

2023 STATE OF EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE



A STRONGER
PATH FORWARD







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A LETTER FROM BILL FRIST & DAVID MANSOURI

Dear Friends,

For more than a decade, Tennessee has been on a journey to improve public education and workforce opportunities for all Tennesseans. Working together, we have made significant progress. However, as we head into 2023, our journey continues to improve K-12 and higher education outcomes and build stronger bridges between our education system and our state's workforce. Tennessee's economy is thriving, with businesses growing and job opportunities coming to our state daily, but many Tennesseans still lack the skills, education, and training required to turn these opportunities into careers.

Tennessee and our nation faced an unprecedented health and education crisis over the last few years. We saw significant disruptions to learning and a decline in the number of high school graduates going to college — especially among economically disadvantaged students and students of color.

We are resolved that much more work must be done to ensure that every Tennessee student can be set on a stronger path forward, building on our state's strong foundation. That is why we're sharing these 2023 policy priorities with you. Over the next year, our advocacy and focus will center on goals to:

- **Advance High-Quality Instruction For Every Student**
- **Address Tennessee's College-Going Decline With Urgency**
- **Prepare All Tennessee Students For Work**

To advance high-quality instruction for every student, Tennessee should implement research-supported policies like high-dosage tutoring, create a scholarship to bolster the teacher pipeline, and bolster support for high-quality public charter schools. These solutions have the potential to positively transform K-12 education and close longstanding opportunity gaps between student groups.

Tennessee has experienced a concerning decline in the number of high school students enrolling in college. Most jobs in our state require training beyond a high school diploma, so we must build momentum for going to college, make financial aid opportunities more accessible, and bridge the gap between K-12 and higher education through stronger and more widespread summer transition programs.



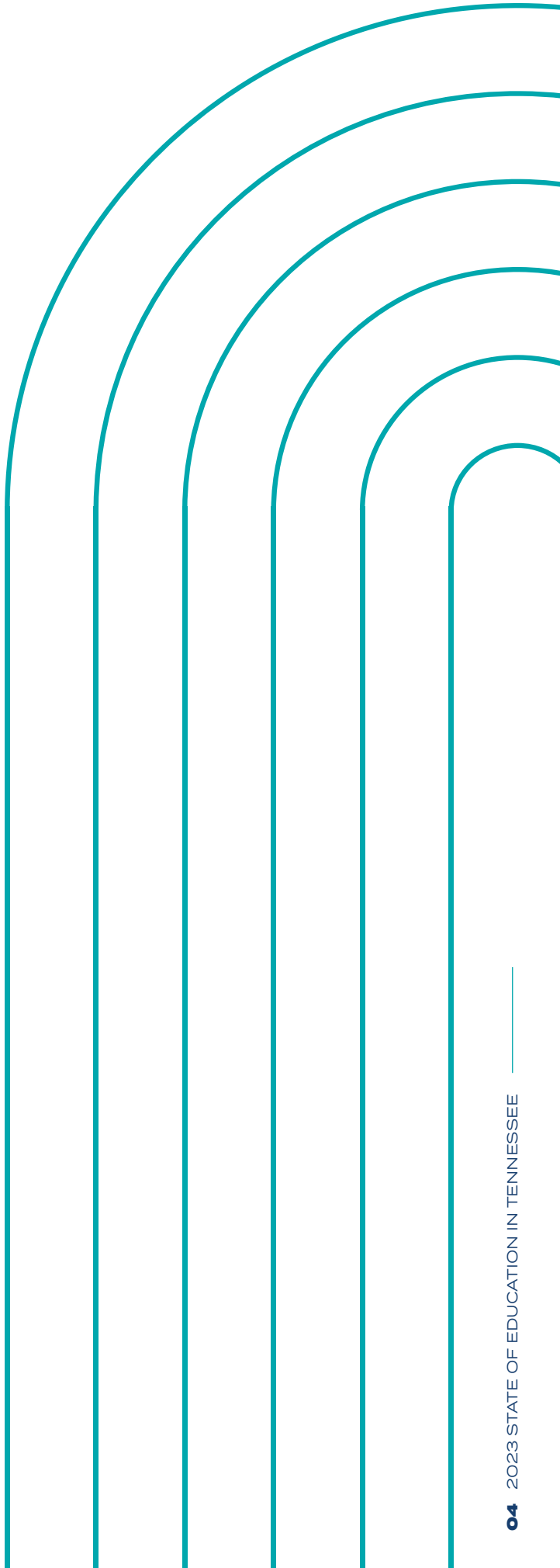


During this period of economic growth and job opportunity, too few Tennesseans have the post-secondary training required to enter and thrive in careers. To address this gap, state policymakers need better and more coordinated education and workforce data to drive decision-making and to inform investments, particularly those that will increase postsecondary attainment and labor-force participation in high-wage, high-demand fields.

We hope you will read and consider these recommendations — and then join us in charting a stronger path forward so that all Tennessee students can succeed in school, college, career, and life.

Senator Bill Frist, MD
SCORE Founder
and Chairman

David Mansouri
SCORE President
and CEO





IT'S TIME TO REIMAGINE EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

When it comes to taking big steps to improve outcomes for students, Tennessee leads. For more than a decade, the state has taken bold actions and demonstrated great success in improving education. This has led to students having more opportunities for their future, businesses having a more skilled workforce, and, ultimately, more Tennesseans experiencing economic independence statewide.

Over the last two decades, Tennessee leaders have passed legislation and enacted policies that have transformed how our state's K-12 and higher education systems serve students and our state. These core initiatives include: raising academic standards, creating a multiple-measure teacher evaluation and school accountability system, enacting an outcomes-based higher education funding formula, and launching bold new college access and success initiatives like Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect.¹ Together, these policies have combined to advance student success, boost academic outcomes, and increase college access and postsecondary attainment rates for our state.

Yet, at the start of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this progress for Tennessee and the nation. In response to this disruption, Tennessee leaders once again acted quickly and with intention to innovate and support our K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems to quickly respond to this unprecedented learning crisis:

- **Tennessee led the way in spearheading recovery efforts by passing legislation to provide summer learning opportunities for students through the Tennessee Student Remediation and Learning Acceleration Act.²**
- **Tennessee aimed to increase the number of high school students taking college courses and receiving postsecondary training by increasing the amount of financial aid available to students taking workforce-relevant dual enrollment courses or those receiving the HOPE Scholarship.³**
- **Tennessee expanded high-quality workforce training opportunities for high school students by developing innovative workforce opportunities in partnership with Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs), launching an innovative grant program for high schools to partner with industry, and creating the Office of Apprenticeship to expand these options statewide.⁴**

These efforts have been critical to supporting student success in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, yet much more is needed to see every Tennessee student be successful in their journey from education to work. At the same time, Tennessee's workforce needs continue to change as new businesses come to the state with different employer needs. We must reexamine and reevaluate policy and practice with an eye toward strengthening the state's education and workforce systems so that students are truly prepared for the careers they choose to pursue.

Our goal in Tennessee should be that every Tennessee student receives the K-12 and postsecondary preparation and educational opportunities that allow them to pursue a career that enables economic independence.

NEW DATA REVEAL PROMISING PROGRESS FOR K-12 STUDENTS

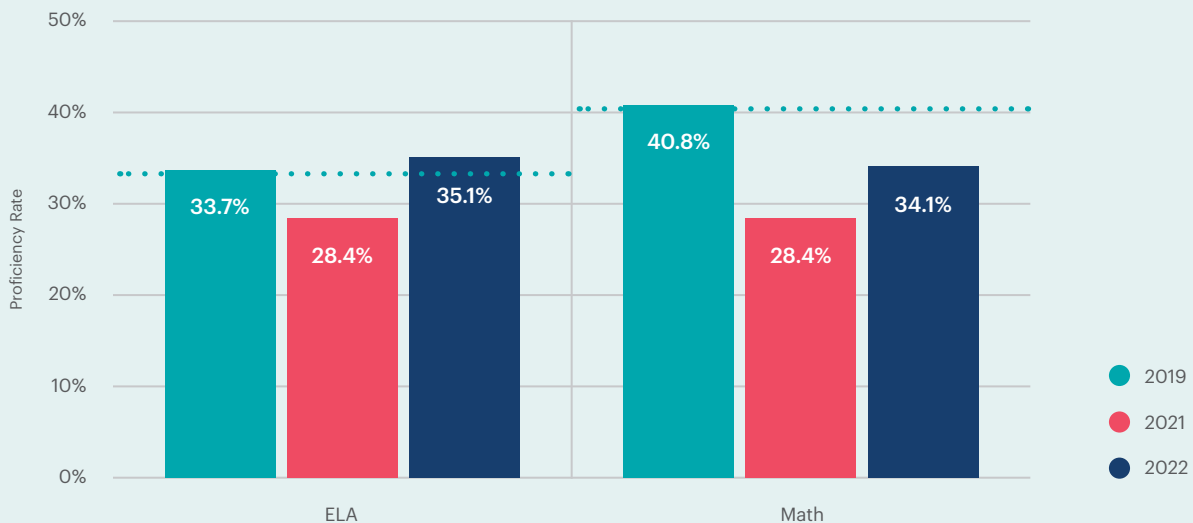
The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and disturbing impact on student achievement in Tennessee. Between 2020 and 2021, students lost valuable instruction time due to the disruptions of the pandemic. Student assessment data showed student achievement gains between 2017 and 2021 were largely erased. The number of students pursuing postsecondary education declined even more steeply than before.⁵

These trends sounded the alarm for Tennessee, and education stakeholders across the state

responded. State lawmakers took important steps to accelerate learning, elevate high-quality literacy instruction, and support postsecondary affordability.⁶ Many school districts and institutions adapted to hybrid learning formats. Educators remained committed to providing high-quality instruction to their students amid frequently changing school schedules. And students and families worked to prioritize education through the disruptions as well.

These steps played an essential role in propelling Tennessee forward in catching up on the lost instructional time students experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2021-22 school year, students experienced promising academic recovery on our state's TCAP assessment. Overall, scores in English Language Arts (ELA) increased to a rate higher than the prepandemic level, and math proficiency rates recovered about half of the lost learning during the same time frame.

ELA Scores On TCAP Have Surpassed Prepandemic Rates, Math Recovered Half Of Lost Learning

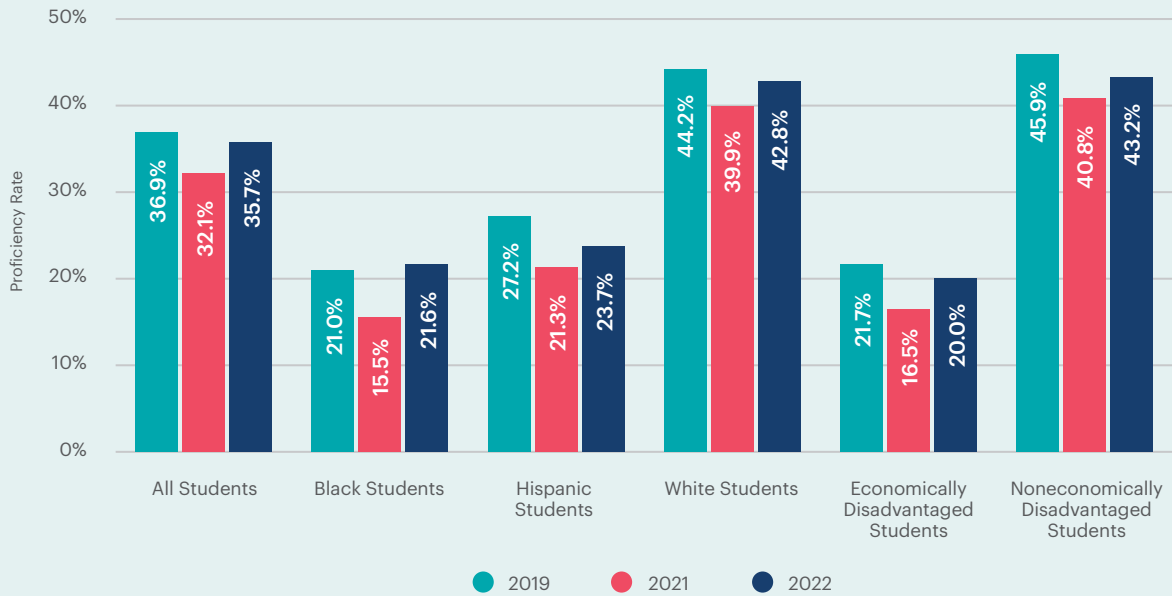


Grades 3-8 TCAP performance for ELA and math, 2019-2022

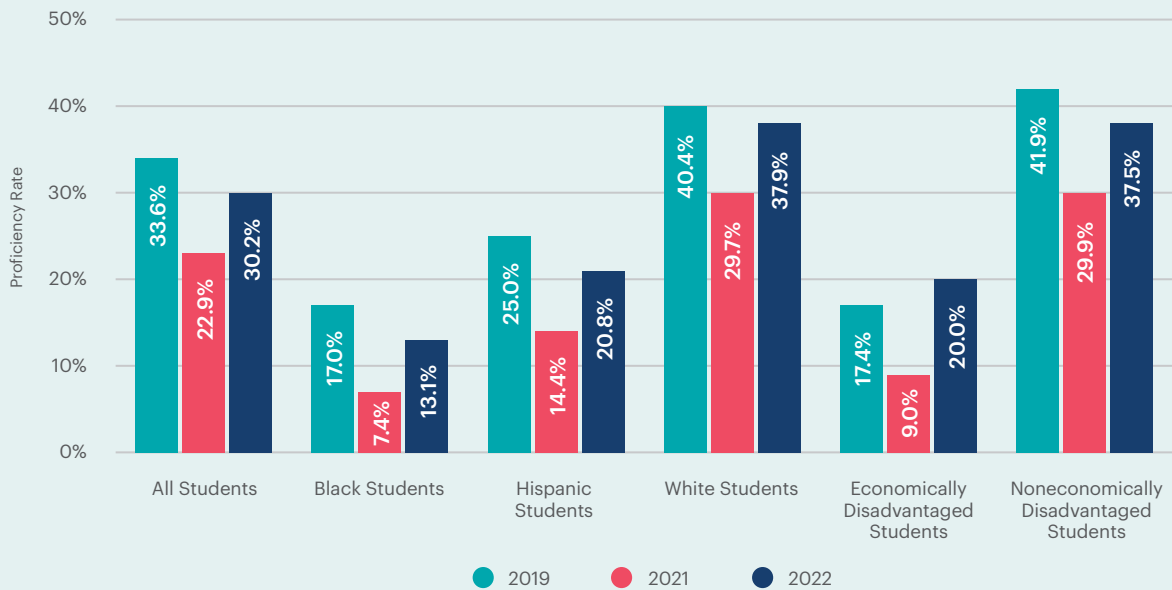
Source: TDOE, 2022

Across Student Groups, Third-Grade ELA And Seventh-Grade Math Proficiency On TCAP Approaches Prepandemic Rates

