## SUMMER MELT IMPACTS STUDENTS OF COLOR AT HIGHER RATES

Percentage of students, by student group, who applied for TN Promise but never enrolled in any form of postsecondary education after high school

Source: THEC, 2020



**Tennessee should be funding to accelerate learning – yet the state currently funds education through an outdated formula.** Education funding is the common thread linking stronger data use and research-supported learning strategies to accelerate student learning today. Research shows that increased funding is tied to higher achievement, high school graduation rates, and improved life outcomes – especially for students from historically underserved groups.<sup>16</sup> As Tennessee continues to recover and innovate in response to the pandemic, the funding that districts receive from the state to spend on educating students remains a critical lever to advance student success.

The Basic Education Program (BEP) is the state’s K-12 funding formula. Created in 1992, the BEP provides funding for a set of core components deemed necessary for a basic education: instructional salaries, instructional benefits, classroom costs, and non-classroom costs. The formula determines the cost of delivering an education based on the costs of these resources – such as teacher salaries and instructional materials. Additionally, the funding formula also accounts for a local county’s ability to pay for education; the state will fund a larger share of education if the district’s county has a lower ability to fund education and vice versa.

Over its 30 years, the BEP has become increasingly outdated in funding education for today’s students. The formula has been substantively updated only twice, yet Tennessee students, the education system, and our state’s economy have changed significantly. Tennessee’s students have made significant academic progress over the last decade, but data through 2021 reemphasize the long-standing opportunity gaps between students from historically underserved student groups and White students, for example.

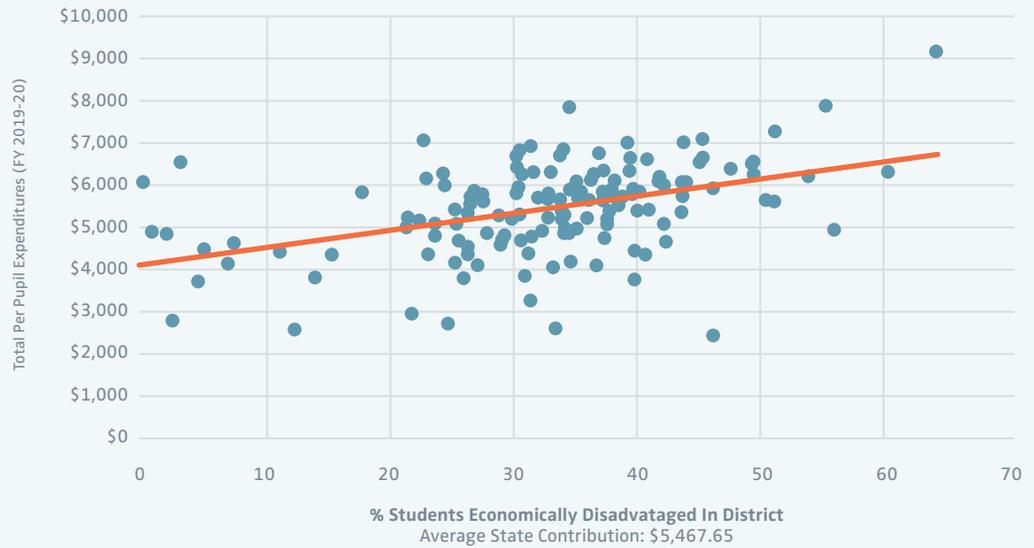
The local spending is one indicator that the state funding formula falls short because local spending accounts for significantly larger numbers of special education teachers and counselors working in Tennessee schools than the number generated by the BEP. But not all districts can contribute the local funding to meet unique learning needs, resulting in inequitable opportunities and outcomes for many Tennessee students.



## THE BEP DIRECTS MORE STATE RESOURCES TO DISTRICTS WITH HIGHER POVERTY RATES

Expenditures from state sources vs. poverty

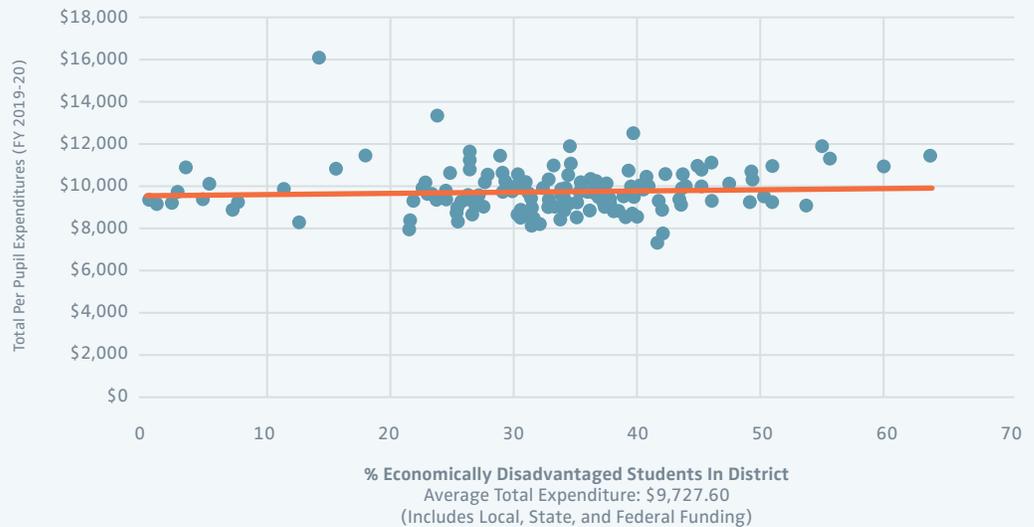
Source: TDOE, 2020



## TOTAL FUNDING IS NOT EQUITABLE DUE TO LIMITED LOCAL RESOURCES FOR SOME DISTRICTS

Total expenditures vs. poverty

Source: TDOE, 2020



To accelerate learning for today's students, Tennessee must reimagine how the state funds K-12 education. Because the BEP is resource based, the formula distributes funds to districts based on the cost resources such as teacher salaries and textbooks. Conversely, a student-based approach would provide funding to districts based on each student, with extra funding for students with greater learning needs such as students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, and rural students.

A concerted effort to target resources to specific needs could accelerate the state's overall academic achievement and push Tennessee to the top of the nation in student achievement.

Tennessee has an opportunity to create a fairer, more student-centered funding formula that better supports students to meet today's classroom and career expectations.

Tennessee is also receiving an approximate \$3.8 billion dollars to support education response and recovery through federal stimulus specific to education, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund. This amount is about seven times more than the dollars received by the state and school districts from the historic Race to the Top grant. And importantly, the bulk of these stimulus funds – \$3.4 billion of the \$3.8 billion – flow directly to school districts to recover and innovate in response to COVID-19.

These education dollars present a pivotal moment for Tennessee education leaders. As the pandemic continues and student achievement rates have declined, both state and local leadership should use these funds to support initiatives and strategies that will recover lost learning and position students for future success. Several research studies show that funding levels can have positive impacts on student achievement, especially for students with higher needs. These findings highlight the importance of using these nonrecurring dollars to support Tennessee students with state and district initiatives – rooted in data and research – that advance student outcomes and close gaps.<sup>17</sup>

## 2022 PRIORITY ACCELERATE STUDENT LEARNING

2020 and 2021 have been challenging years for K-12 students, families, and educators – but it is not too late to respond with student-centered policies and practices that will set up our education system to recover and excel in the short term and long term. Stronger data use will position Tennessee to gain a clearer sense of how the state can accelerate student learning, while research-supported strategies, innovative school models and a student-centered funding formula will empower schools and teachers to actively improve student outcomes, resuming the state’s education progress.



### 1: Tennessee must harness data to identify how best to support all students to succeed.

- **The Office of Evidence and Impact (OEI) in the Department of Finance & Administration should publish an annual report that provides an overview of how the state’s education system is serving students.** More robust data will provide state leaders and advocates with a clear picture of how the education system is serving students, how the system has been impacted by COVID-19, and where there is room to see all students succeed. In 2020 and 2021, SCORE released two *By The Numbers* reports providing data across K-12 and postsecondary education that could serve as an example of a state progress report.<sup>18</sup>
- **The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) should publish a report on Tennessee’s educator workforce, including critical information about shortages, effectiveness, demographic diversity, and compensation.** Because teachers are the single most important factor in schools for improving student achievement, state and district leaders need accurate and timely information to increase the supply of high-quality educators to instruct students.<sup>19</sup> In Michigan, the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) produced a report in partnership with Michigan State University about the teacher shortage with recommendations for state policymakers to consider.<sup>20</sup> Stronger and more comprehensive information will enable district and state leaders to create actionable, strategic recruitment and retention plans for educators that can accelerate student learning.
- To support student learning through middle and high school, the **TDOE and OEI should develop a readiness indicator for ninth graders that measures a student’s progress toward high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary completion.** When state-level data collection processes are stronger, educators are equipped with information to better support their students. This readiness indicator would give districts actionable information about students who are not ready and how to help them. The information would also be provided to students and families. Research shows that a robust, comprehensive data indicator that measures student readiness for high school graduation and college is an effective way to identify earlier the students who need more academic supports.<sup>21</sup>

## 2: Tennessee should expand research-supported strategies, including high-dosage tutoring and summer learning, to accelerate learning.

