

COMPLETE TENNESSEE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Meeting One | 2021 Issue Brief

THE HISTORY OF TENNESSEE'S HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee is known across the country for its thoughtful and comprehensive higher education policy structure, which has been built on over a decade of student-focused policy changes at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. However, despite the many strong policies in place, there is still much work to be done by Tennessee leaders in order to help the state reach its higher education goals.

The dilemma facing higher education leaders in Tennessee—an urgent need to continue above-average progress toward ambitious goals—can be seen by looking at the state's postsecondary attainment rate data over the last decade. The number of working-age adults in Tennessee who have attained a certificate or degree has grown at an impressive rate since 2008—only eight states have higher attainment growth rates over that period. However, despite such growth, Tennessee's current overall attainment rate is just 45.2 percent—only five states have lower current attainment levels.¹

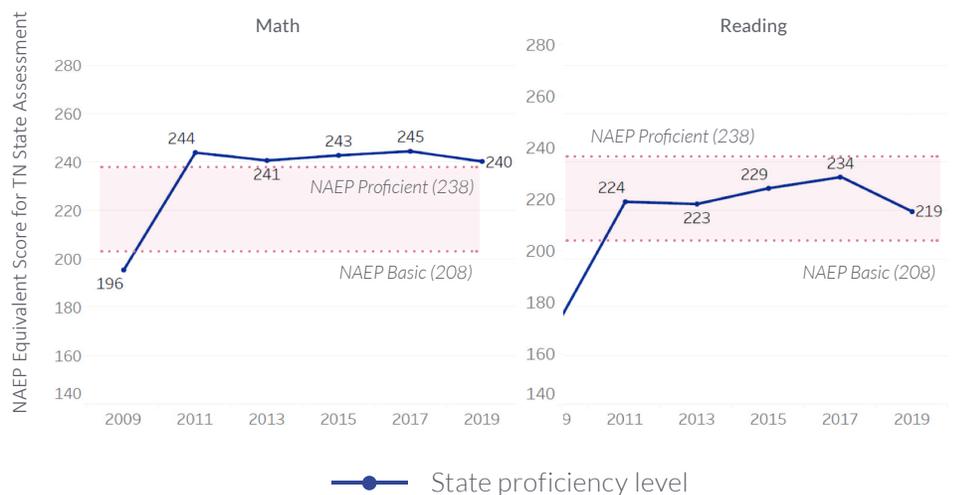
The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have made this work even more urgently important for Tennessee's future. Current predictions state that by 2027, 70 percent of jobs will require some education beyond high school.² When we look back across the last two major recessions, the unemployment gap between degree-earners and those without degrees widened significantly since 2001—and the difference still has not been made up.³ As Tennessee works to develop an economic recovery strategy, many Tennesseans who have experienced job loss or income reduction will seek to re- or up-skill by attaining a credential, certificate, or degree from one of the state's institutions of higher education (IHEs). However, significant declines in community college enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to hinder further progress toward postsecondary attainment goals. As policymakers at all levels redouble their efforts to make progress toward the state's higher education goals, it is important to understand the major milestones of state education policy developments over the last decade.

K-12 CORE REFORMS

In 2010, Tennessee adopted a new set of statewide academic standards that were more closely aligned with nationwide measures of student achievement such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The state standards were further refined in the 2017-18 school year with the adoption of the Tennessee Academic Standards.

In order to measure how state standards have changed over time, NAEP conducts a "mapping" process to determine a NAEP equivalent score for each state proficiency standard. This measure shows what score students would receive on the NAEP assessment if they met the state proficiency standard. As shown in **Figure 1**, Tennessee's proficiency standard in 2009 was lower than the NAEP proficiency standard; by 2011, the state's proficiency standards were significantly higher.

FIGURE 1
STATE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS COMPARED TO NAEP | GRADE 4, 2009-2017





These K-12 policy reforms have produced significant results—the Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University used longitudinal assessment data to show that districts in Tennessee strongly outperform their regional counterparts on providing educational opportunity, as measured by average test scores, learning rates, and trends in test scores.⁴ However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant drops in student proficiency, with overall proficiency dropping five points since 2019. Although secondary education moved quickly to adapt to the pandemic, these gaps in proficiency demonstrate the impact of virtual learning and psychological stress due to the pandemic. In order to ensure proficiency improves to pre-pandemic levels, dedicated effort will be required across the state.

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM LEGISLATION

In 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA), which established the state’s **outcomes-based funding (OBF)** formula for IHEs. Two particular features of the formula established by CCTA remain notable among state IHE funding formulas:

- While many states only allocate a modest percentage of IHE funding based on OBFs, the Tennessee model allocates the majority of state IHE funding based on student outcome measures.
- The Tennessee OBF model is also distinguished by its flexibility—there are different sets of outcomes used for two-year IHEs and four-year IHEs, and the weights used for those outcomes are tailored to each IHE’s mission.