Grade 3 ELA



Grade 7 Math



Grade 3 ELA and grade 7 math TCAP performance by subgroup, 2019-2022

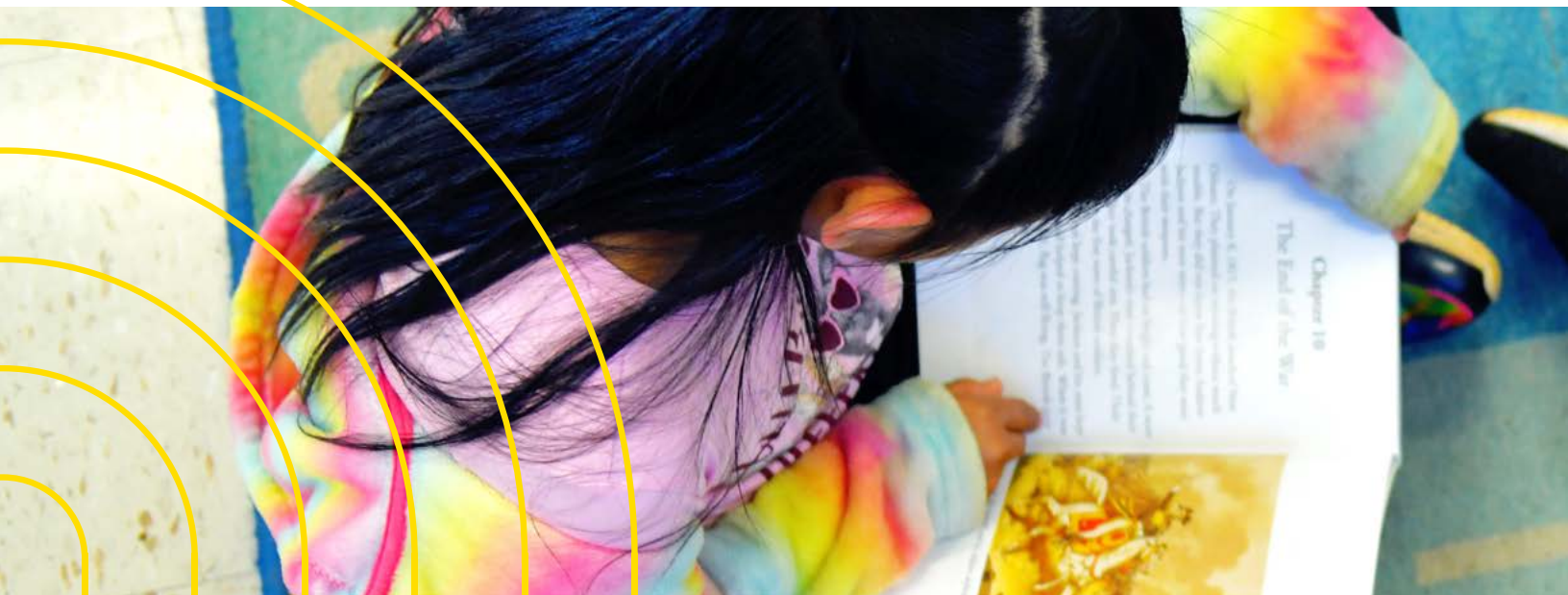
Source: TDOE, 2022



YET OPPORTUNITY GAPS WIDEN IN K-12

Though Tennessee made remarkable education progress after the COVID-19 pandemic, a deeper look at the data show we still have much work to do to ensure every student in Tennessee can thrive in higher education and the workforce. Student achievement rates have improved overall, yet achievement gaps continue to widen in ELA. Between 2021 and 2022, all students, on average, saw an increase in third- through eighth-grade ELA student proficiency by seven points. However, there was an increase in the percentage of students scoring in the lowest performance category — showing that the number of students who have fallen furthest behind is growing. Tennessee’s recovery rates in ELA and math are important to highlight, but the opportunity gaps between these different student groups have also widened over these last few years.

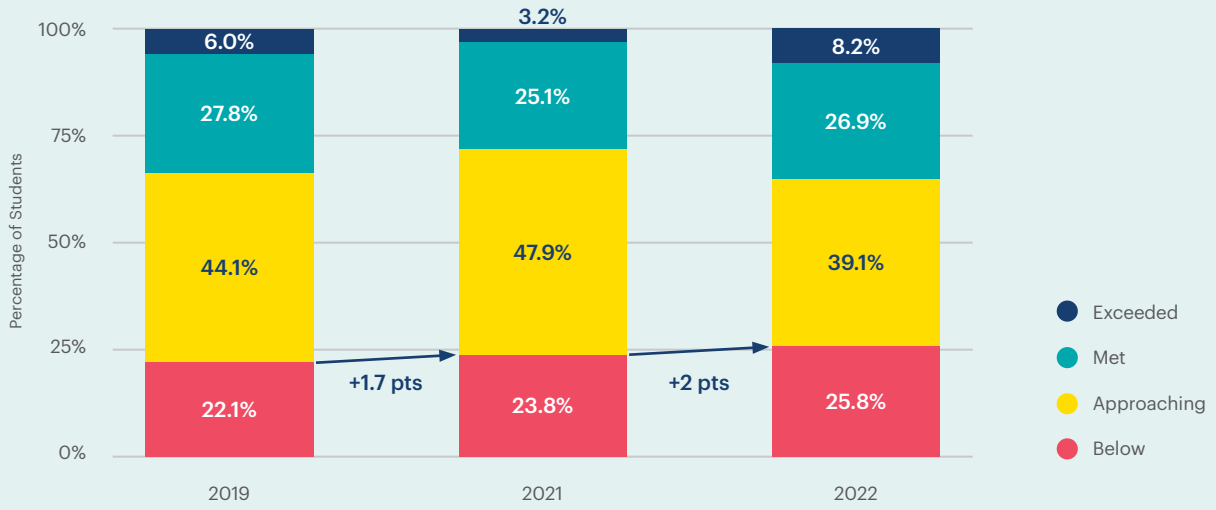
The National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, is another critical benchmark of student progress in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math that, in part, compares how Tennessee is performing relative to other states. In 2022, Tennessee saw declines across all grades and subjects, as did the rest of the nation. Achievement gaps widened for student groups in Tennessee — a trend also seen in state assessment results — with Black student achievement gaps ranging from 20 to 34 percentage points and achievement gaps for lower-income students persisting in reading and math.⁷ These results reinforce the findings about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on historically underserved student groups, calling the state to action in ramping up efforts to make sure every student receives high-quality instruction and additional supports in the classroom. This includes expanding and embedding high-quality instructional practices and interventions, such as the state’s high-dosage tutoring (HDT) program, as well as ensuring that all classrooms across the state are staffed with a highly effective teacher.



The time is now to take bold action to work against the longstanding gaps that have widened as a result of COVID-19.



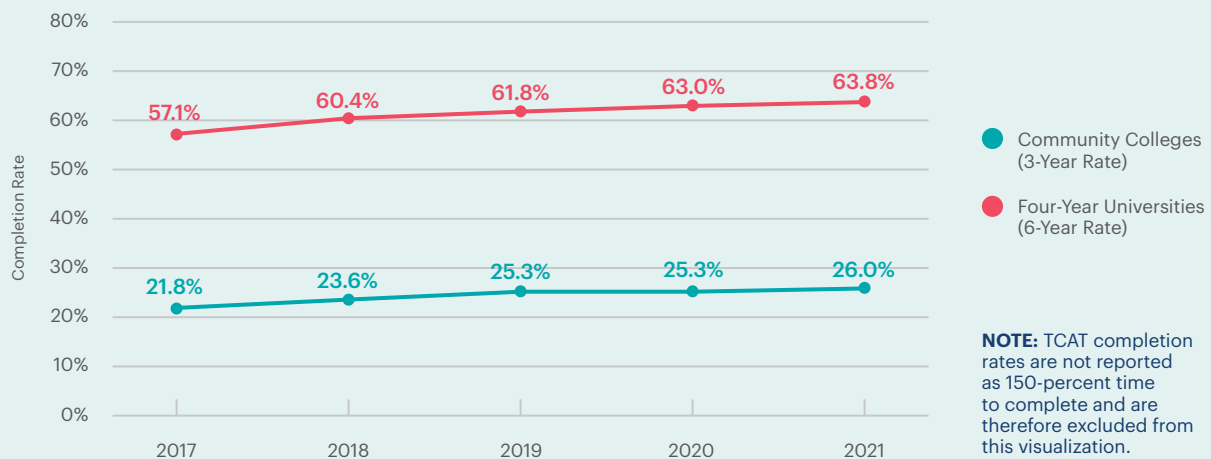
Students Who Struggled Prior To The Pandemic Continue To Fall Further Behind



COMPLETION RATES CONTINUE TO IMPROVE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

A postsecondary education is a critical step in providing students with an opportunity for economic independence. Even amid the COVID-19 disruption, public colleges and universities continued to support students in earning additional degrees and credentials. The rate at which students are completing a postsecondary credential at a community college or public university in Tennessee continues to rise even amidst pandemic impacts, with a nearly 1-point increase between 2019 and 2021.

More Students Are Earning Degrees And Credentials



Postsecondary completion rates by college type, 2017-2021

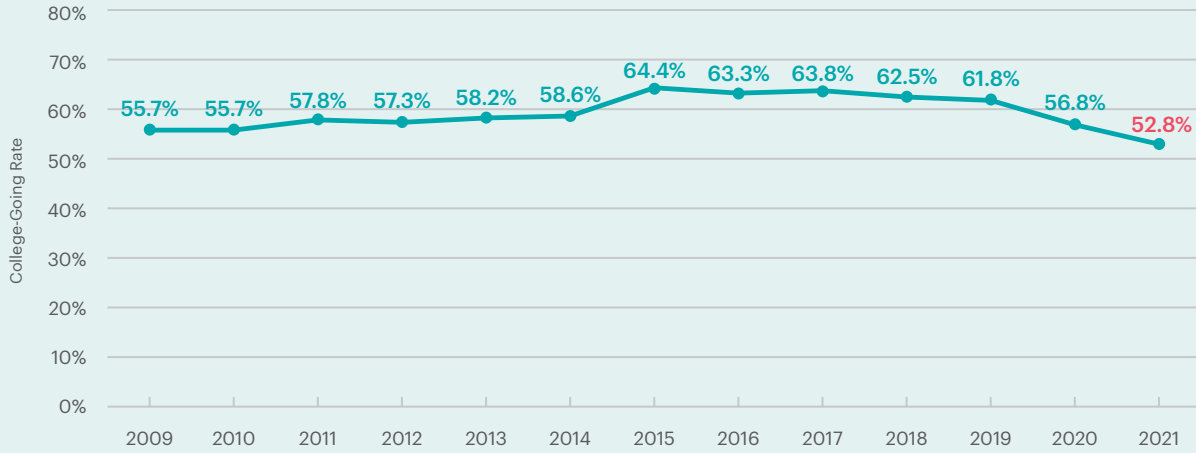
Source: THEC and TBR, 2022

BUT TENNESSEE'S COLLEGE-GOING RATE FELL TO A NEW LOW

That being said, higher education has not been immune to the disruption of the pandemic. Tennessee's college-going trends have been declin-

ing since 2015 and have dropped even more significantly as a result of the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The college-going rate measures the number of public high school graduates who enroll in a TCAT, community college, or university immediately following high school graduation. Between 2019 and 2021, the portion of Tennessee's high school graduates who enrolled in postsecondary education decreased to its lowest on record. This concerning decline comes at a time when a high school diploma is no longer enough for most high-wage and high-demand jobs.⁸

College-Going Continues To Decline As A Result Of COVID-19

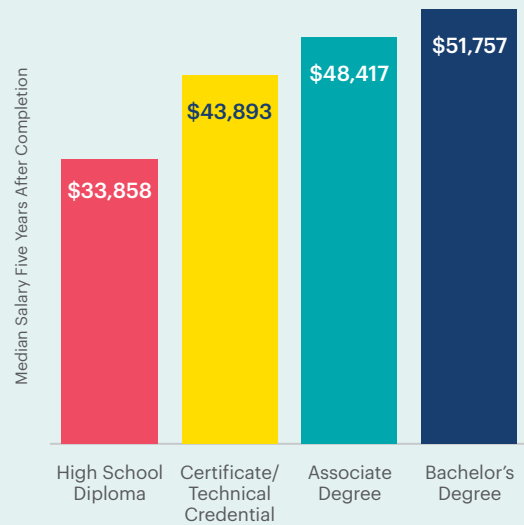


College-Going Rate, 2009-2021

Source: THEC, 2022

This college-going dip is even more concerning when looking at the difference in average salary for Tennesseans with a high school diploma compared to those with a postsecondary certificate or degree. Three years after completion, college graduates, on average, earn 1.5 times more annually than high school graduates. Ensuring every high school graduate has the opportunity to enter into and succeed in some type of postsecondary training must remain a top priority in order for Tennessee to meet future work needs in our state.

College Graduates, On Average, Earn 1.5 Times More Than High School Graduates



Median full-time wages five years after completion by degree type for 2015-16 graduates. High School Diploma reflects 2015-16 high school graduates with no additional postsecondary enrollment. All other categories reflect 2015-16 degree completers.