- **TDOE and school districts should utilize federal resources to provide robust support and technical assistance to school districts in launching and implementing high-dosage tutoring models across the state.** After a year where students have been more disengaged than before, these high-dosage tutoring models provide both academic support and personal mentorship that improve student academic performance and engagement. The Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning (ALL) Corps, created through the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, is a grant opportunity that supports districts in implementing these research-based models. Moving forward, additional federal resources should be invested to not only launch these models but ensure districts and schools are supported to implement them well.<sup>22</sup> TDOE also should consider leveraging tutoring programs to pilot the co-requisite remediation model used by the Tennessee Board of Regents in high schools. The co-requisite remediation model places students in need of additional academic support in a supplemental learning support class while they are simultaneously enrolled in a credit-bearing course. Evaluations of this approach show that participants in this model successfully pass first-year math and English courses in their first year at a community college.<sup>23</sup>
- **The state and school districts should use federal resources to provide more flexible and extended learning time for students in middle and high school to catch up on learning.** In the last year, student scores have decreased in critical milestones including seventh-grade math and ninth-grade algebra by 10 percentage points.<sup>24</sup> Tennessee has made a significant investment in summer learning programs after a 2021 special session focused on education, and the state and school districts should continue to collect data, monitor progress, and expand research-supported approaches like these extended learning models to offer more opportunities in the summer or during school breaks for students whose proficiency levels declined in the last year.<sup>25</sup> Summer learning programs should include rigorous evaluation and reporting mechanisms to help the state and districts improve implementation moving forward over the next several years.
- **The state and districts should use existing federal resources to launch Learning Acceleration Plans that incentivize district innovation, including balanced school calendar models.** With an influx of funds, the state should partner with a select number of school

districts to develop innovative learning acceleration plans. These districts should consider research-supported strategies for accelerating student learning, including the year-long school model for extended learning time. Balanced-calendar models would provide students with more continuous instruction to catch up on critical learning from the last year and increase student achievement moving forward.<sup>26</sup>

## 3: Tennessee must reimagine education funding to improve student outcomes today.

- **The state should prioritize developing a student-based funding formula to reflect the current needs of individual Tennessee students.** As the state considers what a new K-12 funding formula looks like, any decision-making should be driven by the needs of students and include additional funds for students with specific characteristics, such as economically disadvantaged students, rural students, students with special needs, and English learners. Additionally, a reimagined funding formula must include greater transparency at the state, district, and local level about spending decisions, as well as a simplified approach to measuring the local ability to pay for education.
- **The state and school districts should deploy short-term, federal resources toward a strong education recovery.** As TDOE and local school districts begin to use ESSER dollars, robust monitoring systems are needed to account for the vast amount of money flowing into communities. Additionally, the state should build on existing innovations to prioritize funds for research-supported learning strategies, including technical assistance for implementing high-dosage tutoring, learning acceleration grants, and extended learning models. It will be critical for state and district leadership to use these funds well, building capacity to set students up for success beyond the 2023 deadline for spending.



PRIORITY:

# CLOSE TENNESSEE'S COLLEGE COMPLETION GAPS

Tennessee is a national leader in postsecondary education policy. The state enacted several student-centered pieces of legislation, including the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 and the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act of 2014, that redesigned funding systems, developed scholarship programs, and coordinated system-level practices that center on making sure more students access and succeed in postsecondary education.

Even with these policies in place, Tennessee still has a college completion problem. Just one in two students who enroll in a public college or university in Tennessee complete a credential within six years.<sup>27</sup> Completion rates at the state's community colleges are even lower, where about one in four students complete a degree within three years. And Tennessee's higher education system is failing to graduate a large portion of the Black and Hispanic students who enroll. College access and completion policies have created a college-going culture in Tennessee, but not all student groups are earning a high-quality credential on time.

SCORE believes that now more than ever postsecondary completion must become a top policy priority because it is a top economic priority. **Tennessee has 3 policy opportunities to advance this priority:**

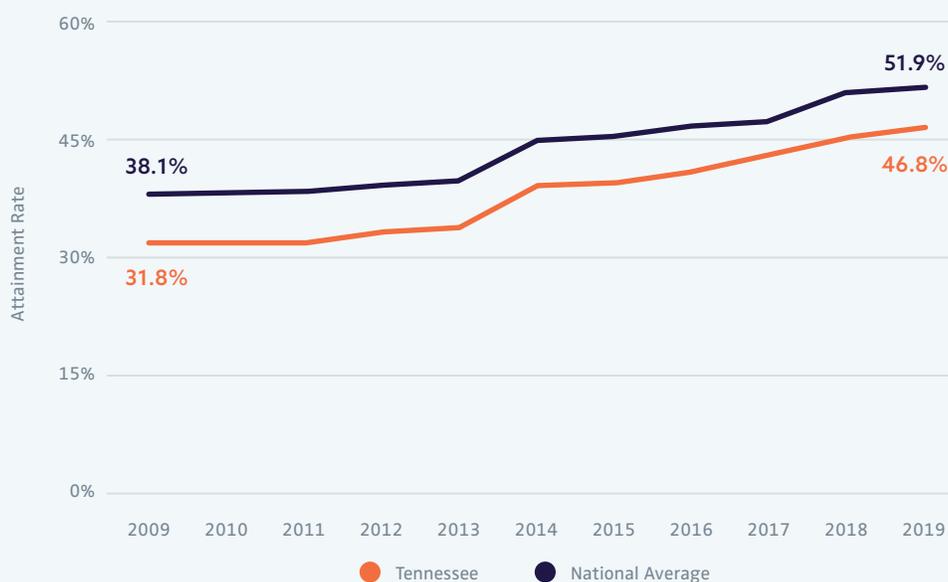
1. Resolve to close Tennessee's long-standing completion gaps
2. Strengthen Tennessee Transfer Pathways
3. Update outcomes-based funding to further improve the state's completion rates

**Over the last decade, the completion gaps between Tennessee student groups have not budged.** The number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential has increased from 31.8 percent to 46.8 percent between 2009 and 2019 – putting Tennessee in the top half of states in terms of attainment rate growth. These trends are commendable, but the state has not meaningfully narrowed its gap with the national average or its gaps between different types of students.

## DESPITE CONSISTENT GROWTH, TENNESSEE TRAILS NATIONAL ATTAINMENT RATE

Postsecondary attainment rate for people ages 25-64, 2009-2019

Source: Lumina Foundation, 2021



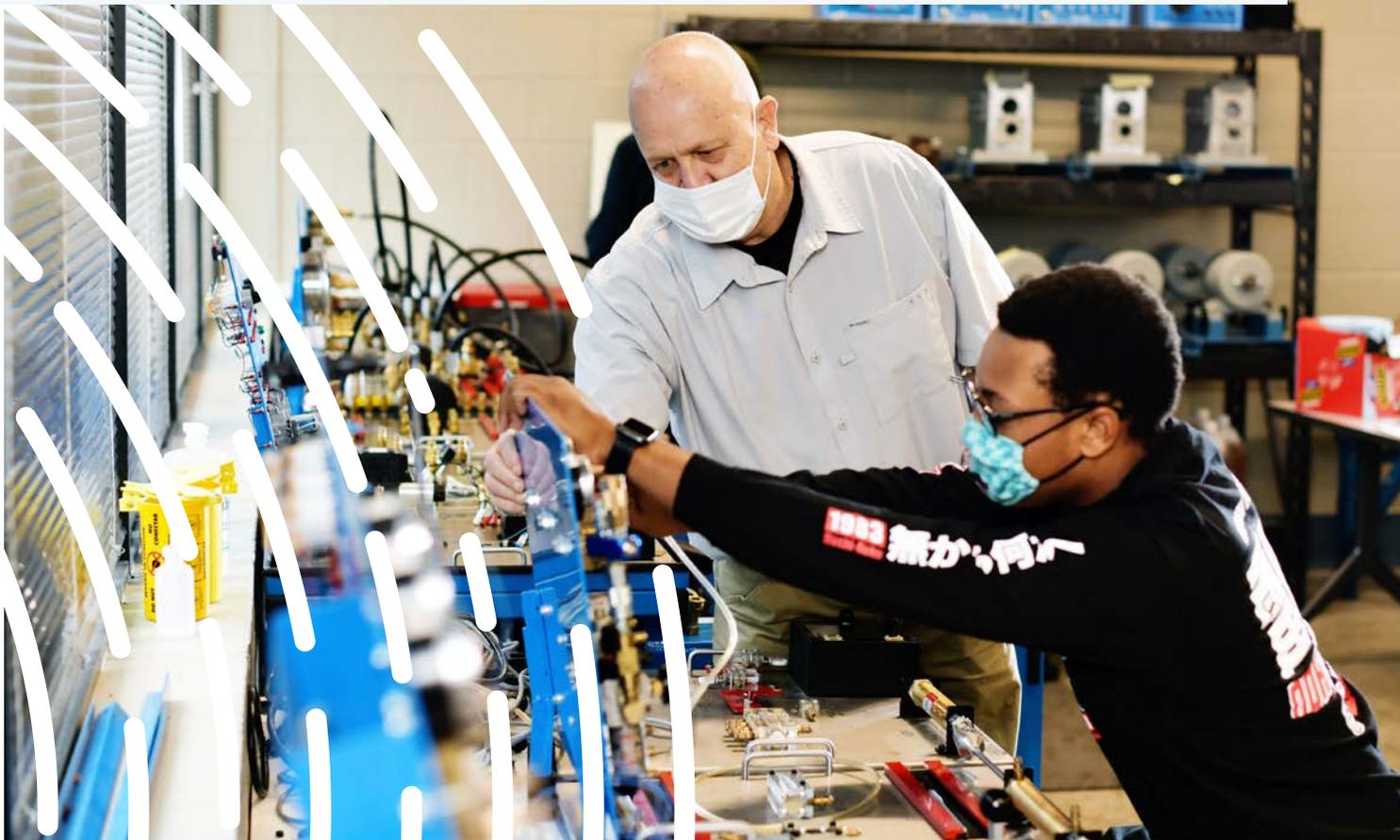
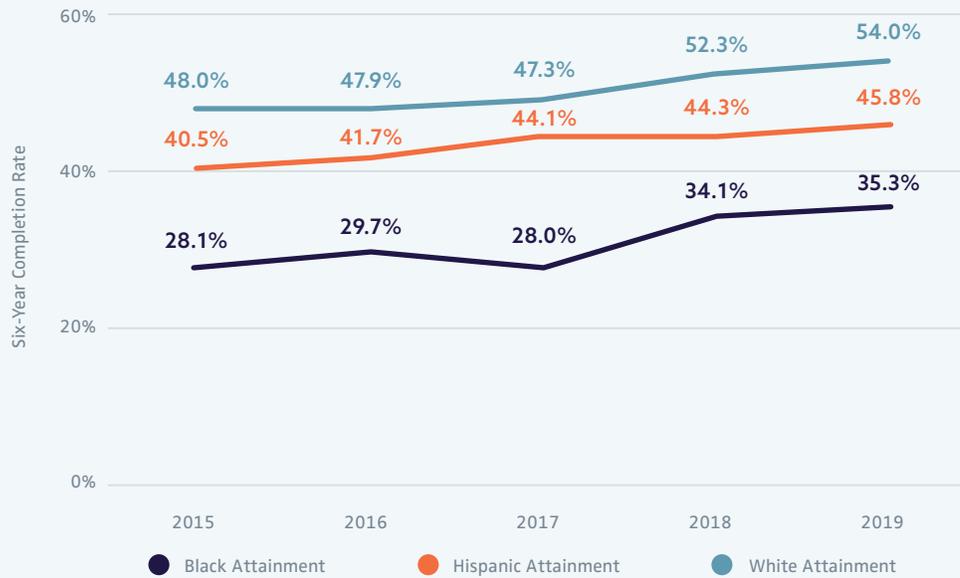
Completion data from 2015 to 2019 show that higher education is graduating Black and Hispanic students at substantially lower rates than White students. The gap between Black and White completion rates has remained around 20 points, while the gap between Hispanic and White

completion is about 8 points. State initiatives are helping more students in every group to earn degrees, but the state has yet to target enough support to the students from historically underserved populations who stand to gain the most economically from a postsecondary credential.

