

# SUPPORTING POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUCCESS

January 11-12, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

The first meeting of the 2020-21 Complete Tennessee Leadership Institute (CTLI) program focused on *equity and quality of access* to higher education. For the second meeting, the policy discussions will focus on the theme of *supporting postsecondary student success*. Once students have started their higher education journey, how can state and local leaders help them stay continuously enrolled and make steady progress toward their goals?

As discussed during the first meeting, in order to make progress toward the Drive to 55 statewide postsecondary attainment goal, policymakers must encourage Tennesseans from all walks of life to pursue higher education. However, we know that simply accessing higher education is not enough – the overall rate of students who complete higher education is just over 50 percent.<sup>1</sup> Once enrolled, these diverse populations require different supports from institutions of higher education as well as state and local agencies. These supports are especially important for certain student populations, such as first-generation students, who may be unsure of how to navigate the unfamiliar higher education space, and adult learners, who may be re-engaging with a higher education system they don't recognize.

## RETENTION & PERSISTENCE

The first year of higher education can be a make-or-break moment for many students. Those who manage to stay enrolled at an institution of higher education (IHE) throughout their first year have set themselves up for success; students who “stop out” sometime during their first year by pausing their enrollment are at risk of falling behind and joining the 16.8 percent of adults in Tennessee who have “some college, no degree.”<sup>2</sup>

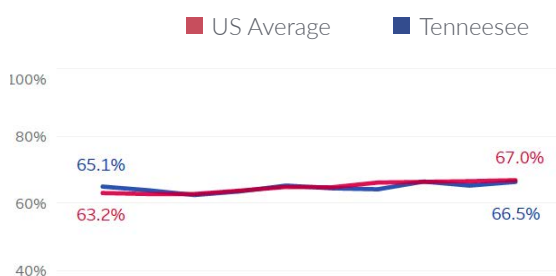
Two important measures of college success are retention and persistence rates:

■ **Retention rates** measure the percentage of students who are continually enrolled at the same IHE through the fall semesters of their first and second years.

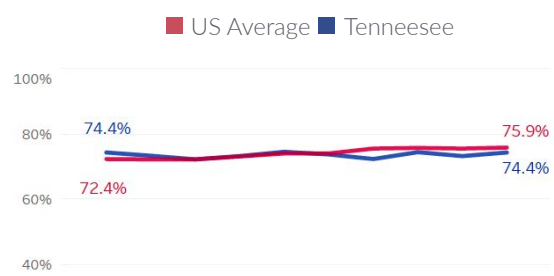
■ **Persistence rates** measure the percentage of students who are continually enrolled at any IHE through the fall semesters of their first and second years.

According to nationwide data from the National Student Clearinghouse, Tennessee's overall retention and persistence rates have remained relatively steady over the last decade and closely mirrored the national average rates. The state's retention rate has increased slightly over the years but the latest data point (the rate for the Fall 2018 cohort) is below the national average, which saw a higher rate of growth over that period. Tennessee's statewide persistence rate for the Fall 2018 cohort is equal to the rate for the Fall 2009 cohort and is now below the national average.<sup>3</sup>

**FIGURE 1**  
RETENTION RATES OVER TIME | 2009 - 2019



**FIGURE 2**  
PERSISTENCE RATES OVER TIME | 2009 - 2019



[Source](#)

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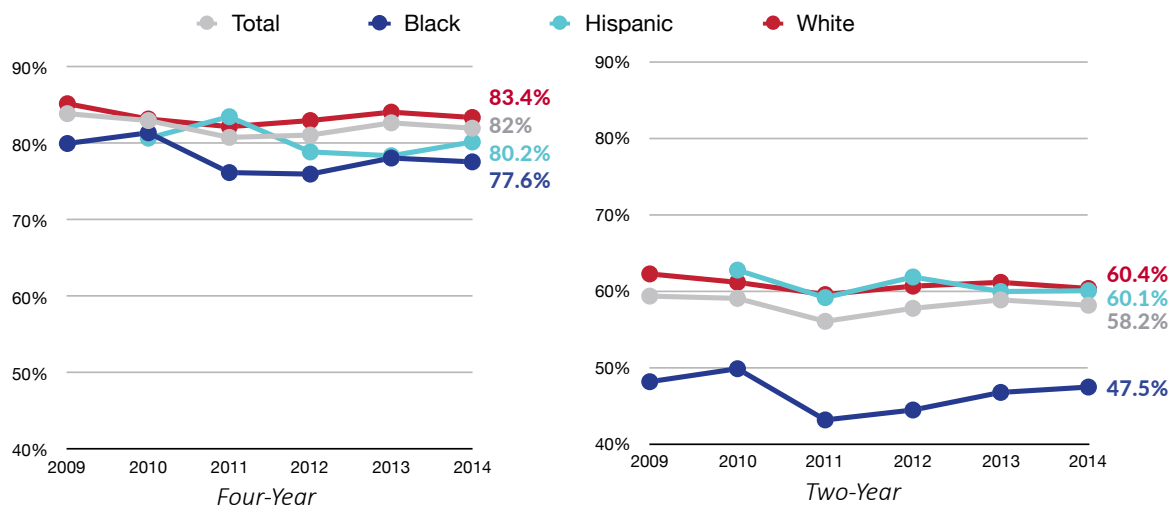
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However, these overall rates mask important differences between student success rates by type of IHE and by racial and ethnic subgroups. The following breakdown of Tennessee persistence rates over time, based on state-specific data collected by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission & Student Assistance Corporation, provides a clearer picture and shows that:

- Students at four-year IHEs are considerably more likely to stay enrolled through their second year when compared to students at two-year IHEs; and
- There are significant equity gaps between the persistence rates of white students and the rates of Hispanic and Black students. The persistence rates for Black students at two-year IHEs are especially stark – the percentage of white students who remain enrolled at a two-year IHE is nearly 13 percentage points higher than the rate for Black students.<sup>4</sup>
- Breaking down persistence rates at public IHEs in Tennessee by sector shows that the likelihood of a student remaining enrolled is higher at Locally Governed Institutions than at a Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Community College – and is even higher at an institution in the University of Tennessee System.

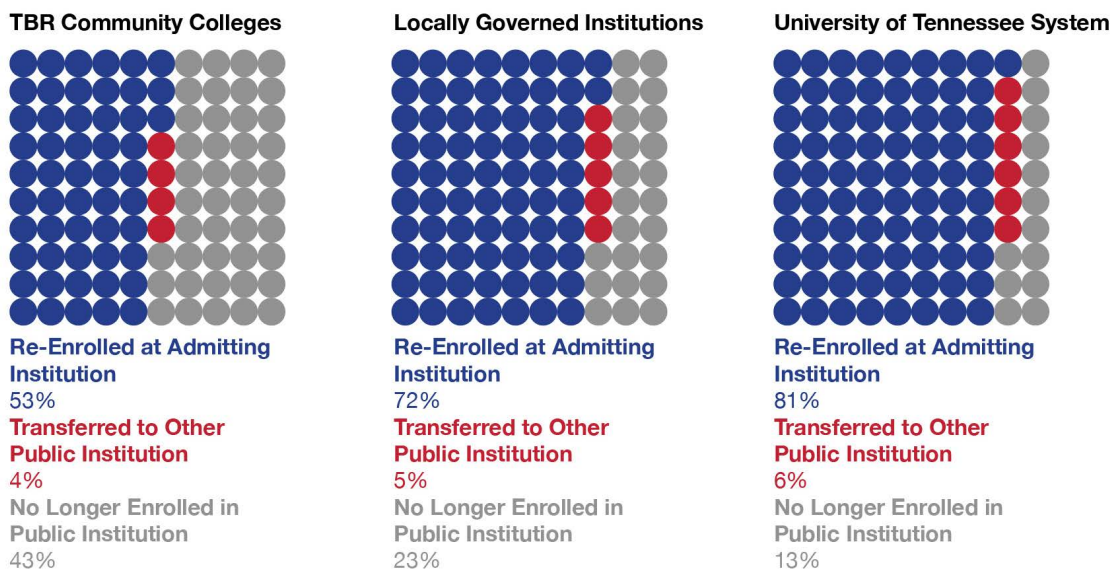
**FIGURE 3**  
PERSISTENCE RATE (YEAR 1 TO YEAR 2) BY RACE AND IHE TYPE, 2009 THROUGH 2014

Source



**FIGURE 4**  
PERSISTENCE RATES BY INSTITUTION TYPE

Source





## Best Practice Examples from Other States

As Tennessee looks to build on the policies in place to encourage higher education student success, policymakers may consider adopting strategies and lessons learned from other states and IHEs.

### GEORGIA - USING PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS TO KEEP STUDENTS ON TRACK<sup>5</sup>

At the institution level, one of the most widely cited completion initiatives has been the use of predictive analytics at Georgia State University (GSU). Since 2012, GSU has leveraged its institutional data to make sure that students are on track to complete their degrees on time. The institution's GPS Advising system allows GSU counselors to target supportive interventions for students who enroll in courses that do not help them make progress toward their degree, or to those who are underperforming in key courses. In addition to the predictive analytics system, GSU has implemented a number of complementary completion initiatives for students such as the Panther Retention Grants program, which provides small amounts of aid for students who experience some sort of financial emergency that may prevent them from completing.