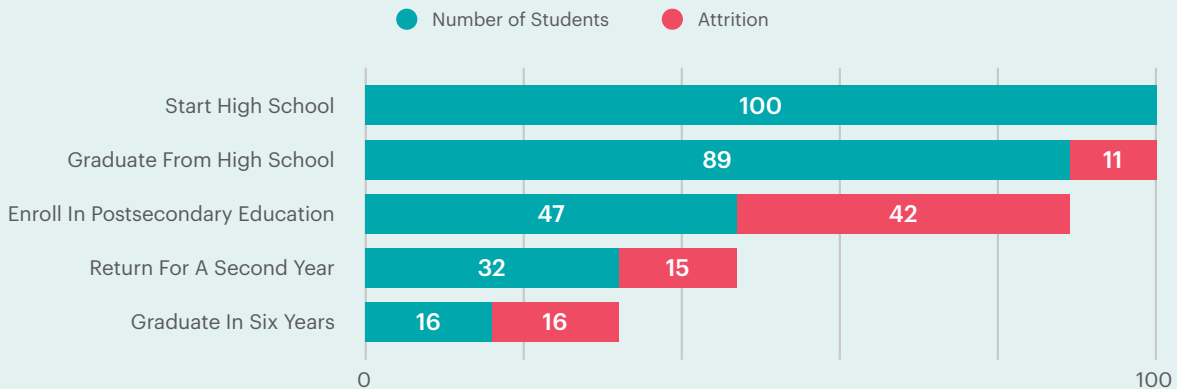
Source: P20 Connect, 2022



As businesses and employment opportunities expand in Tennessee, it is imperative to recognize this reality: **fewer than two in ten students who begin high school in Tennessee will successfully graduate from a college or university.** This number has actually declined since the onset of the pandemic, signaling the impact of COVID-19 on student success from K-12 to the workforce. Too few Tennesseans are being prepared for the skills and knowledge needed to obtain jobs requiring postsecondary training. Stronger linkages between K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce are needed so that all students receive the training and skills they need to qualify for the jobs of today and in the future.



Less Than One-Fifth Of High School Students Successfully Navigate The Postsecondary Pipeline — Down From One-Third Prior To COVID-19



Estimated student trajectory based on success rates throughout education pipeline, 2021

Source: TDOE and THEC, 2022

THE WAY FORWARD

Tennessee has risen to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing meaningful improvements in K-12 education and maintaining positive momentum in higher education completion. Yet the data continue to show that the work is not finished.

Student achievement gaps in K-12 education have widened, and the college-going rate has dropped to its lowest on record. State and local leaders, educators, advocates, and other stakeholders must call for an aligned vision for student success that advances student learning, closes opportunity gaps, and creates a workforce-ready system that prepares every student to have the opportunity for a job that enables economic independence.



The work ahead is not easy, but Tennessee has a track record of advancing student-centered policy in both K-12 and higher education.

High Expectations, Assessment And Accountability, And Educator Evaluation

Tennessee has adopted rigorous K-12 academic standards as well as a state assessment aligned to those standards to measure student progress and hold schools accountable for that progress each year. Schools and districts receive accountability designations based on student performance to hold them accountable for improving student success. Additionally, the state has a multiple-measure teacher evaluation system that supports teachers in improving their practice in educating students every day. These foundational policies have led to the state seeing significant improvements in student performance on the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) prior to pandemic disruptions.

Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction

In 2021, the state legislature passed the Literacy Success Act to ensure that students receive foundational literacy skills instruction in the classroom. Additionally, educator preparation providers (EPPs) are also held accountable for preparing educators to teach foundational literacy skills instruction. These policies are working to improve student literacy rates, with a focus on increasing the number of students reading on grade level in the early grades.

Student-Based, K-12 Funding Formula

The Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) is a student-weighted funding formula that provides funding for school districts based on the individual needs of students in each district. TISA will provide better-aligned resources to the unique needs of individual students in schools.

Higher Education, Outcomes-Based Funding Formula (OBF)

The outcomes-based funding formula (OBF) incentivizes public community colleges and universities to focus on supporting student retention and graduation by providing more funding to the institutions that improve on these student outcomes each year. This formula has led to an increased focus on student completion at the campus level across Tennessee, incentivizing institution leadership to focus on supporting students to finish college instead of simply enrolling them.

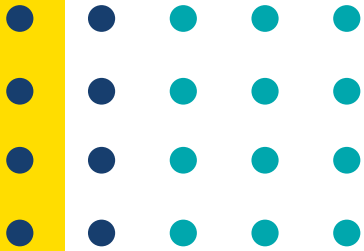
State Financial Aid

Tennessee provides various financial aid opportunities to ensure that students can access postsecondary education. These opportunities include the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, which covers tuition and fees for all state high school graduates attending community and technical college, as well as the HOPE Scholarship, which is available to students with an ACT score of at least 21 or a 3.0 GPA to attend a two-year or four-year institution. The state has also piloted a completion grant program, a research-based approach that should significantly improve completion rates for students attending community colleges. These policies have expanded postsecondary access to Tennessee students over the last two decades.

These foundations will set Tennessee up for success in the next chapter of student-centered education policy. But at this pivotal moment in our education journey, we must center our priorities on this premise: one day, every student will exit our education system and enter our workforce.

We must set a bold statewide goal — coupled with state policies and investments — that spurs greater coordination among our schools, colleges, and employers so that every student can succeed in education, career, and life.

2023 EDUCATION PRIORITIES



With these foundations in mind, SCORE recommends three key priorities for the state to focus on in 2023:

- Advance High-Quality Instruction For Every Student
- Address Tennessee's College-Going Decline With Urgency
- Prepare All Tennessee Students For Work



PRIORITY: ADVANCE HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION FOR EVERY STUDENT

Tennessee has been a national leader in advancing K-12 education policies and practices that support student achievement and growth. From the First to the Top Act in 2010 to the Tennessee Literacy Success Act in 2021, state leaders have passed bold, research-supported policies that ensure every student receives high-quality instruction to prepare them for success after high school. Additionally, schools, districts, educators, and communities have worked to ensure students receive the support they need prior to and during COVID-19. These policies have had success in improving student outcomes, with Tennessee improving on the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) scores in fourth-grade reading and math from 2009 to 2019.⁹

Even with Tennessee's high academic standards, statewide assessment, and foundational literacy

skills instruction, state data show that too few students are proficient in reading and math. For the students who were already behind, the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened this achievement gap. Too many Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students are not supported to read on grade level by third grade, a critical milestone for future success in K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce. Within this context, many school districts face difficulties in finding qualified teachers — the most significant in-school factor impacting student achievement.¹⁰ Many high-quality public charter schools, which serve high proportions of students from low-income backgrounds and can serve as an innovative school model to advance instruction, face operational and bureaucratic barriers to meeting student needs as well.

In order to advance instructional practices that support all students to achieve, **Tennessee should adopt three policy opportunities to advance this priority:**

1. **Grow Tennessee's Teacher Pipeline**
2. **Ramp Up Effective Instruction**
3. **Strengthen Tennessee's Public Charter School Sector**

Teachers are essential to improving student achievement, yet too many students lack access to a fully prepared teacher in critical grades and subjects.

Tennessee’s teaching workforce has been disrupted by the pandemic. As schools and districts across the state look to hire and retain the best and brightest teachers for their students, the state must provide schools and districts with information about the teaching force as well as create and strengthen high-quality pathways to becoming a teacher. Strong educator preparation — either at a university or through an alternative certification program — is crucial to giving teachers the right tools to advance student success.¹¹ Making sure every student receives high-quality instruction begins with a high-quality teacher, and it is essential that policies and investments continue to support this effort in Tennessee.

Tennessee has a strong track record of supporting effective teaching. The state’s teacher evaluation system measures a teacher’s impact through classroom observation and on a student’s performance using both proficiency and growth measures.¹² Additionally, the State Board of Education outlines various pathways for prospective educators to receive a license and endorsement to teach in a specific subject area — to ensure each educator has the expertise needed to be successful in the classroom.¹³ Tennessee has also taken innovative steps by creating the country’s first-ever registered apprenticeship program for teaching.¹⁴ This permanent Grow Your Own partnership between the Clarksville-Montgomery School System and Austin Peay State University will be critically important for growing the state’s teacher pipeline, serving as a model for future innovation.

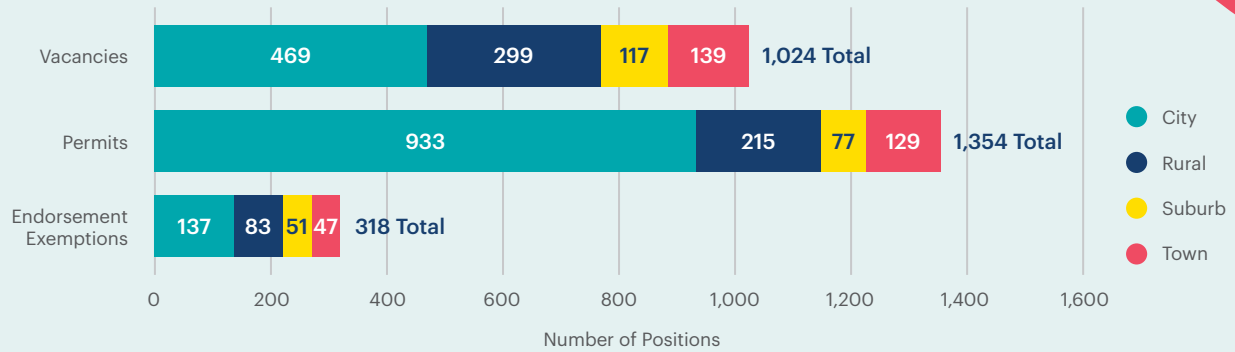
These policies, investments, and initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that every student has a strong teacher, yet many schools still struggle with recruiting qualified instructors in key subject areas. Data show that the number

of individuals completing educator preparation programs in Tennessee has declined by 40 percent since 2011.¹⁵ Additionally, less than one-third of these program completers receive training in high-demand subject areas. In May 2022 about 2,700 educator positions across the state were left unfilled, filled by a licensed educator without the proper subject-area training and expertise¹⁶, or filled by an individual on a permit with no formal teaching training. Most of these positions were filled by instructors on a temporary teacher permit, which can provide short-term solutions to hiring barriers. However, these permits are not a sustainable solution to provide every student with a highly effective teacher. Data also show that students in the early grades are most likely to be taught by someone on a permit. The early grades are the foundation of a student’s success; improving the quality of instruction in the early grades has been a state priority for years, so this trend toward relying on permits to staff classrooms creates a significant cause for concern.¹⁷

Tennessee must identify pathways that provide prospective teachers with flexible but quality training so that students are prepared to achieve at the highest levels.



Too Many Students Lack Access To High-Quality Educators

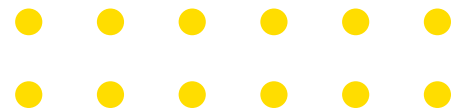


Number of educator vacancies, permits, and endorsement exemptions

Source: TDOE, 2022

State leaders, education leaders, advocates, and families also have limited information on the teacher workforce landscape in the state, including teacher shortages, instructional effectiveness and experience, district compensation trends, and other important information about the state’s teacher pipeline each year. As a result, this limited information affects decision-making for both prospective teachers and education leaders entering the pipeline, as well as for policymakers targeting support around these critical issues.

As Tennessee works to advance high-quality instruction for all students, stronger financial incentives must be put in place to attract high school students and adults considering a career change into the teaching profession. The state also continues to lag behind the nation in teacher pay, an important recruitment and retention strategy.¹⁸ Beyond teacher salaries, other financial supports and innovations could help expand the number of qualified teachers across Tennessee. Tennessee currently has no comprehensive package that targets financial aid or scholarships to high school seniors who are interested in the teaching profession.¹⁹ And while the state has multiple pathways to earn a teaching license, the state could streamline licensure advancement for those who have demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom. Moving forward, Tennessee must enhance its focus on educator preparation and recruitment in order to grow a qualified teacher pipeline that will best serve all students.



INNOVATIVE PATHWAYS SUPPORT QUALITY TEACHER PREPARATION

The Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) has pioneered an alternative pathway to teacher licensure through an apprenticeship model. Teacher candidates, referred to as residents, work as paid educational assistants and learn from a mentor teacher. In addition to spending their day learning from the most effective teachers within the school district, these prospective educators also take college-level courses at partnering educator preparation providers to receive their teaching license. The residents come from a diverse pool of applicants, including employees, community members, and graduating high school seniors.

Through the apprenticeship model, CMCSS is working to address three crucial issues relating to the teacher pipeline — teacher diversity, teacher shortages, and inadequate teacher preparation. CMCSS’s program draws candidates from the local community, which is ethnically and racially representative of the student population. Only 16 percent of teachers in CMCSS are ethnically diverse, but the current cohort of teacher candidates is 34 percent ethnically diverse.

This program has had a tremendous impact on the prospective educators who have moved through and received their training and license. Jermaine Purdie, a current resident in the program, spoke to the vast amount of support the program has provided him as he works to earn his master’s degree and teaching certification. Not only are tuition and books fully covered, but Purdie says his school district has put in resources. “I have a liaison if I need any help. Lipscomb University provides resources as well. I have a professor who said, ‘If you need study sessions for the Praxis, I’m the one.’ It shows that you have been invested in,” Purdie says.