### TENNESSEE POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION GAPS PERSIST OVER TIME

Six-year postsecondary completion rates by student group

Source: THEC, 2021



## KNOX PROMISE PROVIDES TENNESSEE PROMISE STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT TO COMPLETE

Tennessee Promise has helped larger percentages of new high school graduates enroll in higher education by connecting them to a volunteer mentor for their last year of high school and a last dollar scholarship to cover tuition and fees at Tennessee community colleges and TCATS. Nevertheless, many Promise students drop out before earning a credential when unable to overcome additional costs and bureaucratic hurdles.

Knox Promise, a program administered by tnAchieves, was created to improve college completion rates by giving students transitioning from Knox County high schools to higher education additional advising and financial support. Knox Promises provides:

- **tnAchieves Completion Coach** who will support students through graduation or credential attainment
- Access to **Summer Support Programming** for students identified as needing additional support to reduce remediation prior to entering college and boost retention from high school graduation to postsecondary enrollment the following fall
- **Completion grants** based on need to ensure financial burdens extending past tuition and fees do not bar students from entry
- **Textbook stipends** each semester for up to five semesters

These research-backed strategies have led to impressive student completion outcomes. Since its inception, Knox Promise has distributed nearly \$1.1 million in textbook stipends and completion grants to roughly 2,500 students. Knox Promise students who work with a completion coach and receive a completion grant are about 20 percentage points more likely to persist from year 1 to year 2. While the state's college-going rate decreased between 2019 and 2020, Knox County's rate increased by 2 percentage points – signaling the strong impact programs like Knox Promise have on a community's college-going culture.<sup>29</sup> Knox Promise is the first of its kind in Tennessee and provides students with the integral supports needed to succeed in higher education.

**Tennessee Transfer Pathways are a national model for student-centered credit transfer policy but must be strengthened to realize their full potential in supporting students to complete.** Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTPs) are an established set of courses approved to transfer between participating community colleges and universities in the state. Included as a part of the Complete College Tennessee Act, there are now more than 60 programs of study with a guaranteed credit transfer pathway between institutions for students who remain committed to that program of study.

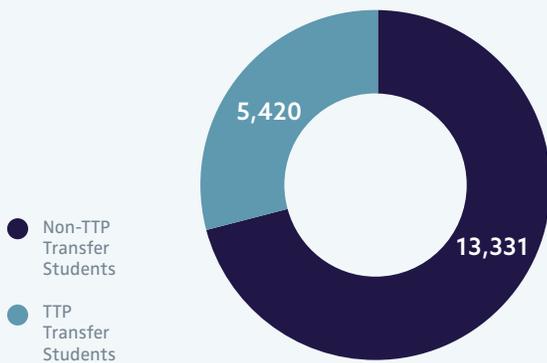
These approved pathways ensure that a student seeking a four-year degree can start at a community college and seamlessly transfer to a university. As long as a student takes each course in the program of study, this block of credits is intended to guarantee transfer between institutions. Approximately two in five students have transferred from one institution to another over the last six years in Tennessee. These students may transfer to add to their postsecondary education or to enroll in a college that better fits their interests, and Tennessee's transfer pathways can support students to achieving their postsecondary goals.

TTPs were intended to ensure that when students transfer, their credits transfer, too. But TTPs are not yet functioning as intended. In 2019, more than half of the state's transfer students were not enrolled in a TTP and missed the benefits the program could offer. State leaders should improve data collection and analysis and coordinate with college advisers to better understand what barriers students are experiencing with enrolling and transferring.

### THE MAJORITY OF TENNESSEE TRANSFER STUDENTS DO NOT USE TRANSFER PATHWAYS

Share of total transfer students enrolled in Tennessee Transfer Pathways

Source: THEC, 2020



Besides too few students taking advantage of these pathways, more than half of TTP students do not complete a credential within six years. While TTP students who transfer through a designed pathway are more likely to complete a credential than a transfer student who did not take one of these pathways, the state must do more to evaluate and improve the TTP implementation so that more students are supported along the way until they complete credentials.



### MOST 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

Source: THEC, 2020





**Tennessee’s outcomes-based funding formula should further advance the state’s postsecondary goals.**

Since 2010, a portion of state funding distributed to public colleges and universities has been based on improving student outcomes. The outcomes-based funding (OBF) formula rewards community colleges and universities based on annual growth on key student retention and graduation measures. This policy ensures that the state’s institutions focus on students finishing credentials rather than simply enrolling students at the start of each semester.

Several research studies show that when compared to outcomes prior to implementation, the OBF increased the likelihood of a student completing a degree.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the formula incentivized college campuses to create innovative initiatives focused on increasing completion rates that include

campus-wide strategic plans, mentoring programs, and new advising software.<sup>31</sup> These studies highlight how OBF is an important tool in addressing the state’s completion problem.

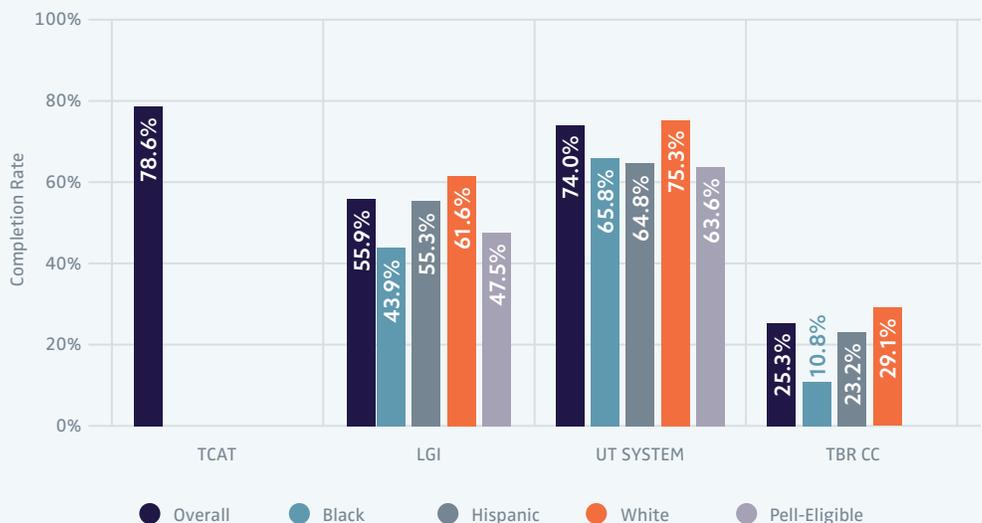
The state should further leverage the OBF to support closing the state’s completion gaps. Completion rates continue to vary by institution, with lowest rates at the community college level. Emerging research also suggests that Tennessee’s formula has led to a greater increase in degrees for White students than students of color. In 2021, state leadership is considering a funding premium for institutions that complete students in pathways aligned to workforce need.<sup>32</sup> More work like this can be done to incentivize institutions to support students from historically underserved groups to complete credentials that allow them to make the most of workforce opportunities.

**COMPLETION RATES VARY WIDELY BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND STUDENT GROUP**

Completion rates by institution type and student group, 2020. (TCAT: diploma or certificate; CC: 3-year completion rate; LGI/UT: 6-year completion rate)

*Disaggregation of data varies by sector. Completion rates for TCAT by student group are not currently available. Pell-eligible student completion rates for community colleges are not publicly available.*

Source: THEC and TBR, 2021



## 2022 PRIORITY: CLOSE TENNESSEE'S COLLEGE COMPLETION GAPS

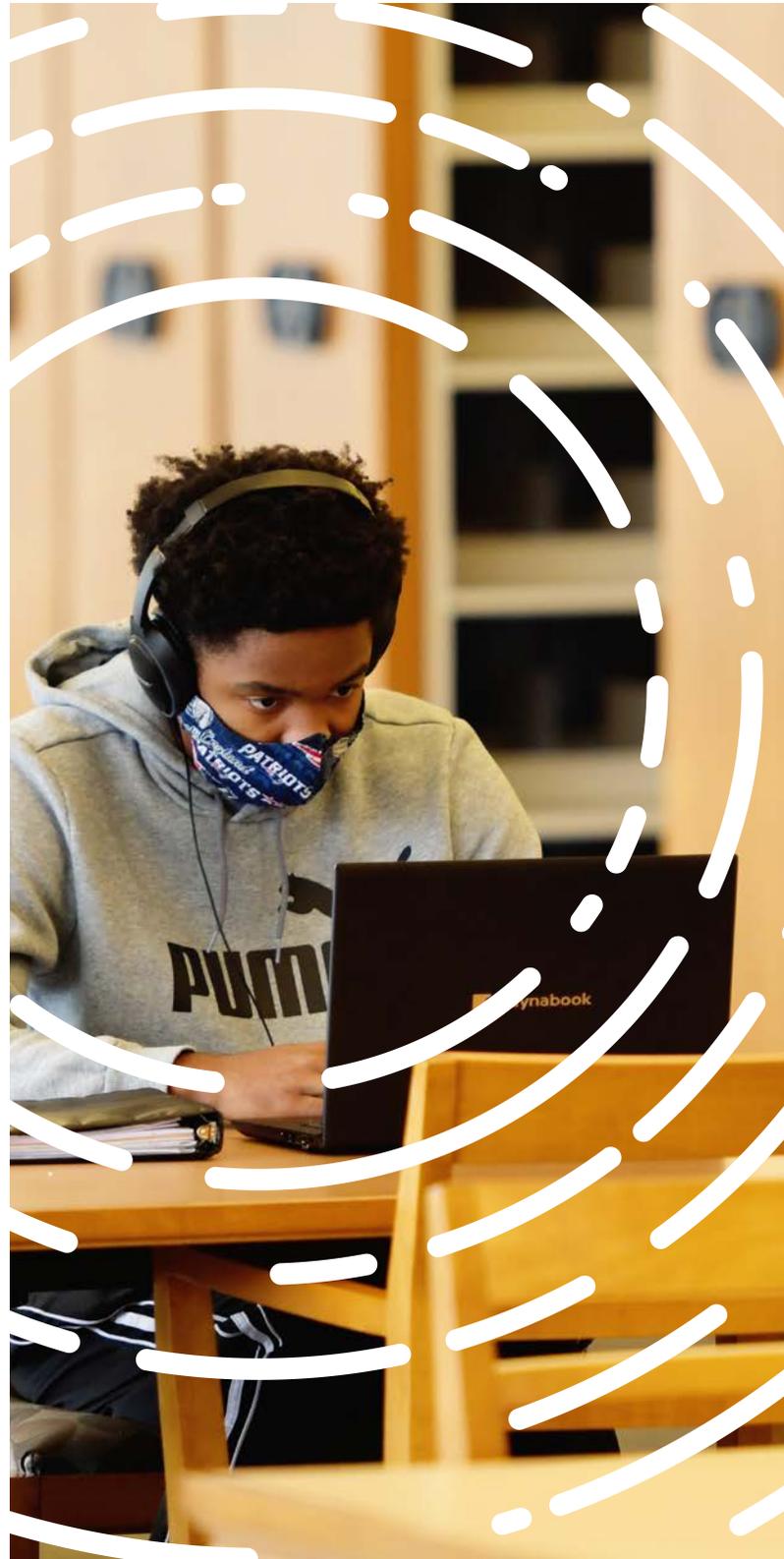
Tennessee enacted policies that have raised enrollment and completion, yet too few students are attaining postsecondary credentials. COVID-19 has also put a dent in the state's progress, with many college students discontinuing their studies halfway through the semester due to unforeseen circumstances and challenges associated with the pandemic.