OBF

A policy that bases a portion of an institution of higher education’s funding on certain information about its graduates, such as the numbers of associate and bachelor’s degrees earned.

ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

Policies that govern the number of course credits that IHEs will accept for incoming transfer students.

The CCTA also laid the groundwork for the development of the state’s Tennessee Transfer Pathways, which established a transferable block of courses that are accepted as transfer credits by public IHEs across the state.

STATEWIDE POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL

Tennessee became one of the first states in the country to adopt a **postsecondary attainment goal** in 2013 by establishing the Drive to 55 initiative, which states that:

- By **2025, at least 55 percent** of Tennesseans aged **25-64-years-old** will have a **postsecondary credential**.⁵

POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL

A policy goal stating that by a certain year, a certain percentage of state residents will have some form of education beyond high school.





TUITION-FREE TECHNICAL OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS

There are several different financial aid policies in Tennessee that help students afford to pay for their postsecondary education. In 2014, the state enacted the Tennessee Promise program—a **tuition-free community and technical college program** that provides scholarship funding and mentorship for students to attend a community or technical college. One hallmark of the Tennessee Promise program is the one-on-one support that participating students receive from mentors through partner organizations, including The Ayers Foundation and tnAchieves. In 2017, the state enacted the Tennessee Reconnect program, providing tuition-free community and technical college for adult students who do not already have an associate degree or higher and qualify as an independent student on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

TUITION-FREE COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE PROGRAM

A policy that allows students to attend a community or technical college without paying tuition.

TENNESSEE TRANSFER PATHWAYS (TTPS)

One of the six changes put forth by the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 was the creation of a 60-hour block of courses that would be guaranteed for transfer between community colleges and universities if approved within a [transfer pathway](#) for specific programs of study. Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTPs) are more than just articulation agreements – they are a single, statewide articulation agreement for an agreed set of programs of study. The TTP was intended to ensure that when students transfer, their credits transfer, too.

The Middle College Scholarship, which started in the Fall of 2018, is awarded to high school juniors and seniors enrolled full-time at an eligible community college with an amount of \$1,250 per semester.⁶

The HOPE Scholarship is established and funded from the net proceeds of the state lottery and awarded to entering first-years who are enrolled at an eligible postsecondary institution within sixteen months after graduating from an eligible high school. Students in Tennessee are eligible for the HOPE Scholarship by finishing high school with at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA. Students are awarded up to \$1,750 per full-time enrollment semester as first-years and sophomores and then up to \$2,250 per full-time enrollment semester as a junior and senior.⁷

The Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant is established and funded from the net proceeds of the state lottery. It is awarded to students who are enrolled at a TN College of Applied Technology, granting them an award of \$2,000. Under certain circumstances, Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant recipients who complete their diploma may be eligible to receive a HOPE Scholarship by enrolling at an eligible two-year or four-year postsecondary institution within three years of completing a diploma.⁸



LANDSCAPE OVERVIEW OF TENNESSEE'S KEY HIGHER EDUCATION PLAYERS & PROGRAMS

These developments led to the creation of a higher education policy structure in Tennessee that involves many key players who share responsibility for different programs:

KEY PLAYERS

Coordinating Board

Responsible for providing guidance to the Tennessee Board of Regents, University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and locally governed state universities.

THEC	Tennessee Higher Education Commission
TSAC	Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation

System Boards

Responsible for setting policy and governance for member IHEs. Each University of Tennessee campus has its own Advisory Board in addition to the System Board.

TBR	Tennessee Board of Regents
UT	University of Tennessee Board of Trustees

Locally Governed Institutions

Responsible for governance of six individual IHE campuses.

LGI	Locally Governed Institutions
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Government Agencies

Responsible for administering and executing specific duties, e.g. financial aid, curriculum development, etc.

TDOE	TN Department of Education
TNECD	TN Department of Economic & Community Development
TLWD	TN Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Nonprofit Partners

Responsible for providing support across multiple programs.

TICUA	TN Independent Colleges & Universities Association
SCORE	State Collaborative on Reforming Education
DRIVETO55	Drive to 55 Alliance
TNACHIEVES	Tennessee Achieves
AYERS	Ayers Foundation
ET-TN	The Education Trust in TN
THEI	TN Higher Education Initiative
TCASN	TN College Access & Success Network
TNCHAMBER	TN Chamber of Commerce & Industry

KEY PROGRAMS

Advise TN

College-advising for high school students

THEC

Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning

Real-world experience for students

THEC **TLWD** **TDOE**

Early College Opportunities

Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, etc.