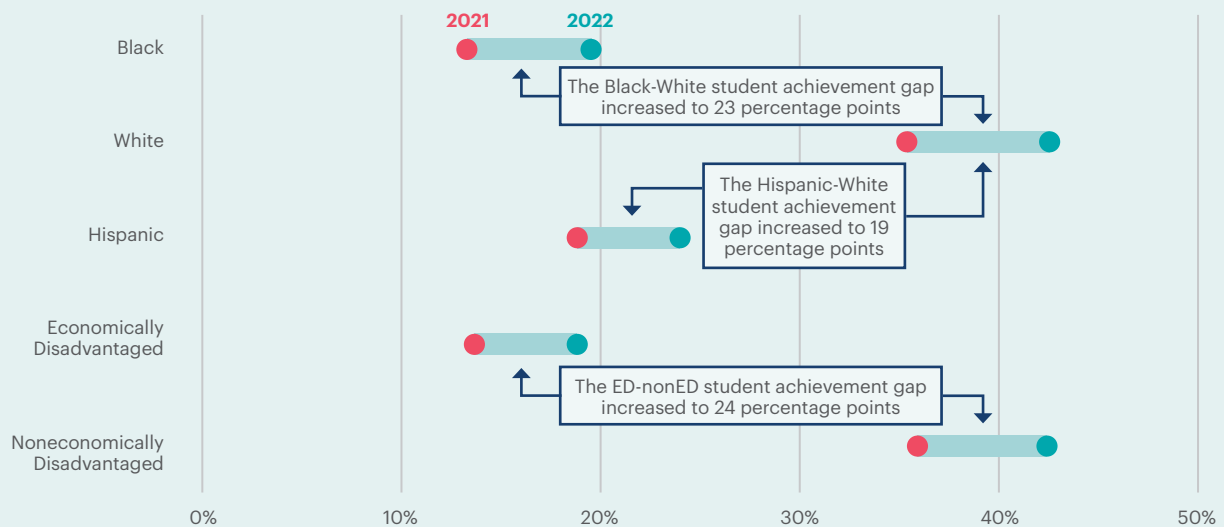
Investment in the residents has led to an 83 percent completion rate and served as an effective method for addressing the teacher shortage. At the end of this year, there will be 70 residents placed within CMCSS schools, which will cover the 40 positions that were open at the start of this school year. This alternative pathway provides prospective teachers with an affordable avenue to become a teacher and ensures that teachers have extensive hands-on experience during their training so they are prepared to enter the classroom.²⁸

Tennessee students who need the most support also need the best and most consistent instruction to achieve at higher levels.

High-quality instruction is the foundation of student achievement in our schools. Yet even as Tennessee students make up instruction time lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the achievement gap between high-performing students and the students who need the most support continues to

widen. This gap widened between White students and students of color in particular, with historically underserved student groups falling further behind. The gap between the number of higher-income and lower-income students reading and writing on grade level actually increased over the last several years, signaling the impact of the pandemic on different student groups. Efforts to accelerate learning are incomplete when they result in historically underserved student groups falling further behind.

Achievement Gaps Are Widening In ELA



Grades 3-8 TCAP ELA proficiency growth by student group, 2021-2022

Source: TDOE, 2022

Over the years, and in response to the pandemic, Tennessee has prioritized instructional interventions to help students who need extra academic support beyond traditional classroom instruction in reading and math. Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) was adopted in 2013 and was implemented in K-12 schools between 2013 and 2016. This framework outlines a process for a school team to identify students

who might benefit from additional small group instruction in specific skills related to reading and math. Students are regularly assessed for improvement, and parents are informed about any recommended changes to this academic support.²⁰






When Tennessee began to see the impact on student learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, state leaders wisely invested in a grant program to support districts in implementing research-based high-dosage

tutoring (HDT). Similar to RTI², HDT uses small-group instruction with a targeted group of students and is available to any student who needs additional instruction in reading or math. As of November 2022, 87 of 147 districts were participating in high-dosage tutoring programs coordinated by the state.

HDT is based on extensive research on what instructional interventions are most effective in improving student outcomes. Research outlines

how frequently tutoring should happen, the recommended tutor-to-student ratio, and when tutoring should occur during the school day to have the greatest impact.²¹ SCORE analyzed 2021 district recovery spending plans that include how they approached HDT implementation, compared it to best practices, and found that less than half of participating school districts are implementing HDT based on what the research says works best for students.

About Half Of All Tennessee Districts Are Planning Tutoring Programs Aligned To Best Practices

Design Principle	Best Practice	Tennessee Data
Frequency 	The most effective tutoring interventions have 3 or more sessions per week with sessions lasting 30-60 minutes per day	104 of the 136 districts analyzed are aligned to frequency best practice
Group Size 	In lower grades (K-5), tutors should maintain ratios of 1:3 or lower. For upper grades (6-12), ratios can be 1:4 or lower	66 of the 136 districts analyzed are aligned to group size best practice
Scheduling 	Tutoring programs are shown to have the greatest impact on student learning when they are integrated into the school day	Districts were not required to report this information though 24 of 55 who specified were aligned to best practice
Prioritization 	Targeting lower-performing students can support those students who could benefit most from personalized instruction	Districts were not required to report this information though 22 of 32 who specified were aligned to best practice
Overall 	62 of the 136 school districts analyzed are planning programming aligned to high-dosage tutoring best practices	

Tennessee is taking important steps to ensure that students who need support outside of traditional classroom instruction receive data-driven intervention. Still, most students in grades 3-8 are not proficient in reading and math. In 2023, Tennessee's third-grade retention law will go into effect, and tutoring is an intervention for students who are not proficient in reading. and HDT provide students with small-group instruction to increase student outcomes, and it will be important for districts to receive support to provide these services to students at risk for retention in 2023. Considering that many students at risk for retention may also qualify for RTI², school districts may face complicated instructional schedules and confusion about how these two models work together for students. Moving forward, the state can help clarify for school districts how to both implement HDT that is aligned to research-based best practices and embed it in the way they operate to help students who need the most support.

In addition to small group instructional interventions, a focus on strong literacy instruction must remain a top priority as Tennessee continues to ramp up recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, high-quality preparation and training in foundational literacy skills instruction will be critical to accelerating learning among all student groups. Yet, many educators may still enter the classroom without sufficient training in this research-supported approach and the state has not yet adopted an assessment to verify that this preparation has occurred.²² Tennessee should develop or identify an assessment to verify that all new educators are ready on day one with the knowledge and skills for the literacy instruction that students will need.

Currently, there is very little public reporting on how students are identified for academic support in RTI² or HDT, student placement in RTI² and HDT interventions, or whether these interventions are improving student achievement and narrowing

Tennessee's achievement gap. As the state continues to implement its comprehensive COVID-19 recovery strategy, Tennessee can streamline and improve data collection, reporting, and guidance around instructional interventions so that every student can catch up and succeed.

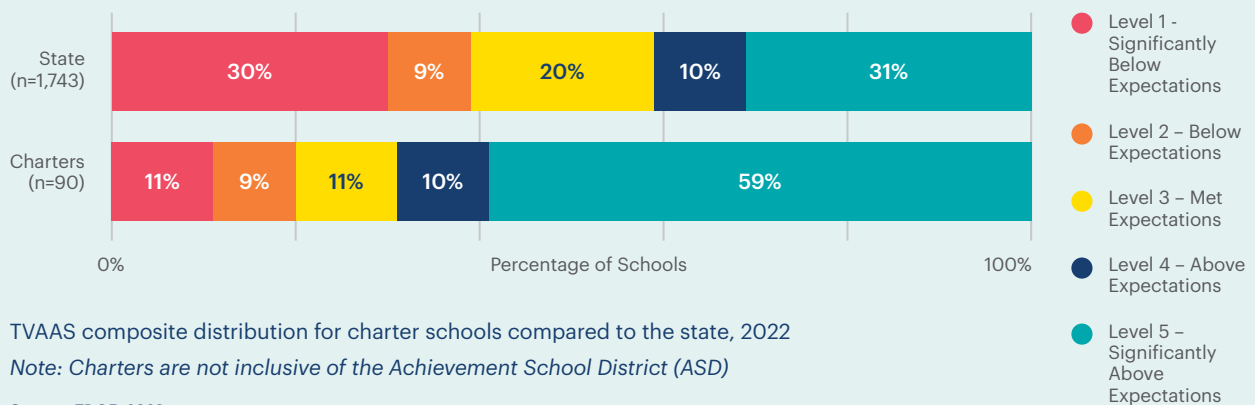


Tennessee’s high-quality public charter schools are also an important part of innovative approaches to improving student achievement.

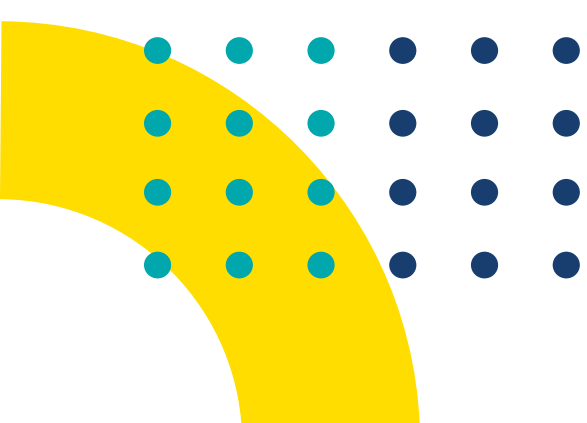
Many of Tennessee’s nonprofit public charter schools have a track record of improving student achievement — particularly for historically underserved groups.²³ While charter schools have the flexibility to design innovative teaching and learning models, these schools are still subject to the same academic standards, statewide assessment, and accountability requirements as district-run public schools. And unlike district-run schools, charter schools must be closed if their academic performance does not meet expectations. These high expectations remain important as the state’s charter sector grows, with 115 charter schools currently serving more than 44,000 students across Tennessee.²⁴

Many public charter schools have demonstrated an ability to support students in improving academic performance year-to-year. In 2022, students in Tennessee charter schools showed higher levels of growth on the statewide assessment compared to their peers in traditional public schools. Notably, public charter schools enroll a greater number of students from historically underserved groups. An average of nine in ten students attending the state’s public charter schools are Black or Hispanic, compared to six in ten students in traditional schools within the same district as a charter school.²⁵ Charter school models provide an effective high-quality learning option for Tennessee to close opportunity gaps and advance instruction specifically for the state’s most underserved student groups.

Public Charter Schools Show Higher Levels Of Growth Than The State On Average



Tennessee has established several student-centered charter policies over the years to ensure public charter schools open and operate in the best interest of students, families, and communities. These laws maintain a high bar for quality when opening charter schools by monitoring their performance over time and supporting them in improving student learning.



Tennessee Charter School Policy Milestones:

- **Charter School Quality:** State leaders outlined a rigorous high-quality process for charter operators to apply and be authorized to open by a school district. Authorizers, or school districts, must consider the prior performance of the charter operators' existing schools. The charter operator must also include an academic plan for school instruction and an evaluation plan for reviewing student achievement.²⁶
- **Statewide Appellate Authorizer:** In 2014, the State Board of Education became an appellate authorizer for public charter schools. Previously, charter application decisions approved on appeal were remanded back to local school boards for approval, but in 2014, the State Board was authorized by the General Assembly to serve as the district and authorizer for schools approved on appeal. This authority was later moved to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, an independent body created by state law in 2019, and the State Board assumed the role of authorizer evaluator. The Public Charter Commission follows rigorous national authorizing standards and plays an important role in ensuring that charter applications demonstrating a strong ability to serve students and families are approved.
- **Charter Funding:** Charter schools receive funding through the state's K-12 funding formula but do not have the same ability as a district-run school to raise funds for building costs through bonds and taxes. This funding disparity leaves many charter schools without access to the facilities they need for quality instruction and student learning. In 2017, the state created a formal Charter Facilities Fund to provide grants for public charter schools with facilities needs.

Charter schools play an important role in advancing high-quality student instruction and innovative learning options in Tennessee's public school sector. Since the adoption of the state's charter school law in 2002, leaders have taken steps to ensure that students and families have access to high-quality charter schools that meet student, family, and community needs. However, many charter schools lack adequate learning space where students can learn, grow, and thrive.²⁷ In the future, state law should provide more clarity on what building spaces charter schools can purchase or lease from a school district so that their students have a fair opportunity to learn.

Additionally, charter schools face similar challenges as district-run schools in finding qualified teachers to instruct students. Tennessee's innovative work, such as the Grow Your Own network, should also be available for charter schools to ensure they can grow their own teachers within their unique school models.

Finally, the very model of a charter school as an innovative public school learning option for students and families continues to face opposition from some in the education community despite a track record of success in serving some of the state's high-needs students as well as parent and family demand for innovative public options. All stakeholders should aspire to put the needs of students first in these conversations, holding a high bar for quality regardless of the type of public school — traditional or charter.

Tennessee charter schools are public schools, and the success of high-quality public charter schools can meaningfully advance improved outcomes for the state's highest needs students.

2023 PRIORITY: ADVANCE HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION FOR EVERY STUDENT

Advancing high-quality instruction will be essential to closing student achievement gaps that have only widened over the course of the pandemic. To ensure every student receives the best instruction possible, Tennessee must first take steps to grow the teacher pipeline so that every student has a high-quality teacher. Classroom instruction and instructional interventions must be aligned to the research on effective approaches to help students catch up from lost instruction time. And to provide an instructional option for students and families and close achievement gaps, the state's public charter school sector should be strengthened and supported to serve students well.



The state should improve access to and understanding of the teacher pipeline so that all students have access to effective teachers.

- **Reduce the cost of becoming a teacher.** The Tennessee General Assembly should create a scholarship that covers the cost of tuition and fees for the state's high school students who enroll in a state-approved EPP and commit to teaching in Tennessee after completion. Additionally, the state should reimburse teachers who obtain a passing score on licensure assessments.
- **Create a new path for licensure advancement.** The State Board of Education should establish a pathway for educators on a job-embedded practitioner license who have demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom to advance to a professional license rather than solely relying on licensure assessment scores. This innovative option could help schools keep highly effective teachers in the classroom and in the profession.
- **Give leaders data about their teachers.** TDOE should create and distribute teacher workforce reports so that school and district leaders have information about the distribution and scope of teacher vacancies, instructional effectiveness, experience levels, preparation, and compensation strategies. Reporting guidelines should be standardized, including a statewide definition of vacancies. Summary information should also be distributed to EPPs and published publicly.

Tennessee should ramp up effective instruction.

- **Strengthen data collection and reporting on academic interventions.** TDOE should collect and share additional data on how many students are being served through RTI² and tutoring across the state, as well as the academic outcomes for these students. This information will be helpful in understanding how students are identified for learning supports before third grade, how many students are served by these interventions, and how effective these interventions are at moving students toward proficiency. Since summer learning is another intervention available to students at risk for retention in third grade, the state should also collect and share data about summer learning programs to evaluate whether this intervention supports students' improvement.
- **Provide additional, sustained funding for tutoring.** TDOE should ensure districts have sufficient recurring funds for implementing high-dosage tutoring programs that are aligned to the research on the most effective approaches. Additionally, this funding should include incentives for districts to create staffing structures where high-need students have access to the most effective instructors.
- **Support high-quality literacy instruction in the early grades.** To ensure that every student receives the highest-quality instruction in literacy, the state should ensure quality in summer learning programs, prioritize clear intervention strategies for students identified as having a significant reading deficiency in K-2, and adopt a literacy assessment for new educators entering the classroom.