### CALIFORNIA - PROVIDING A SUITE OF SUPPORT SERVICES TO HELP STUDENTS ADAPT TO HIGHER EDUCATION<sup>6</sup>

Another example of a completion best practice from the IHE system level is the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at California State University (CSU). EOP provides a holistic set of counseling and support services for low-income and traditionally underserved students who attend a school in the CSU system. While the specific services vary by campus, EOP generally provides participants with ongoing advising, tutoring, mentoring, and workshops designed to increase student retention and persistence rates. EOP also offers a summer program where participants are provided with an opportunity to adjust and transition to the university environment and are introduced to an extensive educational support service network.

## TRANSFER STUDENTS

In addition to supporting students during their first year of higher education, policymakers should also ensure that students who transfer from one IHE to another receive the support and guidance they need to succeed.

The primary way to support transfer students is through the establishment of credit transfer agreements that govern the transferability of courses and credits between IHEs. There are a number of different approaches that policymakers can use to enhance the transferability of credits, although some of the most common strategies include:

- **Common Course Numbering** – a strategy where IHE leaders determine which courses share the same learning goals and content and then assign those courses the same prefix, number, title, credits, and other descriptions.
- **Articulation Agreement** – a specific agreement that governs the transfer of specific coursework between two or more IHEs.
- **Guaranteed Admissions** – a system that allows students who graduate with a certain degree (such as an associate degree) to automatically receive guaranteed admission to another public IHE (such as a four-year college or university).

Although credit transfer agreements may sound relatively straightforward, there are a number of complex issues that are involved in the implementation of such agreements. These include:

- **Credit Loss and Applicability** – a primary concern is credits earned at one institution may not count toward a particular degree at receiving institutions. While a course may meet a degree requirement at one institution, it may count as only an elective at the second, which students may not discover until after they transfer. Additional coursework needed to graduate increases costs and postpones time to degree.
- **Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs)** – many states offer EPSOs, where high school students are able to take classes that could result in a higher education course credit. However, not all state credit transfer agreements contain language that governs the transfer of such courses.
- **Reverse Transfer** – when students transfer from a two-year IHE to a four-year IHE, credit transfer agreements often account for how the credits earned at the two-year school will count toward a four-year degree. But such agreements don't always consider how a transfer student may be eligible for a two-year degree, or a certificate, based on a combination of credits from both IHEs – reverse transfer initiatives seek to capture these cases.

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In Tennessee, following the passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act in 2010, state leaders implemented a number of statewide policies to provide support for transfer students.

For example, public IHE leaders reached an agreement that they would work to ensure **Common Course Numbering** and establish **Articulation Agreements** that cover a core set of general education courses as well as certain pre-major pathways. All public IHEs offer 41 hours of general education coursework that can be successfully transferred – either in its entirety or by completed general education subject. In addition, IHE leaders have created articulation agreements that govern the transfer of designated pre-major pathway courses for 38 different baccalaureate degree majors. All courses that meet general education or pre-major pathway requirements carry the same course number at all public IHEs.

Tennessee also has the **Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TPPs)** program, a framework that allows students who earn an associate degree from any community college in the state to automatically transfer all of the credits they have earned to many of the state’s public four-year IHEs. There are 52 TPPs in place that are tied to specific bachelor’s degree majors – each pathway was developed by interdisciplinary committees that included community college and university faculty members who taught in each discipline. When a student follows one of those 52 pathways, the credits they earn at a community college all count toward completion requirements for the particular major they have chosen. Lastly, the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation in 2012 to codify requirements around **Reverse Transfer** agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions.

## **Best Practice Examples from Other States**

As Tennessee looks to build on the policies in place to encourage higher education student success, policymakers may consider adopting strategies and lessons learned from other states and IHEs.

### **NORTH CAROLINA - CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS<sup>7</sup>**

In North Carolina, leaders from the University of North Carolina System have come together with leaders from the North Carolina Community Colleges to establish a Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) that governs the transfer of credit between all of the state’s public IHEs – the 16 University of North Carolina institutions as well as the 59 community colleges. IHE leaders have also established an Independent Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (ICAA) that governs the transfer of credit between community colleges and independent IHEs.

### **GEORGIA - LEVERAGING ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS TO FACILITATE CREDIT TRANSFER<sup>8</sup>**

One innovative credit transfer framework has been implemented at the IHE system level by the University System of Georgia (USG) with their eCore program, which gives students the opportunity to complete a core curriculum of undergraduate requirements that are offered online by public IHEs. All courses offered through the eCore program are transferrable to any institution within the USG system, as well as most regionally accredited schools.