To address these concerns, Tennessee must first declare a statewide resolve to close Tennessee's long-standing completion gaps through research-supported investments and student success innovations. A coordinated cross-sector focus will ensure that Tennessee provides students with the credentials and skills needed to succeed in today's economy. Additionally, Tennessee must strengthen the state's Tennessee Transfer Pathways to reach their full potential for increasing student completion and update the state's higher education funding formula to further incentivize colleges and universities to support all students in reaching the finish line with a degree.

### 1: Tennessee should resolve to close higher education's long-standing completion gaps.

- The **General Assembly should create and invest in a state fund that supports TCATs, community colleges, and universities in designing and implementing research-supported completion strategies.** These funds should be provided to colleges and universities to develop completion plans with a focus on supporting more Black, Hispanic and Pell-eligible students to earn their degrees. Eligible uses of funds should include practices with a strong research base, including summer bridge and remedial programs, a completion coach program that pairs coaches with students, learning cohorts, block scheduling, and predictive analytics to target student supports.<sup>33</sup>
- The General Assembly should direct the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to examine the state's higher education policy on supporting recent high school graduates who have experienced lost learning time, including revisiting the state's policy on what types of postsecondary institutions can offer remediation courses to incoming students. **THEC could launch a state task force in coordination with public colleges and universities to explore the feasibility of a university pilot that offers student remediation** as well as other critical components, such as remedial course affordability and proactive advising, to ensure high school students enter postsecondary education with a greater potential to earn a credential.

- **THEC should add an "annual completion update" to the THEC Factbook.** To supplement the raw data on degrees awarded by student group at public colleges and universities, the Factbook should add an annual comparison of how completion rates are improving each year, disaggregated by student group. Such reporting would contribute to the transparency and urgency around closing the state's long-standing completion gaps.



## 2: Tennessee must strengthen the Tennessee Transfer Pathways.

- **The state should launch a public-private partnership between a community college and a university that pilots a “Tennessee Transfer Pathway Network” focused on both credit transfer and student completion.** Modeled after the DirectConnect model in Florida, this pilot should involve a community college and university in close geographic proximity and focus on providing all transfer students with wraparound supports shared between the two institutions. This network could elevate evidence-based approaches that the state could put into policy to strengthen the transfer pathways.<sup>34</sup> In addition to state investment, this network could also be supported through private philanthropy to maximize impact for students.
- **The General Assembly should pass legislation to automatically opt Tennessee Transfer Pathways students into dual admission.** Dual admission allows a student who has met admissions requirements to two institutions to be enrolled in both institutions at the same time.<sup>35</sup> To strengthen a TTP student’s sense of belonging to a community college and a university that they plan to attend, state law should be updated to automatically opt a TTP student into dual admission with the option to select a university of their choice. A student could be subject to additional enrollment requirements based on unique programs of study at the university level.
- **The state’s public universities should develop and adopt a reverse transfer policy** that automatically opts eligible students into reverse transfer upon transferring to a university. Currently, eligible students who transfer to a university from a community college must opt in for reverse transfer, a unique opportunity where a student may earn an associate degree upon completing the required credits after transferring to a university to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Requiring students to opt in places an unnecessary burden and bureaucratic hurdle on a student. To ensure transfer students receive the degrees they have earned, universities should develop and adopt a policy of automatic reverse transfer for any qualifying student that complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

## 3: Tennessee must update the outcomes-based funding formula to further align with the state’s completion goals.

- **THEC should consider adding a “transfer-in” component for four-year universities.** Currently, the funding formula includes an outcome component for students who transfer out of a community college with 12 credit hours. A “transfer-in” component at the university level would incentivize stronger, student-focused partnerships between community colleges and universities centered on student transfer. This component could also serve to improve the Tennessee Transfer Pathways outcomes statewide.
- **The Formula Review Committee and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission should consider revising the premium structure in the OBF to provide more flexibility based on institution mission.** Currently, public colleges and universities receive bonus funds for three focus populations that complete credentials: academically underprepared students, low-income students, and adult students. The state should consider restructuring the premium option, requiring all institutions to be held accountable for a set number of formula premiums, while permitting institutions to choose from an additional set of formula premiums that focus on workforce investments, Tennessee Transfer Pathways, dual admission, and other characteristics important to student completion. Additionally, institutions could be required to pick from a list of other premiums that could include a workforce investment premium, a Tennessee Transfer Pathways premium, and a dual admission premium.
- **The Tennessee Higher Education Commission should incorporate a funding formula premium requirement for all institutions for graduating Black and Hispanic students.** Including an incentive to support Black and Hispanic students to completion would be one step in advancing policy to close Tennessee’s college completion gaps so that all students reap the benefits of a postsecondary education in the future.



PRIORITY:

# INCREASE HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

High-quality, nonprofit public charter schools are one strategy Tennessee can advance to support and accelerate student learning in effective ways. Expanding high-quality public charter schools is a research-supported approach for increasing student achievement, with better outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students compared to many traditional public schools.<sup>36</sup> Charter schools also have shown rapid, student-focused responses during COVID-19 through implementing teacher coaching, civic engagement, and soft skills required for success in career and life – making them important models to expand and replicate as Tennessee’s education system recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>37</sup>

Public charter schools have shown promising growth in student achievement, and the state has made significant investment and policy change to support the expansion of high-quality models. Still, Tennessee’s current landscape does not go far enough to support the operation and expansion of great public charter schools. SCORE believes that high-quality, nonprofit public charter schools provide students with effective, innovative learning environments that can improve their achievement and postsecondary readiness. **Tennessee has three policy opportunities to advance this priority:**

1. Incentivize high-quality charter operators to launch, expand, and replicate
2. Strengthen charter authorizer practices for high-quality charter schools
3. Address funding disparities for charter schools, including facilities funding

**High-quality charter operators can be further incentivized to launch, expand, and replicate in Tennessee.** Tennessee has various high-quality public charter schools that have a track record of advancing student outcomes.<sup>38</sup> While public charter schools receive some flexibility in designing teaching and learning models, charter schools are subject to the same high academic standards, statewide assessment, and accountability requirements as traditional public schools. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools can be shut down if their performance does not meet state expectations over several years.

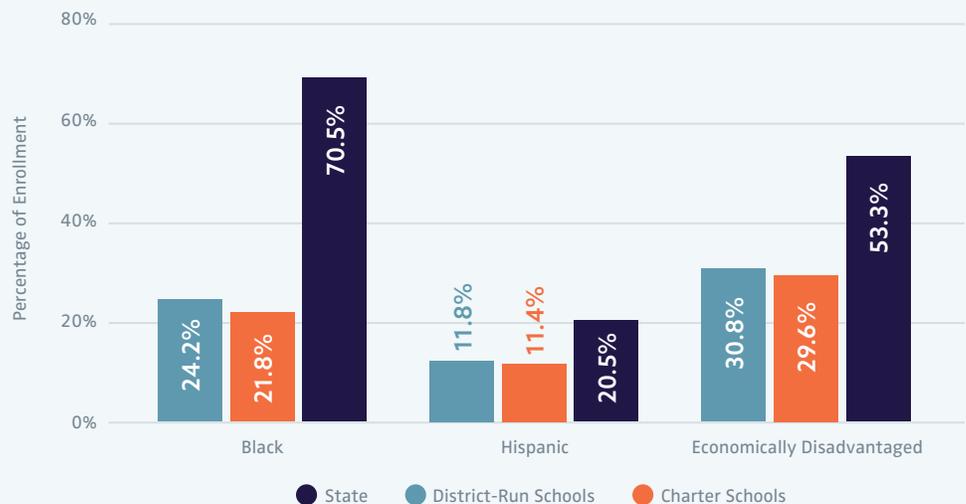
These high expectations are important as Tennessee’s nonprofit charter sector has grown significantly to encompass 115 schools across the state serving more than 44,000 students, the majority of whom are students of color and lower-income students. Prior year data also suggest that many charter schools frequently outperform traditional public schools in increasing student achievement for disadvantaged student groups.<sup>39</sup>

Public charter schools also serve a more racially diverse student population than district-run public schools while demonstrating higher overall growth rates pre-pandemic. On average, nine of ten students attending the state’s nonprofit public charter schools are Black or Hispanic compared to three in ten traditional school students.

## PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVE A HIGHER PROPORTION OF TENNESSEE’S DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students by public school type

Source: TDOE, 2020



Because Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students have seen the steepest declines in student achievement statewide during the pandemic, state incentives to launch, expand, and replicate high-quality charter operators are even more important. Tennessee should maintain a policy foundation of high expectations and accountability that elevates and expands high-quality charter schools and continue to hold a high bar for opening new schools and closing charter schools that are not serving students well.