The state should continue to strengthen and support a high-quality public charter sector.

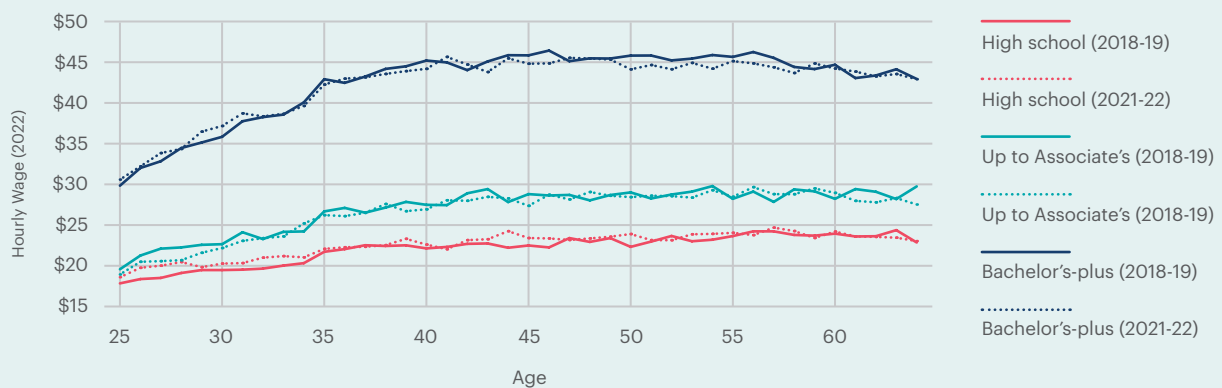
- **Protect Tennessee's foundational charter policies.** The state should be resolved in its commitment to the charter policies that have supported the highest-need students. Tennessee's charter students are proportionally higher need, so the state should maintain direct allocations for charter school students in TISA, defend the independence of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission as the statewide appellate authorizer, and prioritize quality in both charter operators and authorizers. These foundational policies will ensure that students and families continue to have access to public school options that meet their needs.
- **Increase access to facilities for charter schools.** The Tennessee General Assembly should establish clear definitions and guidelines for access to underutilized and vacant property within school districts — property that was built for the education of students using parents' taxpayer dollars — ensuring that charter schools have the right of first refusal to purchase or rent properties at fair market price to help address facilities challenges.
- **Strengthen authorizer pathways for high-quality charter operators.** The state should consider expanding authorizer pathways for high-quality charter school operators. These policies would eliminate bureaucratic hurdles to opening high-quality school options and enable these charter schools to serve students and communities in a timelier manner.

PRIORITY: ADDRESS TENNESSEE'S COLLEGE-GOING DECLINE WITH URGENCY

Tennessee has been heralded as a national higher education policy leader over the last two decades. Since 2003, state leaders have established a robust financial aid system known as the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships (TELS) to help students cover the cost of tuition and fees through programs like the HOPE Scholarship and Tennessee Promise. Partnering organizations have also advanced advising and mentoring to support these students as they make the transition between high school and college. During this time frame, Tennessee saw an uptick in the number of students attending community college immediately after the introduction of Tennessee Promise, and the completion rates at community colleges and universities have also improved.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing economy have raised questions about the value of attending college in Tennessee and across the country.²⁹ Labor market data consistently show that postsecondary training is required for jobs in Tennessee's economy. However, college costs beyond tuition and fees, fear of student debt, and the availability of more immediate employment opportunities draw many students away from pursuing postsecondary training.³⁰ Over the last several years, the number of high school graduates enrolling in a TCAT, community college, or university right after graduation has significantly declined.³¹ Today, only half of Tennessee high school graduates are enrolling in some type of postsecondary training by the fall after they graduate from high school. This could have significant consequences for students and Tennessee's economy in the long run when data consistently show that adults with postsecondary credentials have consistently higher earnings over time, as well as greater civic engagement and health overall.³² These earnings — while closer during the beginning of an individual's career — actually widen over time.

The Earnings Gap Between College And High School Educated Workers Widens Midcareer



All US wage and salary workers ages 25-64 in the monthly CPS-ORG, 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022 Q1-2

Source: Current Populations Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group (CPS-ORG) via IPUMS (IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org)

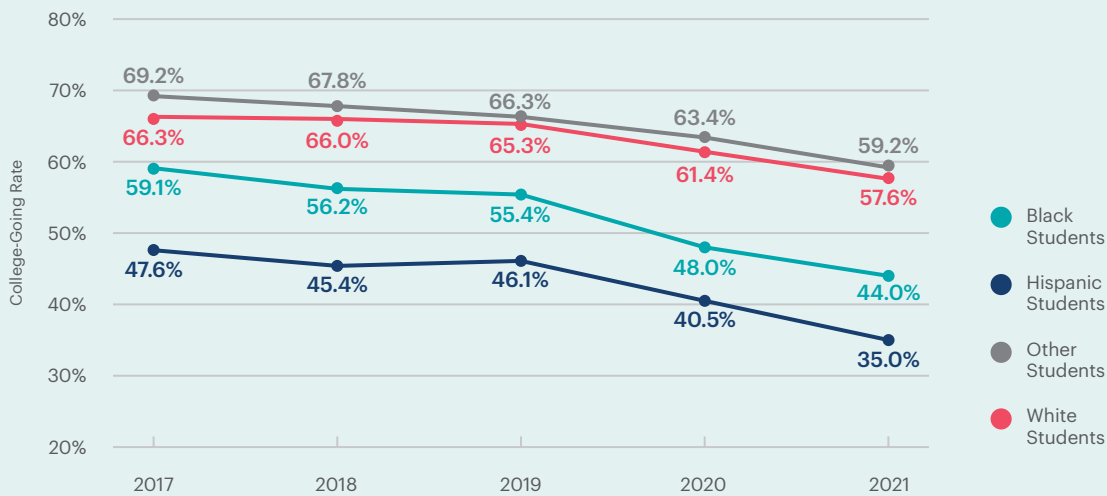
When it comes to achieving economic independence in today’s labor market, a postsecondary credential offers access to a wider variety of career opportunities. It is imperative that the state urgently work to reduce this college-going decline so that every student has the opportunity to earn a credential or degree and be prepared for a dynamic and changing state economy. **Tennessee should adopt three policy opportunities in order to advance this priority:**

1. **Refocus On Postsecondary Preparation In High School**
2. **Bridge The Transition Between K-12 And Postsecondary Education**
3. **Increase Postsecondary Access For Students**

Tennessee incentivizes districts to prioritize college and career readiness through both the state’s accountability system and the new K-12 funding formula, but the state can go further to increase enrollment before and after graduation.

Tennessee’s college-going rate has declined significantly over the last several years, with even sharper dips occurring among historically underserved student groups. The overall rate has been decreasing steadily since 2017, but the rate for Black and Hispanic students — already lower than the overall rate — fell even faster. It is critical that the state advance policies and strategies in both K-12 and postsecondary education for these students to bridge the gap in college-going so that all students can reap the benefits of postsecondary training.

College-Going Gaps Widen Between Student Groups



College-going rate by student group, 2017-2021

Source: THEC, 2022

In K-12 education, providing college opportunities in high school are an important strategy for both better preparing students for college and career and for building momentum to pursue postsecondary education after high school.³³ In Tennessee, high schools are held accountable under the state's accountability system for the number of "Ready Graduates" finishing school each year. One part of this measure includes early postsecondary opportunities, or EPSOs, that provide students the opportunity to take college-level courses, earn college credits, and even gain workforce certifications while in high school. These EPSOs include opportunities like Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, and career and technical education (CTE) courses that can result in an industry certification. These experiences are part of the state's accountability measure because they are proven to increase a student's chances of enrolling in and succeeding in college, especially for historically underserved student groups.³⁴ The Ready Graduate indicator also measures how well a high school is preparing students for success in postsecondary education based on other factors like scoring a 21 or higher on the ACT composite score or the completion of a military readiness assessment.³⁵



To close gaps in college-going and improve student preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce, Tennessee needs to build on the state's EPSO approach to expand the number and quality of EPSO options. These EPSOs provide the framework for schools to offer students with meaningful college and career opportunities, yet student access to these types of courses and their general availability can vary from school district to school district.³⁶ Students can earn an industry certificate for completing a sequence of CTE courses, but many of these industry certifications have no employer demand. Additionally, districts often struggle to fill the staff positions necessary to expand these course offerings.³⁷

Over the last several years, Governor Bill Lee and the Lee administration have taken significant steps in expanding on EPSO and dual enrollment, with a focus on courses aligned to workforce needs for students through the Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE). These opportunities can be further expanded by strengthening and incentivizing partnerships between high schools and Tennessee's Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) to provide high-quality technical training that results in a TCAT diploma. To hold high schools accountable for offering students high-value industry certification options that are aligned to workforce needs, Tennessee should also explore what it would look like to change the Ready Graduate definition to include only "valued" and "preferred" industry certifications that are aligned to workforce need. Additionally, more data about EPSO participation and course success generally, as well as the number of students who enroll in college after graduating high school, will be helpful in forming the path forward for state policymakers and practitioners.

Many students who want to attend postsecondary education do not have the support needed to move directly from high school to college.

In addition to making college opportunities in high school more available to all students to build momentum for college-going before high school graduation, the state must also tackle the problem of “summer melt.” Summer melt is when a high school student indicates their intention to go to college after graduation but ultimately does not enroll. Of the state’s high school seniors who indicate a desire to continue their education, more than one-third receive no formal education after high school.³⁸ This is the experience of too many Tennessee students.

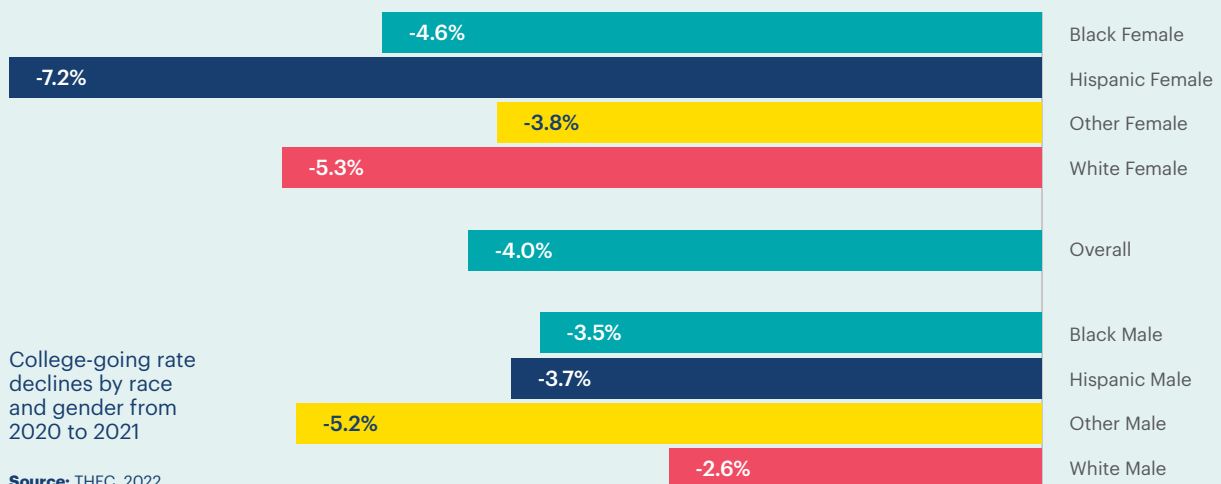
In 2021, survey data showed that about seven in ten high school graduates in Tennessee had plans to attend college, while only five in ten successfully enrolled.³⁹ This drop shows a significant portion of high school graduates have hopes and dreams of receiving some postsecondary education, but nearly 20,000 students fall through the

cracks in the K-12 to postsecondary-to-workforce pipeline each year.⁴⁰ A deeper dive into the state’s college-going numbers reveals this phenomenon is even more significant for Black and Hispanic females in Tennessee. Too many students are entering the world of work without a postsecondary credential or degree, and this significant decline is a cause for concern.



College-Going Saw Significant Declines Across Race And Gender

Decline In College-Going Rate From 2020 To 2021



College-going rate declines by race and gender from 2020 to 2021

Source: THEC, 2022

Summer bridge programs can provide students with academic support and college success coaching between their senior year of high school and first year of college. In fact, several programs in Tennessee show promising outcomes in keeping students on track for enrollment and in reducing the need for academic remediation in their first year of college. Additionally, proactive student ad-

vising in high school and during the transition to college is an effective intervention for keeping students in the pipeline.⁴¹ Innovative practices, such as more deeply embedding college coaching in high school settings, should be considered to address financial aid, improve high school transitions, and combat summer melt so that Tennessee can chart a path forward and boost college-going rates.

Southwest Tennessee Community College hosts the tnAchieves Summer Institute, a free six-week program aimed at helping incoming students get a head start on college both academically and socially. The program aims to support students by bridging K-12 and postsecondary systems more strongly by providing students with the opportunity to earn college credits between high school and college. Through these summer programs, students can experience college life in a smaller and more supported setting, so they feel confident when they begin their first semester.