### **VIRGINIA - USING GUARANTEED ADMISSIONS AGREEMENTS TO SUPPORT TRANSFER STUDENTS<sup>9</sup>**

State leaders in Virginia established system-wide guaranteed admissions agreements that apply to any student who earns an associate degree from one of the state’s 23 community colleges and maintains a minimum grade point average. Students who meet these requirements may obtain automatic, guaranteed admission to more than 30 four-year IHEs in the state – both public and private. The guaranteed admissions agreements are updated periodically and posted online.



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## APPENDIX

FIGURE 5

FRESHMAN TO SOPHOMORE RETENTION RATES FOR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS | FALL 2018-2019

Source

Institution	Fall 2016 First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen	Fall 2017-2018			Retention Rate
		Enrolled at Admitting Institution	Enrolled in Other Public Institution	Total Enrolled	
<b>COMMUNITY COLLEGES</b>					
Chattanooga State Community College	1,722	856	51	907	52.7%
Cleveland State Community College	705	359	34	393	55.7%
Columbia State Community College	1,649	924	70	994	60.3%
Dyersburg State Community College	554	305	21	326	58.8%
Jackson State Community College	986	492	41	533	54.1%
Motlow State Community College	1,571	900	43	943	60.0%
Nashville State Community College	1,375	666	41	707	51.4%
Northeast State Community College	1,323	742	21	763	57.7%
Pellissippi State Community College	2,376	1,243	182	1,425	60.0%
Roane State Community College	1,189	669	39	708	59.5%
Southwest Tennessee Community College	2,028	1,060	64	1,124	55.4%
Volunteer State Community College	2,146	1,055	74	1,129	52.6%
Walters State Community College	1,473	840	48	888	60.3%
<b>TBR Community College Total</b>	<b>19,097</b>	<b>10,111</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>10,840</b>	<b>56.8%</b>
<b>Locally Governed Institution</b>					
Austin Peay State University	1,875	1,177	147	1,324	70.6%
East Tennessee State University	1,960	1,413	108	1,521	77.6%
Middle Tennessee State University	2,865	2,146	128	2,274	79.4%
Tennessee State University	1,219	770	33	803	65.9%
Tennessee Technological University	1,878	1,446	119	1,565	83.3%
University of Memphis	2,424	1,904	63	1,967	81.1%
<b>LGI University Total</b>	<b>12,221</b>	<b>8,856</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>9,454</b>	<b>77.4%</b>
<b>UT Universities</b>					
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	2,231	1,585	253	1,838	82.4%
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	5,105	4,414	202	4,616	90.4%
University of Tennessee, Martin	1,122	838	57	895	79.8%
<b>UT University Total</b>	<b>8,458</b>	<b>6,837</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>7,349</b>	<b>86.9%</b>
<b>University Total</b>	<b>20,679</b>	<b>15,693</b>	<b>1,110</b>	<b>16,803</b>	<b>81.3%</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>39,776</b>	<b>25,804</b>	<b>1,839</b>	<b>27,643</b>	<b>69.5%</b>

## CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup>SCORE, "Renewing Our Pledge: 2021 State of Education in Tennessee," [https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2021-StateOfEducation\\_digital\\_FINAL.pdf](https://tnscore.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2021-StateOfEducation_digital_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Lumina Foundation, "A Stronger Nation," <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/TN>

<sup>3</sup>National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Persistence & Retention – 2019," <https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport35-first-year-persistence-and-retention/>

<sup>4</sup>Tennessee Higher Education Commission & Student Assistance Corporation (THEC/TSAC), "2017 Profiles and Trends in Higher Education," <https://preprod.tn.gov/thec/profiles-and-trends-in-higher-education/2017-profiles-and-trends-in-higher-education/section-iii--student-participation-and-success/retention-rates-by-race.html>

<sup>5</sup>Georgia State University, "Approaching Student Success with Predictive Analytics," <https://success.gsu.edu/approach>

<sup>6</sup>The California State University, "Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)," <https://www2.calstate.edu/attend/student-services/eop>

<sup>7</sup>The University of North Carolina System, "Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA)," <https://www.northcarolina.edu/college-transferarticulation-agreements/comprehensive-articulation-agreement-caa>

<sup>8</sup>Georgia's College Core Curriculum Online Classes, "eCore," <https://ecore.usg.edu/>

<sup>9</sup>Virginia's Community Colleges, "Guaranteed Transfer," <https://www.vccs.edu/students/transfers/>