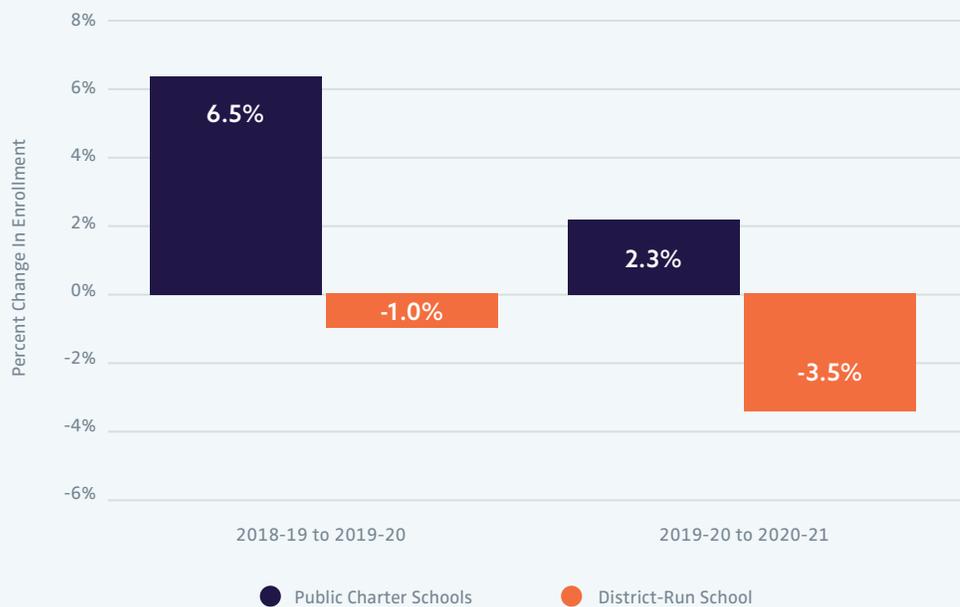
**Tennessee’s charter authorization process for high-quality charter schools must be strengthened and streamlined to give more students access to a high-quality education.** In recent years, more Tennessee families have shown interest in enrolling in high-quality public charter schools. Charter school enrollment increased by 12.7 percent while traditional public-school enrollment in the same districts decreased by 4.3 percent from 2018-19 to 2019-20. To meet this demand while maintaining high-quality options, the state’s charter application and authorization process ensures a thorough review process before charter schools can launch and expand but can also lead to unnecessary delays.



### MORE FAMILIES ARE CHOOSING TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Enrollment trends in districts with public charter options by school type

Source: TDOE, 2021





To open a new charter school, charter applicants must first apply for authorization from the local school district in which the applicant wants to serve students. The process for application, review, and approval is lengthy, sometimes lasting up to eight months. Charter schools whose applications have been denied by the local school board can appeal the decision, but this appeal adds up to three additional months and may unnecessarily delay the opening of a high-quality charter school to students in need of that option.<sup>40</sup> And at times, charter schools with strong track records and parent demand have been denied at the local level for reasons that are not connected to what is best for students.

Authorizers play an important role in monitoring school performance to ensure the charter schools in their portfolio are meeting their obligations to the students they serve. In 2019, the Tennessee General Assembly created the Tennessee Public Charter Commission to serve as the state-level authorizer for charter school appeals. Prior to the launch of the Charter Commission, the State Board of Education (SBE) implemented

the charter schools appeal process, hearing appeals beginning in 2003 and serving as an appellate authorizer from 2014 to 2021. Any schools previously authorized by the SBE are now authorized by the Charter Commission, and the SBE focuses on evaluating charter authorizers.

The Charter Commission is the authorizer for four schools that have opened and three more opening soon, offering additional high-quality education opportunities to more than 1,800 students. Given that student achievement has dropped across most grades and subjects statewide, there is no time to wait. The state's charter application and authorization process must be thorough to ensure only high-quality charter schools launch or expand, but it should streamline the application and review timeline to meet the increased demand without unnecessary delay. Tennessee should allow the Charter Commission to serve as a direct statewide authorizer under certain circumstances, so that families and students have timely access to a high-quality education today.



## CHARTER SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT: KIPP ANTIOCH COLLEGE PREP ELEMENTARY

KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary in Nashville currently enrolls 566 students in grades K-3. KIPP Antioch Elementary's charter application was initially denied by the local school board in 2015, but that decision was overturned through the appellate process, and the school was able to open its doors to Nashville students in 2018. Initially authorized by the State Board of Education, the school transferred to the Tennessee Public Charter Commission in 2021.

KIPP Antioch Elementary has introduced an innovative school option that can better serve families in its community:

- **KIPP Antioch Elementary offers a promising strategy to improve student achievement in Tennessee.** The school belongs to a charter network with strong, positive evidence of prior performance. A rigorous national study of KIPP schools found that students scored higher on both reading and math assessments.<sup>42</sup> KIPP Antioch Elementary does not yet have enough years of assessment data to report publicly, but the strong performance history of KIPP schools reflects the network's commitment to increasing achievement and holds promise in preparing students to succeed in college and life.
- **KIPP Antioch Elementary provides families with a school option to meet student needs.** KIPP Antioch Elementary is available for all students who are residents of Davidson County. The school serves a diverse group of students: 38 percent are Black, 25 percent are Hispanic, 28 percent are economically disadvantaged, and 28 percent are English Language Learners. Enrollment at the school has grown consistently since opening in 2018, nearly tripling in three years from 144 kindergarten students to 422 K-2 students, and the Charter Commission reports current enrollment is now 566.<sup>43</sup> These enrollment trends suggest the community values this public school option in Nashville.

**Funding policy puts charter schools at a disadvantage.**

Education funding has a strong impact on student outcomes for high-need students at the school level.<sup>44</sup> Resources are needed to cover costs for instruction, student supports, personnel, and capital maintenance, among other expenses. Yet compared to traditional public schools in their districts, both Davidson County and Shelby County charter schools receive between \$1,000 and \$3,000 less for each student because their funding is based on the district’s per-pupil average and does not account for the number of high-needs students served, such as students with disabilities or English learners.

Traditional public schools can finance new facilities through bonds repaid with revenue from local property taxes and state aid allowances, but charter schools do not currently have access to local annual, dedicated facilities funds. As a result, charter schools must redirect, on average, 10 percent of per-pupil funding toward facility costs each year.<sup>45</sup>



**PER-PUPIL FUNDING IS LOWER FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS IN THE TWO LARGEST DISTRICTS**

District-level per-pupil funding and enrollment information by school type, 2019

*While top-level analysis can show differences in funding levels between charter schools and traditional public schools in Davidson and Shelby counties, the small number of charter schools in Hamilton and Knox counties do not allow clear comparisons.*

Source: TDOE, 2020

	Per-Pupil Funding		Total Enrollment		Number of Schools	
	Charter	District-Run	Charter	District-Run	Charter	District-Run
Nashville (Davidson)	\$11,787	\$14,971	12,809	68,579	29	131
Shelby	\$11,895	\$12,373	16,000	90,307	54	148

In 2021, the state made significant investment to support charter schools by appropriating \$24 million to Tennessee’s Charter Facilities Fund, building on commitments in previous years. However, three-fourths of that appropriation was one-time funding, and a Tennessee Charter School Center survey reported that charter schools have \$35 million in urgent capital costs in the next year and \$75 million in anticipated costs over the next five years.<sup>47</sup> The state must continue to expand per-pupil facilities funding for public charter schools to ensure students have space to learn and grow.



## 2022 PRIORITY: INCREASE HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Expanding high-quality, public charter schools is one strategy to accelerate student learning in Tennessee. To ensure that students and families have access to these school options, the state must increase investment and create an ecosystem where high-quality charter schools can launch, operate, and thrive. As Tennessee strengthens and expands these opportunities, charter authorizer quality must remain a top priority so that high-quality school options open at the local level and are closely monitored with fidelity. Finally, the state must increase recurring funding for charter school facilities so that per-pupil funds can be directed toward hiring great teachers and providing innovative learning approaches to improve student outcomes.

### 1. The state should incentivize high-quality charter operators to launch, expand, and replicate.

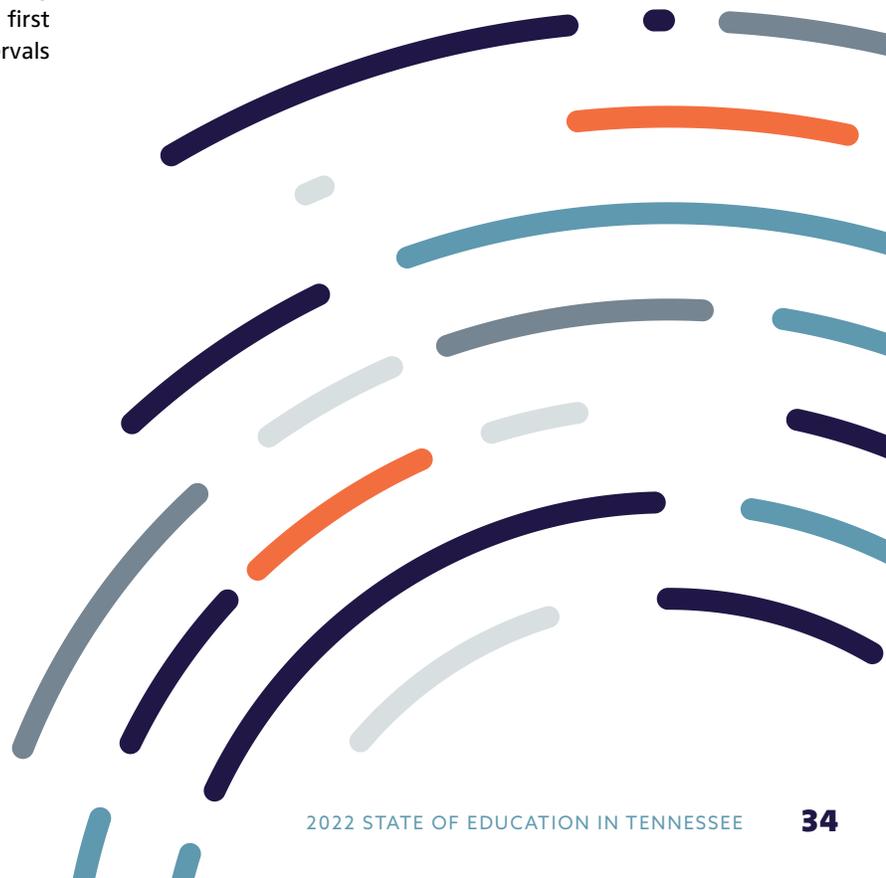
- **The state should invest in high-quality charter school expansion by offering support grants.** Building on its previous investment in charter school expansion, the state should continue to provide grants to high-performing charter school operators and to new operators with a history of strong academic performance to assist them in adding capacity to serve more students. Any grant for expansions of existing charter schools should have established achievement and enrollment targets.
- **The state also should fund grants through a public-private partnership to incubate new charter schools.** Currently, charter schools have access to grant funds once authorized, but grant funding at an earlier stage would support high-quality operators in planning and launching new charter schools. The state should combine the investment with private philanthropic resources to expand the ability to incubate more high-quality schools.
- **The state should strengthen data collection for charter schools.** The state should consistently report on the state's charter sector performance, ensure school-level data is available in the State Report Card and data downloads page, and add a unique charter school indicator to the Report Card so that users can easily distinguish between charter schools and district-run schools.