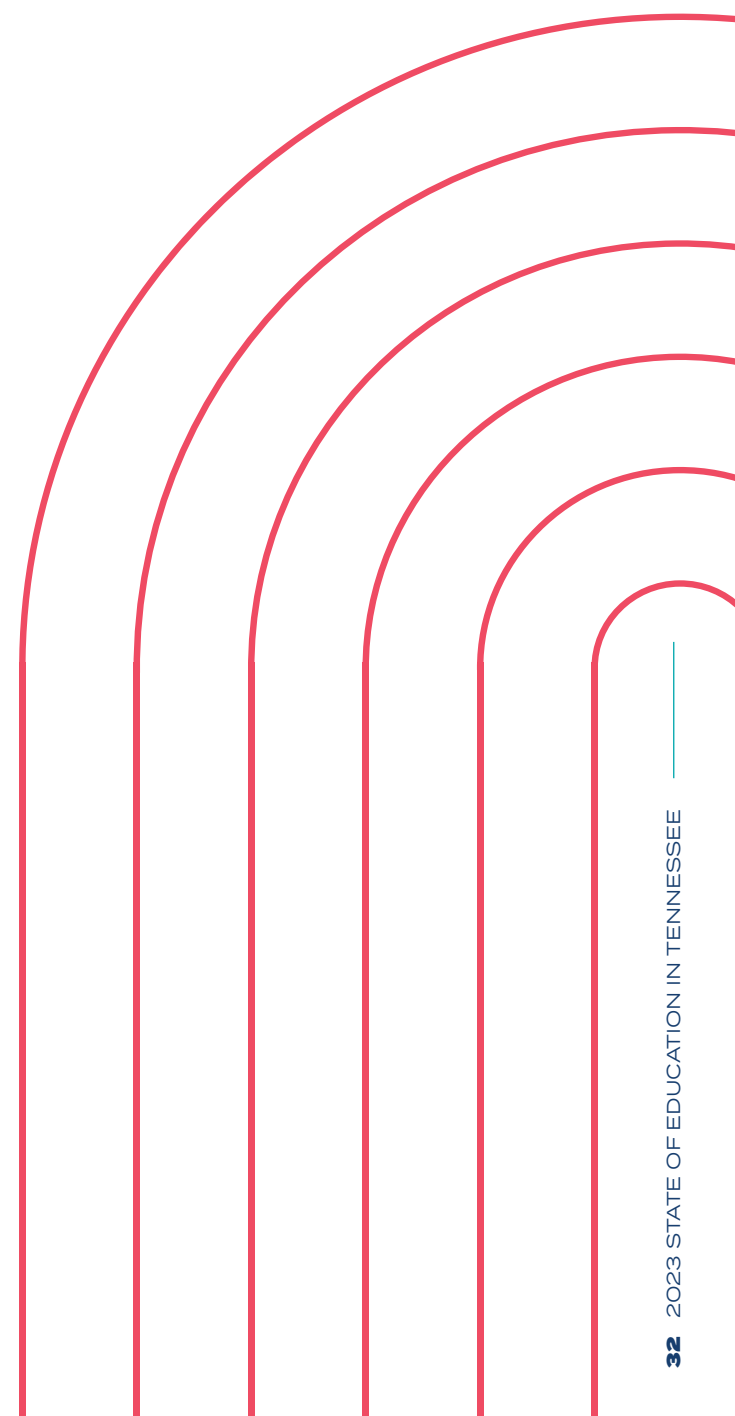
The Summer Institute has had a tremendous impact in increasing college-going for participating students. Alexis Gibbs attended the Summer Institute in 2022 and felt the program helped her learn “how to stay focused and organized.” She also gained confidence in math and felt her writing skills improved through the coursework. Academics were not the only important part of Gibbs’ experience. “The most important thing I learned was how to find and use the many resources the college has to offer, like the library, tutoring in all subjects, student clubs, and activities and counseling.” Gibbs enrolled for the 2022 fall semester and plans to major in nursing.

Gibbs is one of the many success stories from the Summer Institute. In 2021, 100 percent of the students enrolled in tnAchieves Summer Institute completed all remediation and earned the full nine credit hours offered. Completing the Summer Institute provides an easier start to college for students. A smoother transition to college, along with knowledge about accessing and using valuable on-campus resources, will help students be more successful in moving from high school to higher education and into the workforce.⁴²

Tennessee offers a large amount of state financial aid for postsecondary education, yet many students still face barriers to enrolling in college.

Nationwide, survey data show that cost is the number one barrier Americans believe prevents many students from not attending college.⁴³ Costs to attend college have increased gradually in Tennessee over the years. Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, tuition levels increased by 15 percent and 13 percent at the state's community colleges and universities.⁴⁴ In 2016, state leaders authorized the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to adopt a tuition range annually that is binding on public colleges and universities.⁴⁵ This policy and consistent state funding for higher education have helped to minimize extreme increases in tuition and fees across Tennessee. Yet, many students continue to cite cost as a barrier to enrolling in college — as well as a lack of understanding of the actual cost of college. In fact, on average, less than 40 percent of Tennessee students correctly estimate the cost of attending a public college or university.⁴⁶

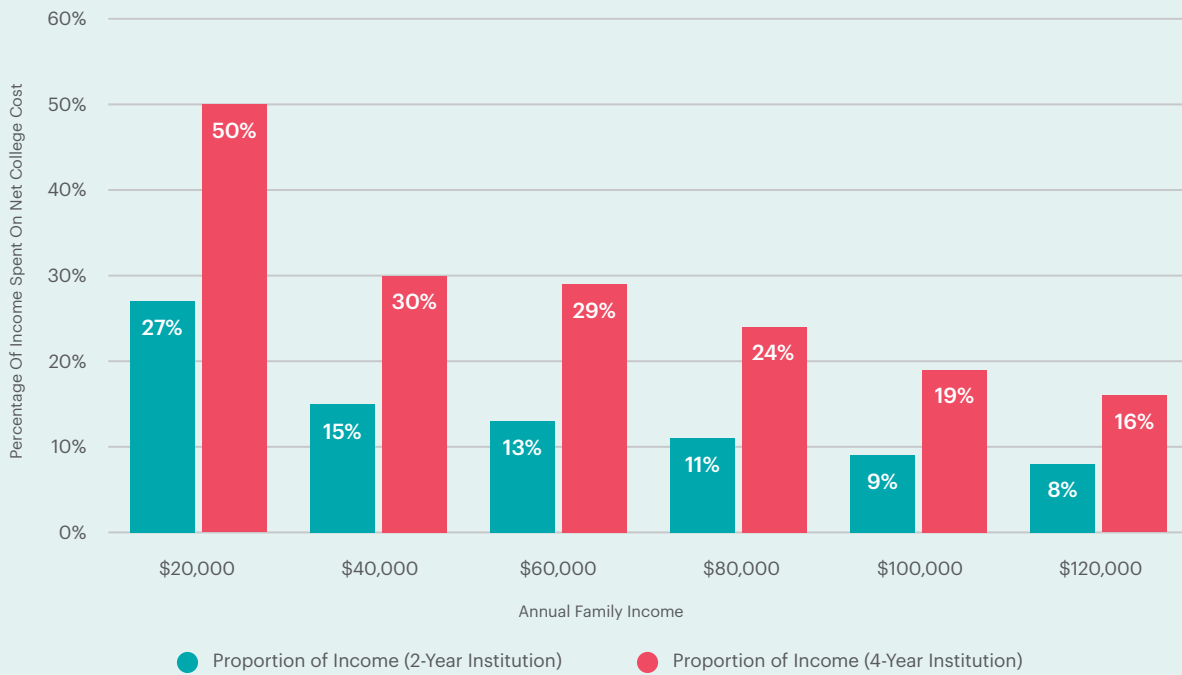
To make sure Tennessee students can afford college, the state has invested significantly in financial aid opportunities for students through the education lottery scholarship programs.⁴⁷ These 10 programs include the HOPE Scholarship for students who attend community colleges or universities, the Tennessee Promise Scholarship that covers the cost of tuition and fees for students to attend a community college or TCAT, and the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant for students who attend TCATs. With these financial aid options, Tennessee provides the 8th most state grant aid in the country.⁴⁸



Financial aid is a proven tool to support students in attending and succeeding in college, with Tennessee’s financial aid programs playing a significant role in increasing access to postsecondary education over the last two decades.⁴⁹ Tennessee Promise resulted in a 40 percent increase in full-time enrollment at the state’s community colleges upon initial implementation, and students who access the education lottery scholarships are more likely to persist and complete their degree.⁵⁰ While these programs continue to support students in accessing postsecondary education, many lower-income

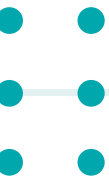
families still pay a significantly higher proportion of their annual incomes to send their children to college after receiving federal and state aid. In the case of Tennessee Promise, the lowest-income students face persisting costs for books, transportation, and other nontuition costs that can both prevent them from enrolling and persisting in college. Additionally, program eligibility requirements — such as full-time status or general application deadlines — can sometimes have an adverse impact on students who are interested in attending and succeeding in college.⁵¹

Low-Income Tennessee Families Pay A Significantly Larger Proportion Of Their Annual Income To Send Their Student To College After Aid Is Applied



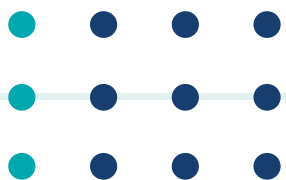
Percentage of income required to afford net college costs based on institution type by annual income level

Source: THEC, 2022



In addition to program eligibility requirements, information about financial aid in Tennessee remains a barrier for students as well. Survey data show most students are not aware of the majority of the state’s education lottery scholarships and programs.⁵² State leaders and practitioners should consider opportunities, such as a financial aid advising day, to get information to students about the scholarships and aid opportunities that are available. If resources and additional capacity are needed to support these initiatives, the state should provide funding to school districts, partnering organizations, and state agencies to make sure every student is aware of the financial options for attending college.

The decline in the college-going rate over the last two years is alarming, especially when a high school diploma is no longer enough to meet workforce needs in today’s economy and the economy of the future. However, these declines are not surprising given that students are navigating information and bureaucratic barriers, costs beyond tuition and fees, an economy changed by a pandemic and rising inflation, and other challenges to enrolling in postsecondary education. As state leaders consider how to strengthen Tennessee’s education-to-workforce pipeline, financial aid should be strengthened to ensure more students enroll in college and persist to complete a credential.



2023 PRIORITY: ADDRESS TENNESSEE'S COLLEGE-GOING DECLINE WITH URGENCY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on student success in Tennessee, with many high school students' plans for attending college disrupted by the economic uncertainty of these last few years. Tennessee must enact bold policies to eliminate persisting barriers to postsecondary access, refocus and expand college and career opportunities in high school, and combat summer melt with research-backed strategies known to work for students so that all students enroll in postsecondary training and are prepared for work.

The state should refocus on postsecondary preparation in high school.

- **Strengthen the Ready Graduate measure.** The state should improve the state's Ready Graduate measure in Tennessee's ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) plan so that it is a better K-12 indicator of preparedness for postsecondary education. In particular, the measure should only count "valued" and "preferred" industry credentials, include work-based learning pathways, and require students taking an EPSO to pass the course exit exam in order to earn credit toward the measure.
- **Establish a cross-agency EPSO task force.** The state should convene a task force of K-12, higher education, and state workforce agencies to set a statewide priority and agenda around the purpose and focus on EPSOs and make recom-

mendations to improve access to and quality of these offerings for high-need students. The task force should inform potential revisions in our state's ESSA plan to prioritize high-quality credit-yielding opportunities for students. Additionally, this task force should focus on setting goals for EPSO enrollment and success by different student groups, as well as examining both EPSO affordability and staffing strategies for EPSOs requiring special instructor certifications.

- **Report a college-going measure disaggregated by student demographic group on the state report card.** Currently, the state report card provides college-going numbers at the high school level. However, these numbers do not break down the college-going trends by student group. TDOE should report this data at the student group level to hold high schools accountable for supporting all students to participate in EPSOs and successfully transition from K-12 into postsecondary education.

The Tennessee General Assembly and the State Board of Education should provide high-need students with supports that smooth the path from high school to college.

- **Invest in existing high-intensity summer bridge programs to incentivize participation of high-need students.** The Tennessee General Assembly should provide recurring funding for these programs to be administered across the state between K-12 and postsecondary institutions. These programs can help students succeed by orienting them to college and providing them with a jump start on coursework in the summer between high school graduation and the first semester of college. Many of these programs are being implemented across

the state. As a result, it is essential for these initiatives to be funded and monitored for quality to ensure students are successfully transitioning to college.

- **Fund a postsecondary advising initiative.** The state should provide funding for schools with low college-going rates or student populations with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and students of color to hire dedicated college and career advisers. Building on the work of AdviseTN, tnAchieves, and The Ayers Foundation at the state level, this grant program would expand the number of postsecondary advisers in the high school who can support students in navigating the complicated path from high school into higher education and the workforce.
- **Develop a college and career advising endorsement for teachers, counselors, and other school staff.** The State Board of Education should develop this endorsement in order to provide teachers with content knowledge about financial aid opportunities and other college and career readiness information. This endorsement would provide teachers with an option for professional development, as well as a skill that could be used for a short period of time during the school day in working with high school seniors considering their opportunities after high school.

Tennessee should increase postsecondary access for students.

- **Require school districts to have a financial aid advising day in partnership with state higher education leaders.** The Tennessee General Assembly should require all high schools to have a financial aid advising day in partnership with institutions of higher education. The Tennessee Department of Higher Education and Student Assistance Corporation (THEC/TSAC), in partnership with the Tennessee Department of

Education (TDOE), should provide a day during the school year dedicated to providing information about the state's various scholarships to high school seniors. This day should include a Promise mentorship meeting, a period of time to complete the FAFSA, and extensive information about all federal and state financial aid opportunities. In addition to hosting this financial aid advising day, THEC should improve its postsecondary net price calculator by allowing students to compare costs across institutions. THEC should also make the tool more centrally accessible through the CollegeForTN.org portal.

- **Strengthen the Tennessee Promise Scholarship.** The state should strengthen the Tennessee Promise Scholarship to increase access and support for students. In particular, Tennessee should examine some of the scholarship eligibility requirements — such as full-time status and the timeline for community service submission — and consider changes that will be more flexible for students moving from high school into postsecondary education. Additionally, opportunities should be explored within the scholarship to expand nontuition supports for Tennessee Promise students who are from lower-income backgrounds and continue to face cost barriers to access and success in college.
- **Conduct a financial and return on investment analysis for Tennessee colleges.** The Comptroller should conduct a financial analysis on the cost to attend Tennessee's public colleges and universities and how programs of study provide value to students when they enter the workplace. This report can determine whether the state's financial aid system and colleges meet affordability benchmarks based on the cost of attendance for students attending public colleges and universities. It should also generate an analysis of the return on investment for programs of study at colleges across different student groups.

PRIORITY: PREPARE ALL TENNESSEE STUDENTS FOR WORK

Tennessee has experienced rapid economic growth over the last several years. The state had approximately 400,000 job openings in October 2022, and employment opportunities are expected to increase in the coming years. The economy is projected to grow by about 0.7 percent annually, with the expansion focused in health services, hospitals, construction, and business.⁵³ Job opportunities abound across industries in Tennessee, providing students with bright prospects for career choices.