LGI **TBR** **TDOE**
THEC **TICUA** **UT**

Gear Up TN

College-going culture development

THEC

Governor's Investment in Vocational Education

Industry-relevant technical training and grants

THEC

Mentorship

Support for TN Promise recipients

AYERS **TNACHIEVES**

Outcomes-Based Funding Formula

Allocation of funding based on student outcome metrics

THEC

Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)

Early remediation program

TBR **TDOE** **THEC**

TN Education Lottery Scholarships (TELS)

Scholarship program for entering freshmen

TSAC

TN Promise

Scholarship program for HS graduates

TBR **TSAC**

TN Reconnect

Scholarship program for adult learners

TBR **TSAC**

TN Transfer Pathways

Support for transfer students

TBR



OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS POLICY ISSUES

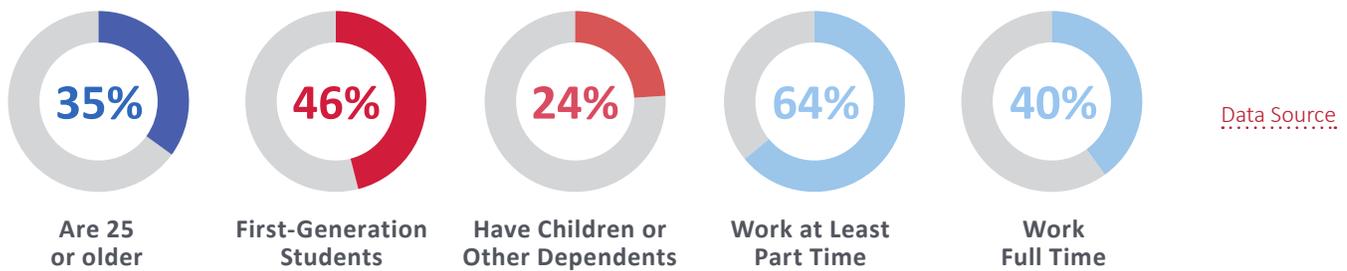
Many of the policy conversations at this first meeting will be framed around the basic question of access: which students are able to pursue a postsecondary education, and how do they get there?

STUDENT POPULATIONS

A traditional college student is generally considered to be someone who enrolls in college full-time, immediately after graduating from high school, is financially dependent on their parents, and does not work while attending college. However, a nationwide demographic breakdown of the current higher education population shows that many students do not fit that traditional definition.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TODAY'S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT POPULATION

The average college student is 26 years old.

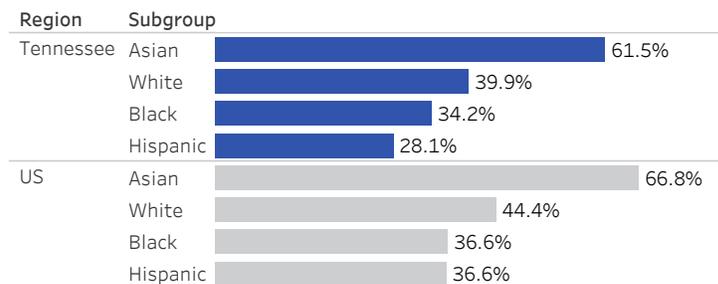


In Tennessee, higher education policymakers have focused on four traditionally underserved student populations who have specific needs related to higher education access:

ADULT LEARNERS	Students who are 25 years old or older.
LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	Students who qualified for the need-based federal Pell Grant at any time during their college careers.
ACADEMICALLY UNDERPREPARED	Students who receive an ACT composite score of 18 or lower.
STUDENTS OF COLOR	African American and Latino students.

When it comes to the percentage of students of color that enroll in higher education, there are gaps between the enrollment rates of different student subgroups. Enrollment percentages of white and Asian students in Tennessee are higher than the percentages for Black and Hispanic students.

FIGURE 2
IHE ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES FOR STUDENTS AGES 18-24 | 2018



Data Source



CITATIONS

- ¹ Lumina Foundation, “A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent,” <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#nation>
- ² Goldie Blumenstyk, The Chronicle of Higher Education, “By 2020, They Said, 2 Out of 3 Jobs Would Need More Than a High-School Diploma. Were They Right?,” <https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/the-edge/2020-01-22>
- ³ State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) and The Boyd Center for Business & Economic Research at The University of Tennessee – Knoxville, “Driving Forward: Ensuring Postsecondary Students Earn Credentials in a Changing Economy,” <https://drivingforward.tnscore.org/section-3>
- ⁴ Sean F. Reardon et al., The Educational Opportunity Project, Stanford University, <https://edopportunity.org/>
- ⁵ Lumina Foundation, “A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent,” <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#/progress/state/TN>
- ⁶ Tennessee State Government, “Middle College Scholarship,” <https://www.tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/tn-education-lottery-programs/middle-college-scholarship.html>
- ⁷ Tennessee State Government, “Tennessee HOPE Scholarship,” <https://www.tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/tn-education-lottery-programs/tennessee-hope-scholarship.html>
- ⁸ Tennessee State Government, “Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant,” <https://www.tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/tn-education-lottery-programs/wilder-naifeh-technical-skills-grant.html>



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