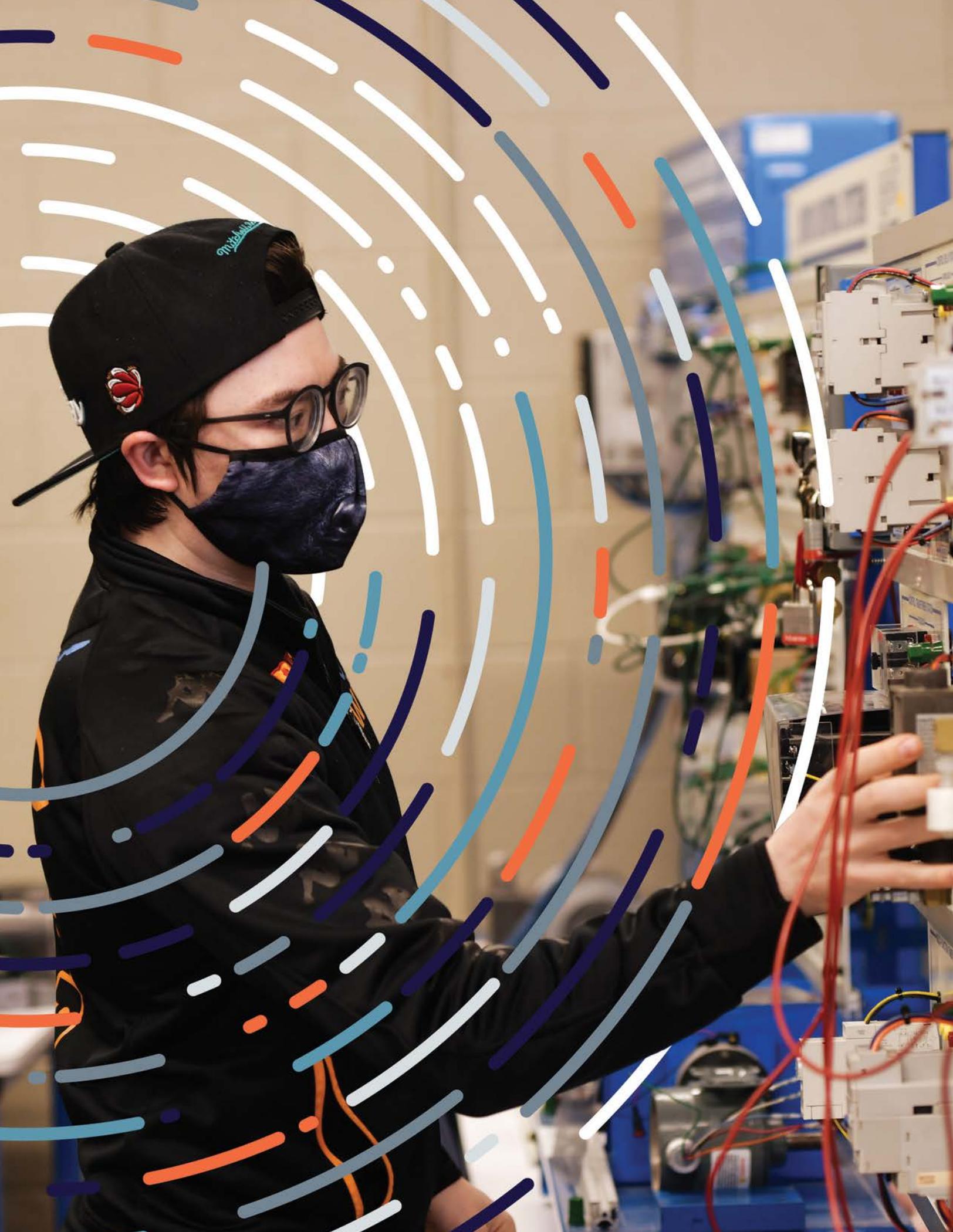
## 2: Tennessee should strengthen authorizer practices for high-quality charter schools.

- **The state should add charter authorization pathways to enable high-quality charter schools to operate.** The General Assembly should amend state law to permit the Public Charter School Commission to become a limited statewide authorizer for schools seeking to open in jurisdictions where denial decisions have been consistently overturned by the state appellate process. Additionally, local school boards should be permitted to voluntarily waive their authorizing role to the Charter Commission through an established process. These policies would eliminate bureaucratic hurdles for charter schools and ensure that high-quality charter school options are available for students and communities.
- **The State Board of Education should ensure authorizers are held to a high standard through the new evaluation process.** The state has set a high bar for authorizing practices and assessing all authorizers for the quality of their oversight and support functions. Furthermore, authorizers should be evaluated on whether they have consistently denied high-quality applications and had their decisions overturned on appeal. Authorizer evaluation results should be publicly available, and support should be provided to authorizers for continual improvement.
- **The State Board of Education should require charter authorizer training aligned to quality authorizer standards for local school boards that receive charter applications.** This rule should require an initial training process when a local school board receives its first application and recurring trainings at regular intervals moving forward.

## 3: Tennessee must address funding disparities for charter schools, including facilities funding.

- **The state should increase the share of recurring dollars for the Charter School Facilities Fund. In disbursing these funds,** the state should consider baseline facilities funding for all charter schools and include additional funding premiums for charter schools with a record of high performance. Beyond funding, the state also should establish clear definitions and processes that permit charter schools to access vacant and underutilized district facilities so that additional space is made available for student learning. In the long term, facilities challenges for charter schools could be addressed through a new state funding formula.
- To provide clarity on how state funds are spent between school districts and charter schools, **the state's annual charter school report should outline funding differences between traditional public schools and charter schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires** school level per-pupil expenditures to be reported, but inconsistent data collection for charter schools across districts impedes any meaningful analysis. In addition to strengthening data collection, the charter school report could also include recommendations to the legislature on how to address funding disparities for high quality-charter schools.





# PRIORITY: SUPPORT STUDENTS TO BE READY FOR CAREERS

Tennessee’s students must be prepared for tomorrow’s workforce opportunities. Currently, more than half of the state’s jobs require a postsecondary credential – whether an industry certificate earned in high school or a bachelor’s degree earned in college.<sup>48</sup> However, not enough Tennesseans have received the necessary skills to meet our state’s employment needs. Postsecondary credentials will improve the economic, health, and civic outcomes for students in the future.<sup>49</sup>

SCORE believes that the K-12 and higher education systems should provide students with coursework and other learning opportunities that are aligned to the workforce. To advance this priority, **Tennessee has three policy opportunities:**

1. Use K-12, college, and workforce data to inform policymaking and practice
2. Strengthen Tennessee’s career and technical education (CTE) and work-based learning (WBL) landscape
3. Increase partnerships across K-12, postsecondary education, and industry to provide students with high-quality credentials

**High-quality credentials unlock learning potential.** State labor data show that the earning power of credential holders is significantly higher than that of high school graduates without additional credentials or degrees. Recent Tennessee data show that on average, a degree-holder earns 1.5 times more than a high school diploma three years after graduation.<sup>50</sup> The premium is even higher for holders of associate or bachelor’s degrees. Simply put, credentials matter in preparing students for higher-wage jobs.

## COLLEGE GRADUATES, ON AVERAGE, EARN 1.5 TIMES MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Median salary three years after completion by degree type, class of 2016

Source: Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2020



In both K-12 and higher education, Tennessee students can earn credentials that prepare them for careers. School districts can provide robust CTE programs of study to high school students across 16 career clusters, some of which include course sequences leading to a work-based learning opportunity and/or an industry certification. Additionally, employers and high schools can partner to provide apprenticeships to students. There are a variety of early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) available in the state as well, such as Advanced Placement and dual enrollment, which offer students the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. Completing different combinations of EPSOs, credentials, and other activities in high school provide

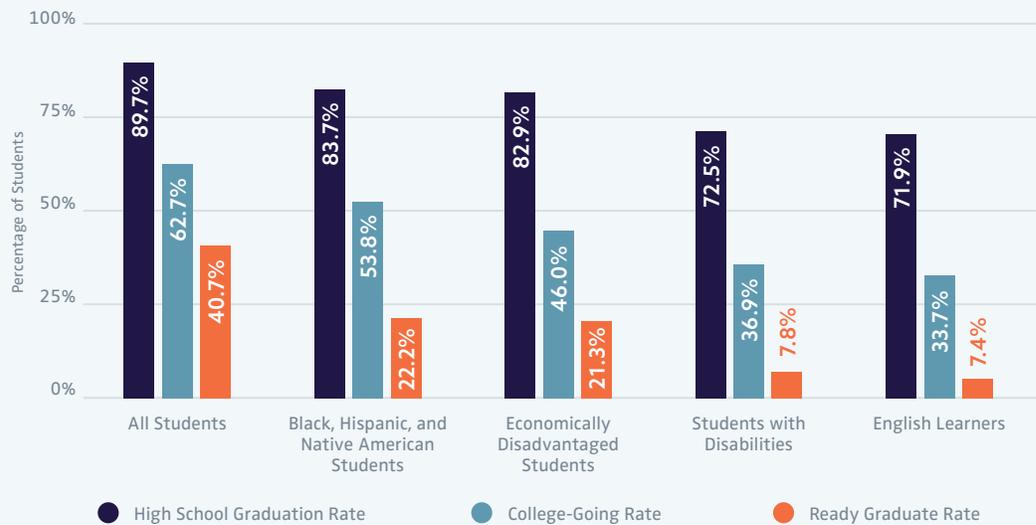
multiple pathways for Tennessee students to be considered a “Ready Graduate,” indicating they have completed courses or activities that increase their probability of succeeding in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Many Tennessee high school graduates, however, are still not considered “college or career ready.” While nine in ten students graduate high school, just four in ten are considered Ready Graduates. This disparity suggests that students do not receive the academic preparation and career training in high school that allows them to make the most of their college and career opportunities.