However, Tennessee's workforce is not fully prepared to meet this significant growth. Estimates suggest that close to 60 percent of jobs in the state require a postsecondary certificate or degree, yet just 46.8 percent of Tennesseans have one.⁵⁴ The state has a talent gap resulting from mismatched education and workforce systems, a gap that is concerning in the face of economic growth, employment opportunities, and new businesses coming to the state.

As we near 2023, the state's education and workforce systems must work better together so that every high school graduate entering the workplace is ready for the job on day one. Education and workforce information should be linked more clearly so that schools, colleges, and employers can better understand the current and future knowledge and skills needed in the economy. Community colleges, critical to meeting local workforce needs, should be bold in partnering with employers to create innovative credential pathways. Not enough students are finishing college, and the state should leverage goal setting, policies, and investments to prioritize improving student completion rates to close the state's talent gap.

SCORE believes connecting education and work on behalf of every student should be the state's highest focus. **Tennessee should adopt three policy opportunities in order to advance this priority:**

1. **Build The Future Of Work Using Data**
2. **Reimagine Community College Credentials**
3. **Hold Higher Education Accountable For Student Completion**

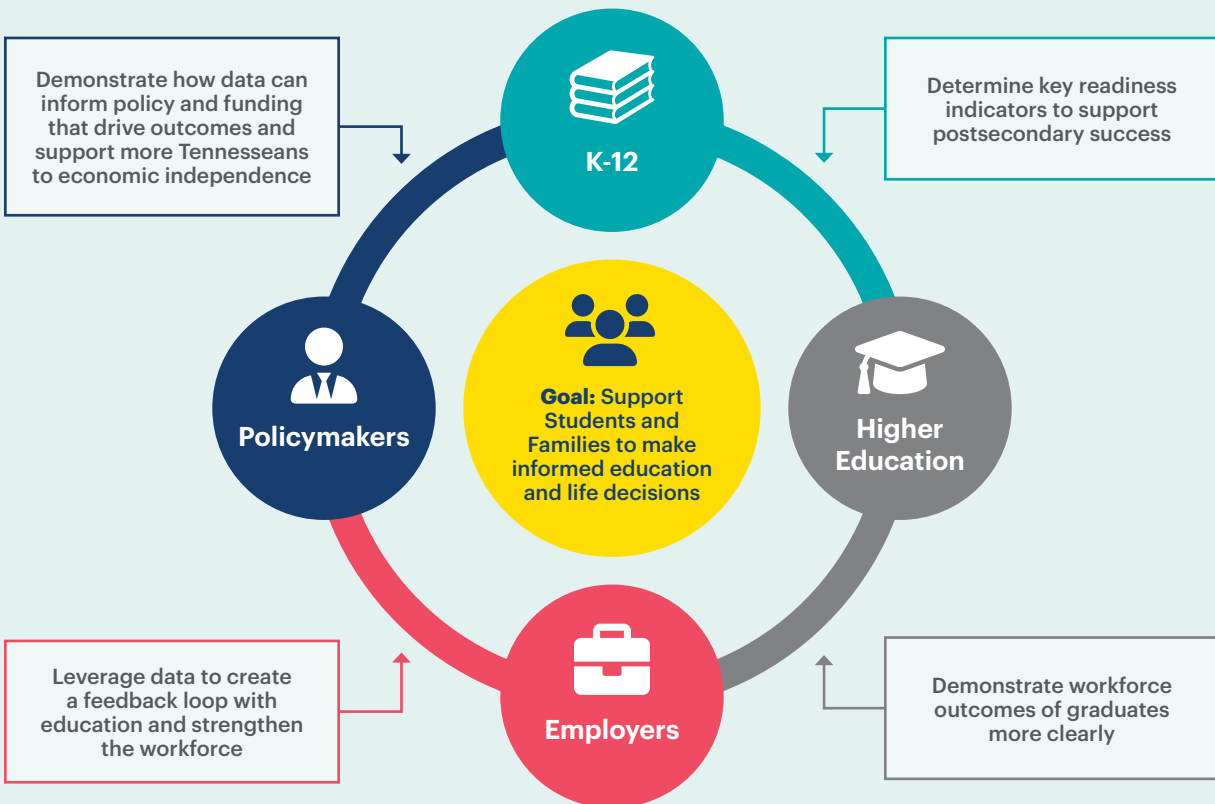


Tennessee has the information to better ensure that every student is ready for work, but the state’s data system is not being fully used to inform employers, policymakers, educators, and communities about how to narrow the talent gap.

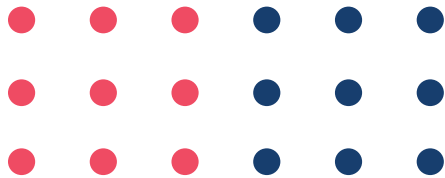
To ensure Tennessee has the talent to meet the state’s economic needs, the state must leverage and generate more useful information from the state’s existing education and workforce data systems to support the future of work. This data is also needed to better assess state programs and enable stakeholders to study the outcomes of state policies and investments.

While our TN DATA (Data Analytics for Transparency and Accountability) system is primarily used by state agencies to set policy and allocate resources and researchers to evaluate programs, the system can be strengthened to further empower Tennessee employers and educators with the information needed to bridge the gap between education preparation and workforce needs. For example, this system could be leveraged to determine what key milestones students should complete in K-12 education — such as taking dual enrollment courses or completing a calculus course — in order to be prepared for specific jobs across the state. To hold higher education more accountable, this system could be used to tie employment outcomes to particular programs of study at a college or university. For the workforce, this information could be used by employers to determine which colleges and universities are generating the types of quality credentials needed for the jobs most in demand.

Use Education And Workforce Information To Prepare Students For Work



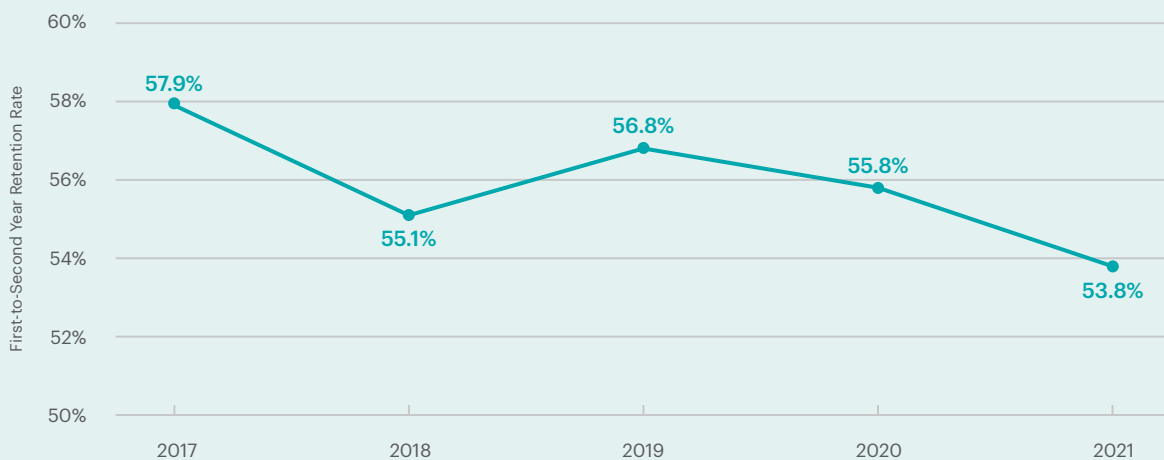
Tennessee has the system to build the future of work. To use this information to drive educational and economic development, we need a state-level cross-agency vision for using this system to ensure students receive quality credentials and obtain sustainable careers. Additionally, an increased investment in this system would support both state agencies and local communities in strengthening, accessing, and using this information to improve student outcomes.



Almost half of Tennessee's community college students do not persist past their first year of enrollment, leaving many without a credential aligned to workforce need.

Tennessee's community colleges play a critical role in preparing students for the future of work. Historically, these colleges originated to provide individuals in local communities the general coursework and skills training to prepare them for a job.⁵⁵ This mission remains true today, with the state's community college system centered on providing an education to Tennesseans that will make them competitive in the world economy.⁵⁶ However, current data spotlights that only half of community college students actually persist from their first to second year. Too many students are leaving the state's community colleges without a postsecondary certificate or degree in today's economy.

Only About Half Of Community College Students Persist Beyond Year One



Community college retention rate, 2017-2021

Source: THEC, 2022

These persistence trends are even more concerning when we examine them up against the degree programs offered across these colleges. While the associate of applied science (A.A.S.) degree provides students with applied skills in various workforce settings in addition to being designed for students to transfer, the associate of arts (A.A.) degree is designed for a student to transfer from a community college to a university without applied learning opportunities. These programs are essential for students who successfully move on to a university, but, on average, only one in seven students who enroll in these programs successfully complete the program and enroll in a university.⁵⁷ Too many Tennesseans are exiting our community college system without a credential that provides them with skills or certifications to receive a high-demand job.

Tennessee has the opportunity to reexamine and design programs of study that are more aligned to workforce needs and accelerate a student's path into work. Nondegree credentials programs,

for example, can provide students with a skill more quickly than a traditional two-year degree program, but these programs do not have clear quality benchmarks to ensure that students who enroll in these programs experience a return on their investment. Additionally, incremental credentials can also be built into two-year programs so that students receive a special certificate in a specific skill on the way to receiving a credential. Employers can also be more involved across all community colleges to facilitate workforce alignment. The Tennessee Board of Regents is in the process of launching an initiative to embed more workforce-ready credentials within existing programs of study, an opportunity for community colleges to redesign and rethink how they prepare students to enter the workplace.⁵⁸ Tennessee's workforce has been disrupted by the pandemic, and all of Tennessee's community colleges should reimagine the way business is done so that every Tennessee student enrolling in college leaves with the tools needed to succeed in our state's growing economy.



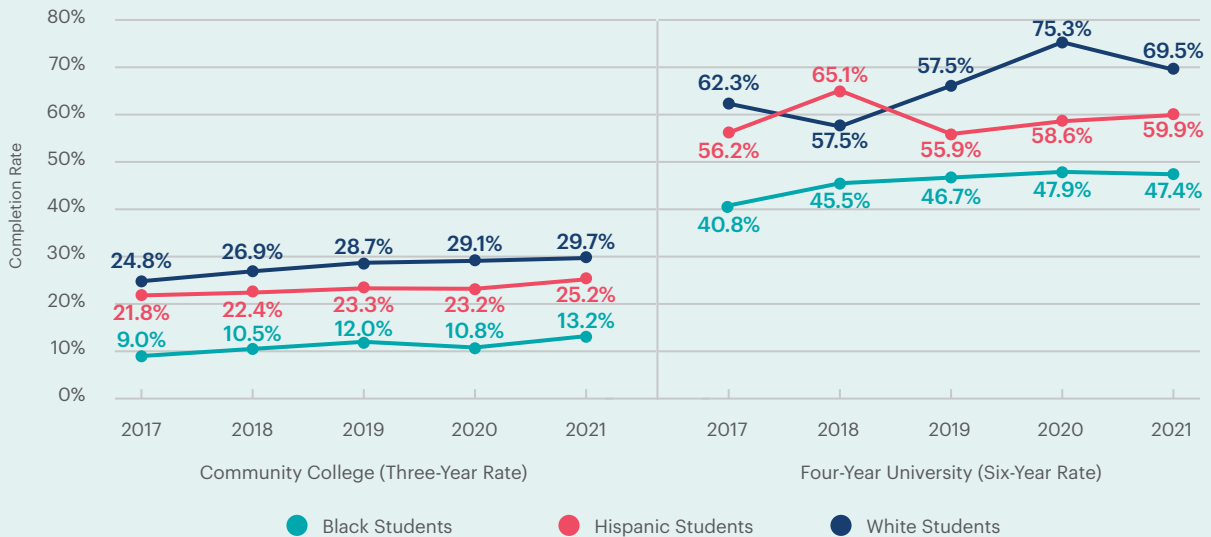
Tennessee’s higher education system has an important role to play in meeting the state’s workforce needs, but too many students are not completing college.

In addition to accessing and using information and reimagining the community college experience,⁵⁹ Tennessee’s colleges and universities must address the state’s college completion crisis to meet workforce demand and ensure more Tennessee students have the opportunity for economic independence. TCATs, community colleges, and universities play important roles in conferring certificates and degrees to students to prepare them for work, but the college completion problem persists. Today, just one in two students attending a public college or university in Tennessee will complete a credential in a period of more than six years.⁶⁰ Completion rates are particularly low at the state’s community colleges, where less than one in three students attending a community college will complete their degree in a three-year period. Higher education has an important role to play in preparing Tennessee students for work, and policies and state investments should hold colleges and universities more accountable for supporting students in finishing their degrees.

This completion crisis looks most concerning for students of color. In 2022, just 13 percent of Black students and 25 percent of Hispanic students complete a community college credential on time. When looking at university numbers, completion rates are higher: nearly 70 percent of White students complete a degree on time, but just 47 percent of Black students and 59 percent of Hispanic students finish in the same time frame. The gaps in student completion rates have persisted across both sectors. We can and must do better to help these student groups persist and receive postsecondary credentials and enter the workforce prepared to be successful.



Though Completion Rates Are Significantly Higher At Universities Than Community Colleges, Completion Equity Gaps Persist Across Sectors



150 percent completion rate by sector across student groups, 2017-2021

Source: TBR and THEC, 2022

Over the years, state leadership has enacted significant policy changes and targeted investments toward improving the state’s completion rates. The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 changed how the state funded higher education, moving from funding based on enrollment to funding based on completion.⁶¹ The law also required community colleges to establish block scheduling and cohort programming for students, strategies that are proven to increase persistence and graduation rates for students. In 2021, to further increase the likelihood of succeeding, the state piloted a completion grant program to provide lower-income Tennessee Promise students with additional microgrants to cover the costs of books, supplies, or transportation.⁶² To chart a shared path toward a common goal across stakeholders, the state set bold goals in 2013 to increase the number of adults with a postsecondary credential from 33 percent to 55 percent by 2025. Since 2013, this number has risen to 46 percent.⁶³

Progress has been made, yet state numbers still show that too few Tennessee students actually complete college. Tennessee must renew and re-center around postsecondary and workforce goals that are focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans who receive a postsecondary credential and who participate in the labor force in high-demand, high-wage fields. This goal could jump start partnerships across education and the workforce, as well as support greater use of data to determine how to measure successful workforce outcomes for students and workers in the state. Additionally, the state should leverage the outcomes-based funding formula and available state funding to support students to complete their degrees across colleges and universities, with a focus on students from historically underserved backgrounds.



TENNESSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROVIDES STUDENTS WITH WORKFORCE-READY TRAINING

Northeast State Community College offers courses at The Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) in Kingsport, Tennessee. RCAM has a 26,000- square-foot industrial training facility that offers both credit and industry training options with programs such as chemical process operations and electrical technology. Their programs aim to provide flexibility to students to ensure they can meet the needs of all students. The programs are aligned with technical job opportunities, so students are ready to enter the workforce with all the necessary skills. The goals of RCAM include meeting the workforce needs of existing industries, building a pipeline of skilled labor, and being a resource for economic development.

RCAM provides a pipeline for many important Tennessee businesses. Jeff Fain, the director of Manufacturing and Workforce Development at Eastman chemical, states that “RCAM is a critical regional asset providing apprenticeship training to support manufacturing workforce development.” The instruction provided at RCAM is world-class and allows Eastman Chemical to develop their own talent to ensure their workforce needs are met.

RCAM has been a useful tool for both small and large companies in Tennessee to develop and hire a skilled advanced manufacturing labor force. In Tennessee, the number of people working in the manufacturing sector is 1.35 times the national average. Students learn directly from practitioners in the field, and the apprenticeship model ensures that students have hands on experience that allows them to develop the necessary skills to be successful. RCAM is an important program for ensuring that students are prepared for the workforce, businesses have skilled laborers to hire, and that the manufacturing demands of Tennessee are met.

2023 PRIORITY: PREPARE ALL TENNESSEE STUDENTS FOR WORK

It is clear that Tennessee needs a highly skilled workforce as the economy continues to grow and as the state continues to be a destination for companies and industry seeking growth, a strong business climate, and a high quality of life. Community colleges should reimagine credentialing to provide students with workforce-relevant training prior to the completion of a degree. Additionally, to hold higher education more accountable for workforce outcomes, the state should set bold goals for increasing postsecondary attainment and producing work-ready graduates, as well as leverage the state's outcomes-based funding formula and state funding to support students to finish the postsecondary training they begin.

Tennessee must use data to build the future of work.

- **Establish a Future of Work Commission.** To facilitate the use of information that will help Tennessee bridge the talent gap, the Tennessee General Assembly should establish a commission that includes the commissioners and executive directors of all education and workforce agencies, as well as members of the higher education community and other stakeholders. This commission can work to develop a shared vision in partnership with the Office of Evidence and Impact for using existing information to better understand how to build the future of work in K-12 schools, higher education, and industry. This body could also set policies and procedures for information

sharing across state agencies, for providing research access for faculty and staff, and for prioritizing the privacy and security of the information.

- **Create public-facing dashboards.** The Office of Evidence and Impact should use information to create dashboards that utilize this longitudinal information to report on how students are moving through K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce. These dashboards should provide information about how students are performing from K-12 into work and include an evaluation of the state's CTE programming, college-going trends, and other information about workforce alignment for postsecondary credentials.
- **Provide additional, recurring funding for state agencies that contribute education and workforce information to the system.** The General Assembly should also provide recurring funding for the state to access and use this information efficiently, as well as for local entities to use this information to inform their practice. These resources would ensure that all state agencies, the Office of Evidence and Impact, and local practitioners have the capacity to support research, analysis, and report writing to build the future of work moving forward.



The Tennessee Board of Regents should reimagine community college credentials.

- **Direct resources to reimagine community college.** The state should appropriate funding to the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) to launch a process for community colleges to develop and identify stackable achievements on the path to achieving an associate degree and how credentials can be stacked toward a degree. Programs that “stack” should be short-term, demonstrate labor market value, and be part of a clear pathway toward a degree. This process could be particularly valuable for high-demand programs that naturally lend themselves to incremental progress, such as healthcare, manufacturing, and business.
- **Develop a statewide definition for short-term, noncredit programs.** The Tennessee General Assembly should direct THEC to develop this definition to evaluate these programs and ensure workforce alignment across the state. Once a standard definition is established, the state could pursue additional policy opportunities that would support students earning workforce-ready credentials, such as permitting state financial aid dollars to flow to students enrolled in these programs.
- **Expand applied workforce learning options at community colleges.** The state should provide funding to both community colleges and employers to expand applied workforce learning options, such as internships and apprenticeships, within college degree programs. These applied learning programs should be targeted to high-demand fields.



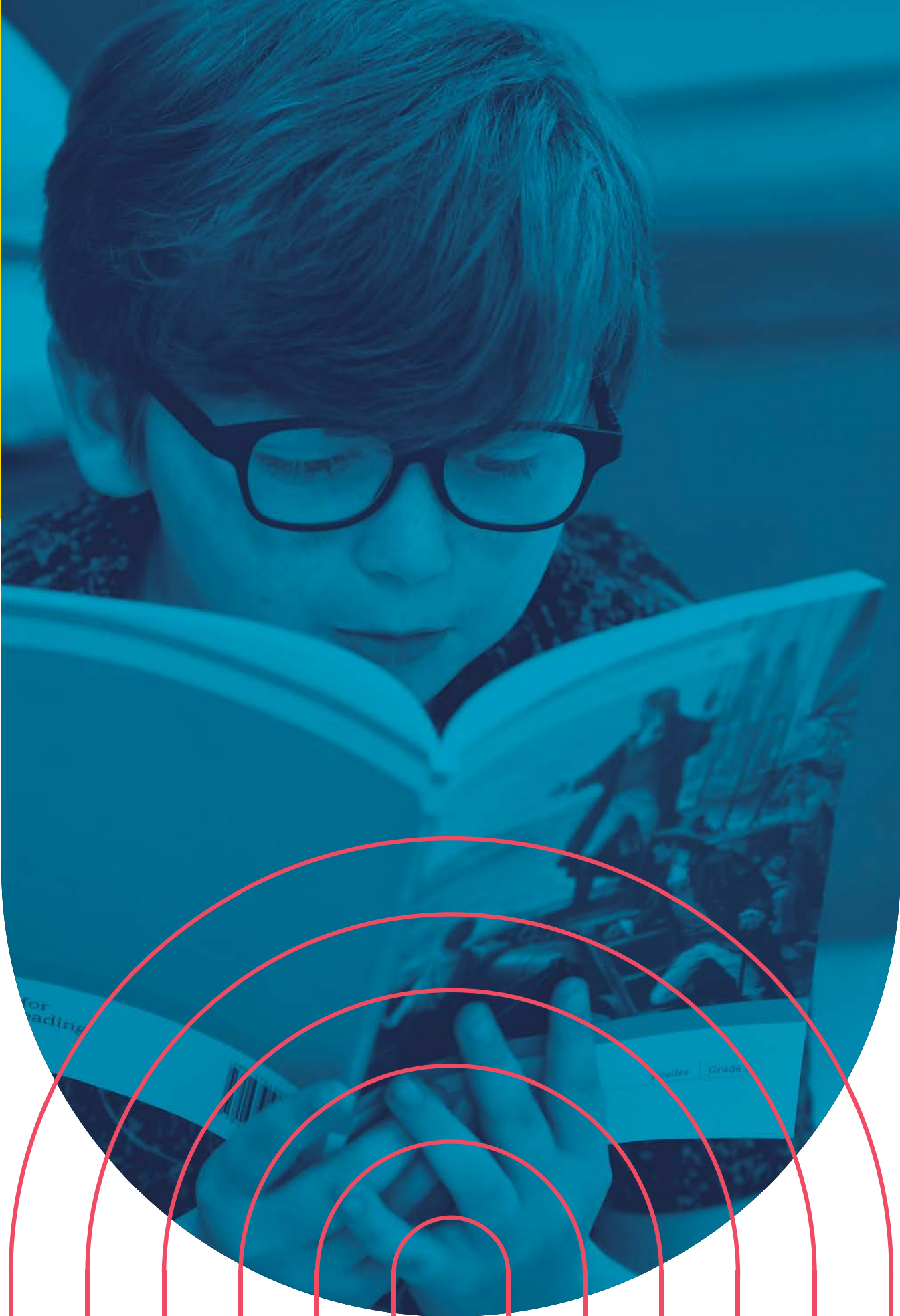
The state should hold higher education accountable for student completion.

- **Set a renewed education attainment goal that is aligned to workforce needs.** Tennessee must set new goals that include specific benchmarks for increasing the attainment rate to meet the state’s workforce needs. In particular, Tennessee should set a goal to increase the number of students and adults who receive workforce-ready credentials for high-demand, high-wage jobs, whether in K-12, postsecondary, or applied working training programs. These goals should be informed by research on the state’s workforce needs. Additionally, the state should prioritize increasing the number of students in historically underserved groups with postsecondary training and incorporate this priority into the state’s strategic plan developed by THEC.
- **Reexamine the state’s outcomes-based funding formula.** The Tennessee Higher Education Commission should focus on opportunities within the current funding formula to support all students in completing their degrees, emphasizing workforce readiness and student

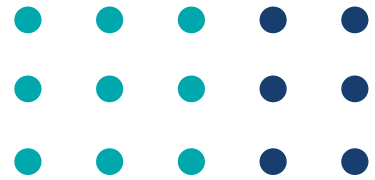
success for specific student groups. Opportunities within the formula include adding weighted funding for institutions that serve a higher percentage of students of color and lower-income students. Additionally, THEC should launch an advisory council of K-12, higher education, and industry stakeholders to inform the upcoming funding formula review process in 2025. In particular, this council should focus on strengthening the formula’s workforce investment bonus and incorporating other workforce readiness measures into the formula.

- **Dedicate funding to cohort-based targeted student support initiatives.** In order to support students of color to complete credentials, the state should invest in resources at TCATs, community colleges, and universities that are centered on research-backed strategies that will help students succeed. Completion coaches, academic support groups, and peer mentoring are important strategies to support students in completing degrees. These resources could be used by institutions of higher education — and especially community colleges — to target funding toward high-impact practices that are proven to increase the number of students completing credentials each year.





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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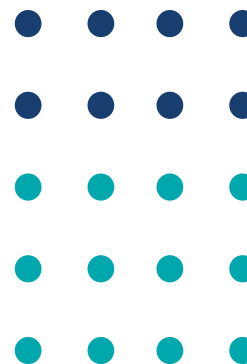
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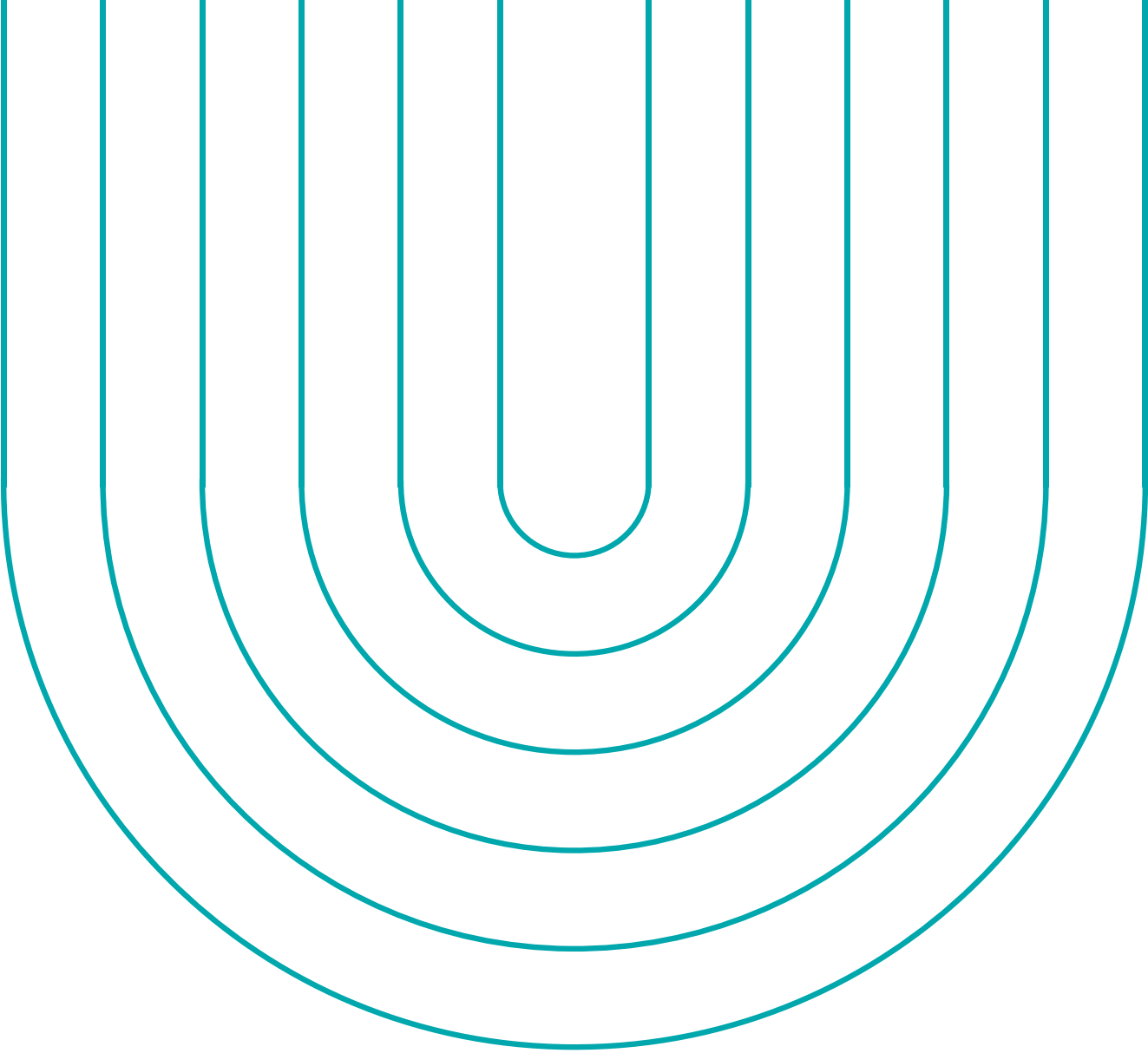
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