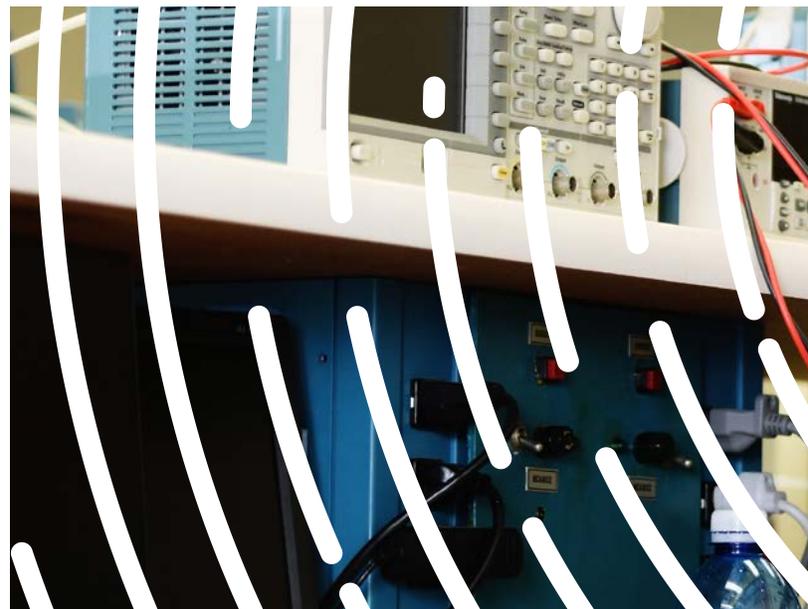
### HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS NEED MORE PREPARATION FOR POSTSECONDARY AND CAREER SUCCESS

High school graduation, college-going, and Ready Graduate rates by student group, 2019-20

Source: TDOE, 2021



In postsecondary education, students can earn diplomas and certificates at the state’s 27 TCATs, associate degrees at 13 community colleges, and various bachelor’s degrees from the state’s 10 public universities. These programs are approved by either the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) or the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and are subject to post-approval monitoring to ensure programs of study benefit students and the state as a whole.<sup>52</sup>



However, not enough students are receiving a postsecondary credential with the skills necessary to be successful in today's economy. More than half of Tennessee jobs require a postsecondary certificate or degree, yet most Tennesseans do not currently have one.<sup>53</sup> The state has mismatched education and workforce systems that lead many students to walk down an unfulfilling pathway.

**Tennessee must first improve K-12 to workforce data access and use.** The state's longitudinal data system, called P20 Connect TN, links information from multiple state agencies and is based in the Office of Evidence and Impact. P20 Connect TN has potential to empower state leaders, school districts, and postsecondary institutions to understand longer-term student outcomes and what students need at each point as they go through school, college, and into work.<sup>54</sup>

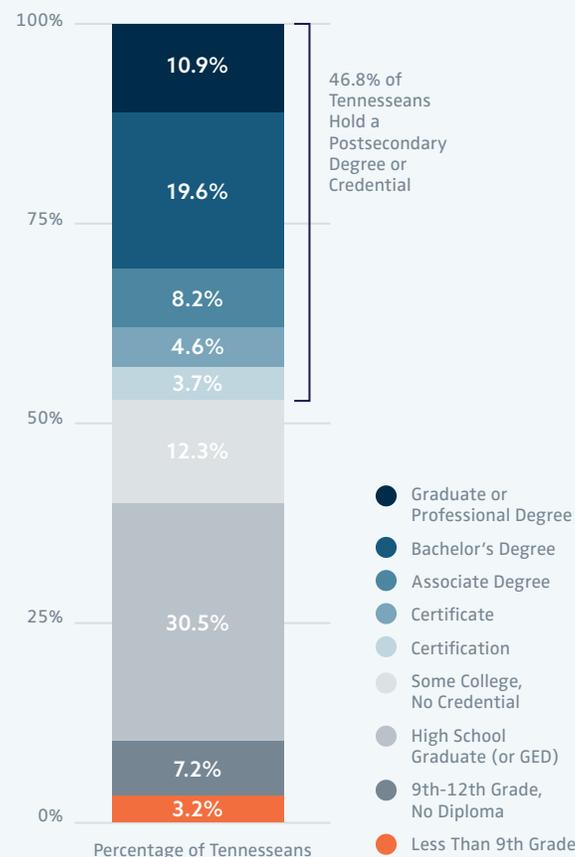
However, the P20 Connect TN data system is not yet fully accessible or used to provide information to stakeholders on how to further improve student outcomes. State agencies lack access to this system, and the data is currently underused by both state leaders and agencies.<sup>55</sup> Without a clear, connected, and coherent picture of how Tennessee systems are serving students, leaders who want to make data-informed decisions are only seeing a broken-mirror reflection.

To provide a clearer picture for data-grounded alignment of education and workforce needs, Tennessee must strengthen the policy for oversight and governance of P20 Connect TN and make bigger investments in staffing and technical capacity. Armed with better information, Tennessee leaders could and should be expected to set a strong vision and use data-driven research for decision-making.

## MORE THAN HALF OF JOBS REQUIRE A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL, BUT MOST TENNESSEANS DO NOT HOLD ONE

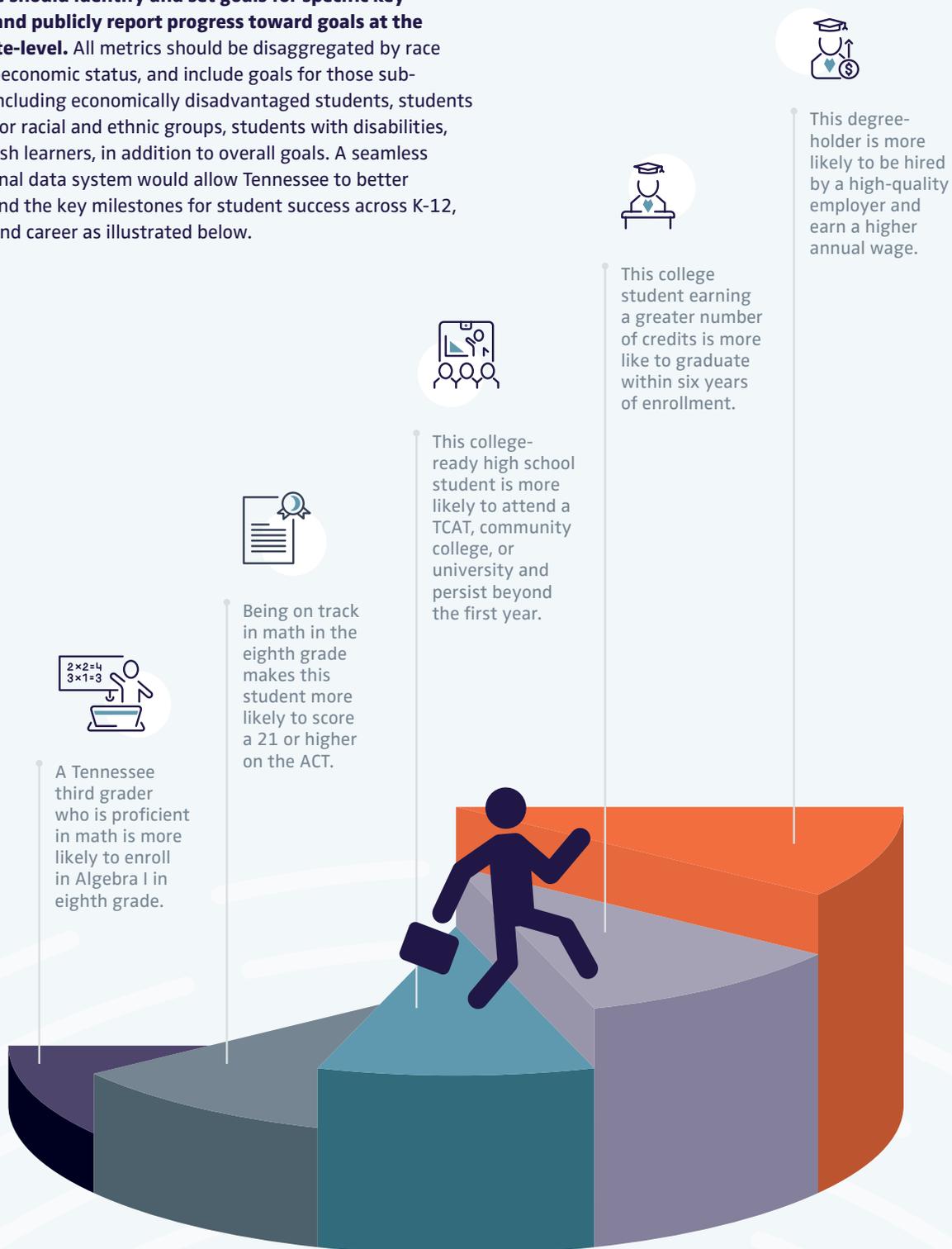
Educational attainment by degree type for Tennessee residents ages 25-64

Source: Lumina Foundation, 2020



# MILESTONES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS FROM K-12 TO WORKFORCE

The state should identify and set goals for specific key metrics and publicly report progress toward goals at the aggregate-level. All metrics should be disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status, and include goals for those sub-groups, including economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and English learners, in addition to overall goals. A seamless longitudinal data system would allow Tennessee to better understand the key milestones for student success across K-12, college, and career as illustrated below.



A Tennessee third grader who is proficient in math is more likely to enroll in Algebra I in eighth grade.



Being on track in math in the eighth grade makes this student more likely to score a 21 or higher on the ACT.



This college-ready high school student is more likely to attend a TCAT, community college, or university and persist beyond the first year.



This college student earning a greater number of credits is more likely to graduate within six years of enrollment.



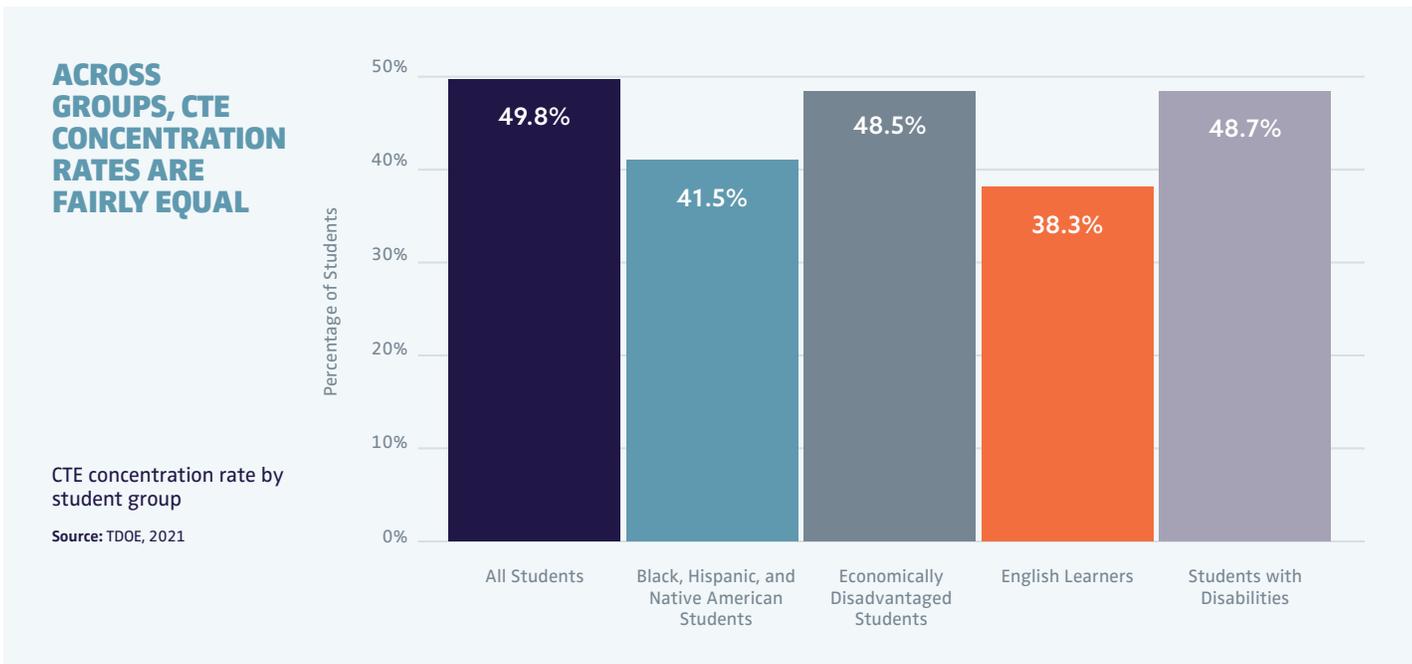
This degree-holder is more likely to be hired by a high-quality employer and earn a higher annual wage.

These are examples of information that could be drawn from a more robust P20 System. They are not based on Tennessee-specific data.



**More high school students should have access to CTE and WBL that is aligned to workforce opportunities.** Research shows that CTE and WBL hold great promise for positive student outcomes. Students who take numerous CTE courses in a program of study are more likely to graduate high school, be employed after high school, and earn higher wages. Participation in these courses by low-income students and students with disabilities is also associated with postsecondary enrollment.<sup>57</sup> Strengthening a school district’s ability to offer a wide array of relevant CTE courses expands opportunity for some of Tennessee’s largest student groups and prepares them to successfully enter the workforce.

Tennessee has seen success in enrolling students in these high-quality pathways at the high school level. On average, almost half of high school graduates have enrolled in at least two CTE courses within the same program of study. These participation rates remain high when looking at the state’s largest student groups: over one-third of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students enroll in at least two CTE courses, and just under 50 percent of students who are lower income have enrolled.





Yet even with these higher participation rates, an external review found that the industry credentials offered through Tennessee’s CTE courses are only “moderately aligned” to workforce opportunities, and six of the ten most common industry credentials received by Tennessee high school graduates have no employer demand. The state has made progress in expanding student participation in CTE courses but has room to improve in making sure these credentials provide students with real skills to succeed in the workplace.

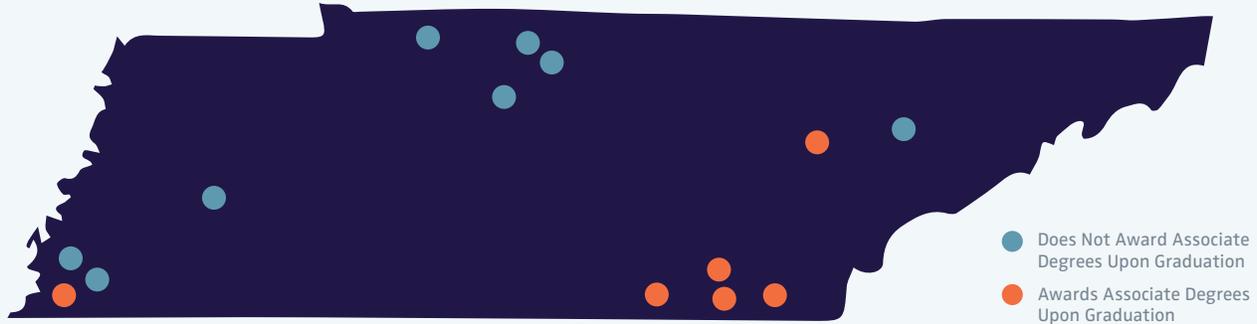
K-12, postsecondary education, and industry should form stronger partnerships centered on providing high-demand, high-wage credentials to students today. Such partnerships can ensure that students have access to high-demand credentials. These partnerships – high school-postsecondary partnerships, high school-industry partnerships, and postsecondary-industry partnerships – have untapped value for student outcomes in each sector and provide innovative postsecondary training opportunities.

One partnership strategy that increases high school relevance and efficiency in preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce is the early and middle college model, which allows a student to earn a high school diploma concurrently with a postsecondary credential. Research shows these models benefit students of many backgrounds – including those from lower-income backgrounds – in college enrollment and attainment.<sup>59</sup> This approach is not widespread in Tennessee, with about 14 early and middle college models existing in the state and only six of those awarding associate degrees upon high school graduation in a report released in 2017.<sup>60</sup> Districts and higher education institutions need streamlined support to launch these models that offer credential opportunities to students.

## ACCESS TO EARLY AND MIDDLE COLLEGES VARIES ACROSS TENNESSEE

Location of early and middle colleges across Tennessee

Source: Complete Tennessee, 2017



Another solution to prepare more students for work is through industry-led WBL partnerships with high schools and postsecondary institutions. Apprenticeships provide students an opportunity to work with an employer to gain work experience and skills while completing their high school diploma or postsecondary credential. As another example, shorter-term certificates and two-year and four-

year degrees that are designed in partnership with industry enable students to gain impactful training while participating in higher education. Both opportunities have increased incrementally in Tennessee over the last decade, but more work remains to scale up these practices statewide so that all students can benefit from industry-led learning in both high school and higher education.



## BLUESKY TENNESSEE INSTITUTE

- BlueSky Tennessee Institute, a partnership between BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and East Tennessee State University (ETSU), allows students to earn an accelerated bachelor of science in computing degree from ETSU and a job offer from BlueCross. Classes are taken on site at the company's offices in Chattanooga, and students work as paid interns while receiving on-the-job mentoring.
- Program recruitment focuses on six high schools in the Hamilton County area. The impetus for the program's development came from a talent shortage: BlueCross faced a labor shortage of highly qualified workers and spent 12-18 months training new employees. The BlueSky Tennessee Institute was developed as an innovative partnership with ETSU to fill in this training gap. Due to the project-based nature of BlueSky, graduates learn on the job and are able to graduate with their degree ready to succeed in the workplace on day one.
- ETSU stood as an excellent collaborator for BlueSky as it is one of just three universities with multiple programs accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. Additionally, their graduates have gone on to work for top-tier organizations across the country. The BlueSky model demonstrates the possibilities of postsecondary to workforce success through pairing the innovative nature of ETSU with the accelerated training structure of BlueSky. The result: students enter the workforce fully prepared.

## 2022 PRIORITY: SUPPORT STUDENTS TO BE READY FOR CAREERS

The state's economic prosperity depends on a workforce that offers high-quality jobs and a stream of graduates ready to succeed in them. To ensure both, Tennessee must leverage the power of the state's P20 Connect TN system to enable state leaders to make more informed policy and investment decisions that will further improve student success across K-12, postsecondary education, and into the workforce. Additionally, policies and strategic investments should provide more opportunity for students to be exposed to and prepared for the workplace through programming and partnerships that expand readiness in both K-12 and postsecondary education.

### 1. Tennessee must use K-12, college, and workforce data to inform policymaking and practice.

- The **General Assembly should pass legislation that codifies governance and use of the P20 Connect TN data system in Tennessee**, with clear articulation of the goals and management at the Office of Evidence and Impact. This policy should outline the role of OEI and participating state agencies in contributing to and supporting the P20 Connect TN data system. It should also outline opportunities to make the data more accessible to practitioners and Tennesseans more broadly.
- To ensure adequate staffing capacity and strong infrastructure, the **General Assembly should also provide funding to the contributing state agencies and to OEI to support data management and sharing**. Additionally, investments should support a strong data processing infrastructure for management and reporting of data in public dashboards for stakeholders to access and use.

## 2. The state should strengthen Tennessee’s CTE and WBL for Tennessee students.

- The General Assembly should pass legislation to **codify the process for identifying the TDOE Promoted Student Industry Credential list** rooted in a clear definition of a “high-quality credential.” TDOE has a process for highlighting the industry credentials offered in high school that are aligned to employer needs, but codification would send a clear signal that CTE programs of study must be responsive and aligned to the real-world workforce needs.
- The General Assembly should **update state law to require districts to send notification of comprehensive CTE, WBL, EPSO, and other offerings to students and parents** at the start of each year. Many Tennessee high schools offer a variety of comprehensive CTE programming and WBL options, but a more intentional notification process would ensure that students and families know about these course and credential opportunities.
- The General Assembly should require **TDOE and districts to improve data collection and reporting about CTE, WBL, and Ready Graduate activities.** Disaggregated data on participation in various CTE courses, work-based learning options, and the Ready Graduate indicator by pathway would equip state leaders and advocates with a better understanding for how to improve the landscape for students moving forward.

## 3. Tennessee should increase education-industry partnerships that can provide students with high-quality credentials.

- The General Assembly should pass legislation that creates a **state designation process for new middle college programs.** While Tennessee has some existing programs, a designation process would establish a standard set of expectations for high-quality, student-focused middle colleges. These guardrails should include a requirement for a postsecondary credential to be earned with a high school diploma within one semester prior to high school graduation, for the rigor of coursework to be maintained at both K-12 and postsecondary levels, and for the partnership to prioritize equitable participation in this opportunity across different student groups.
- The state’s Office of Apprenticeships should **explore the feasibility of extending scholarship dollars to students who participate in registered and high-quality apprenticeship programs** in both high school and postsecondary education. Registered apprenticeship programs are approved by the US Department of Labor, meeting quality standards and leading to an industry-certified credential.<sup>61</sup> To ensure students can afford these opportunities in high school and college, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the Tennessee Department of Education should convene a task force to explore the possibility of extending existing scholarship dollars to students taking part in registered apprenticeships in both K-12 and higher education.
- To expand the use of embedded shorter-term credentials, the state should **provide tax incentives and sub-grants to businesses that partner with public colleges and universities to offer credential-bearing partnerships or short-term credentials within existing programs of study.** The state should incentivize both local industry and higher education through tax incentives and sub-grant funding to embed certificates and credentials within existing programs of study. A policy in South Carolina permits eligible businesses that sponsor a registered apprenticeship program to receive a \$1,000 tax credit for each registered apprenticeship employed for at least seven months during the apprenticeship for up to four years.<sup>62</sup> Moving forward, the state could consider similar tax credit options for businesses that provide workforce-aligned career training with postsecondary education.





# 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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