



**2017**

# **Annual Joint Report of Pre-Kindergarten through Higher Education in Tennessee**

February 1, 2017



**TENNESSEE**  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



**Tennessee State Board of Education  
Tennessee Higher Education Commission**

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## **State Board of Education**

The State Board of Education is the governing and policymaking body for the Tennessee system of public elementary and secondary education. The board's statutory charge touches all facets of state policy and governance, including school and district accountability, educator evaluation, instructional standards, and educator preparation. The State Board of Education's vision is to work with educators and stakeholders across the state to prepare all Tennessee children for postsecondary and workforce success.

## **Tennessee Higher Education Commission**

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is the state's coordinating agency for higher education. Guided by the *2015-2025 Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education*, THEC oversees an array of finance, academic, research, and consumer protection initiatives that promote student success and support the state's completion agenda for postsecondary education. THEC actively seeks to develop policy recommendations, programmatic initiatives, and partnerships that increase educational attainment in the state while improving higher education access and success for all Tennesseans.



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## Overview

The *Annual Joint Report on Pre-Kindergarten through Higher Education in Tennessee* complies with the requirements established in T.C.A. § 49-1-302(a)(10). State law directs the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to provide an annual report to the Governor, the General Assembly, all public schools, and postsecondary institutions and their respective boards. This report includes, but is not limited to, discussion of four areas: (1) state needs in public education; (2) fulfillment of the SBE and THEC's respective master plans; (3) duplication in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education; and (4) compatibility of high school graduation requirements and admission requirements of postsecondary institutions. This year's report focuses on the state's current needs in K-16 education, and how the SBE and THEC are attempting, through each agency's master plan to deliver results in these priority areas.

Continuous improvement has been the common theme in Tennessee's upwardly striving education system. This edition of the *Joint Report* is published at a time of significant transition in terms of education policy. Governor Haslam has recently appointed a new Executive Director of THEC, and the 110th General Assembly has just convened for the first session of its two-year term.

Pre-K-12 education has faced a transition as Race to the Top funding concluded in 2015. Race to the Top funding led to major reforms across the state, including higher standards and new methods of teacher evaluation. The SBE has worked to sustain and improve upon previous reform efforts to better support the Governor's Drive to 55 initiative. The SBE's recently updated master plan places an intense focus on a set of ambitious student achievement goals to address the state's need for increased postsecondary credentials.

In higher education, the policy landscape is also evolving in support of the Governor's Drive to 55. In response, the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee systems continue to develop innovative programs and initiatives to ensure affordability for students and the future economic viability of their institutions. The THEC master plan addresses these efforts, as well as others aimed at increasing the percentage of Tennesseans holding a postsecondary credential.



## State Needs in Public Education

Governor Bill Haslam’s Drive to 55 initiative is critical to the state’s economic development and the long-term growth of its workforce. The goal of the Drive to 55 is to increase the percentage of working-age Tennesseans (age 25-64) with a postsecondary certificate or degree to 55 percent by the year 2025.

Using data from the American Community Survey<sup>1</sup> and projections of certificate holders from the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville,<sup>2</sup> THEC estimates that 37.8 percent of working-age Tennesseans held a postsecondary credential as of 2014. To reach the goal outlined by the Drive to 55, 871,309 additional credentials will need to be awarded by 2025.<sup>3</sup> **Table 1** illustrates the growth needed to meet this goal compared to the current postsecondary attainment in Tennessee.

**Table 1: Number of Degrees Needed to Meet Drive to 55 Goal**

Number of credentialed residents in 2013 who will not age out by 2025	1,037,157
<i> Holders of an associate degree or higher</i>	<i> 940,650</i>
<i> Certificate holders (4%)</i>	<i> 96,507</i>
Needed number of credentialed individuals in 2025	1,978,283
Number of credentials awarded in 2014	69,817
<b>Number of credentials needed to meet the Drive to 55 goal</b>	<b>871,309</b>
<b>Annual needed growth to meet the Drive to 55 goal</b>	<b>79,210</b>

Source: THEC. (2015). *Postsecondary attainment in the decade of decision: The master plan for Tennessee postsecondary education: 2015-2025*. (Table 2, p. 11). Nashville, TN: Author.

The natural growth in degree production for Tennessee’s public institutions will comprise a portion of this annual target but is not sufficient on its own. The gap between this natural growth and the growth needed to meet the Drive to 55 goal is 79,210 credentials, which must be produced annually in addition to the natural growth projected from 2015 to 2025.<sup>4</sup>

To meet this need, the SBE collaborated with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to develop three overarching student achievement goals that will guide its efforts in increasing postsecondary preparedness, leading to increased postsecondary completion.

<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 2013, One-year estimates.

<sup>2</sup> Based on estimates in Carruthers, C. K., & Fox, W. F. (2013). *The 2011 stock of postsecondary certificate holders in Tennessee*. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Center for Business and Economic Research.

<sup>3</sup> *Postsecondary Attainment in the Decade of Decision: The Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education 2015-2025*. Available at <https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/thec/attachments/MasterPlan2025.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



The first of these goals is that Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by the year 2020. In 2013, Tennessee recorded its greatest improvement in the history of NAEP, and in 2015, Tennessee maintained its status as the state with the greatest growth since 2011. In 2015, the state achieved another milestone by ranking 25<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math – the first time Tennessee has ever ranked in the top half of states in any subject or grade.<sup>5</sup> Meeting the targets set by the Drive to 55 will require that students enter postsecondary education prepared to succeed, and increasing Tennessee’s overall performance and national ranking on NAEP is one important way of measuring students’ readiness to complete high school with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in higher education.

**Figure 1** below illustrates the change in NAEP scores for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders from 2005 to 2015 (represented by the black numbers connected with a solid line), as well as the continued improvement required to move into the top half of states by 2020 (represented by the green numbers connected with a dashed line).

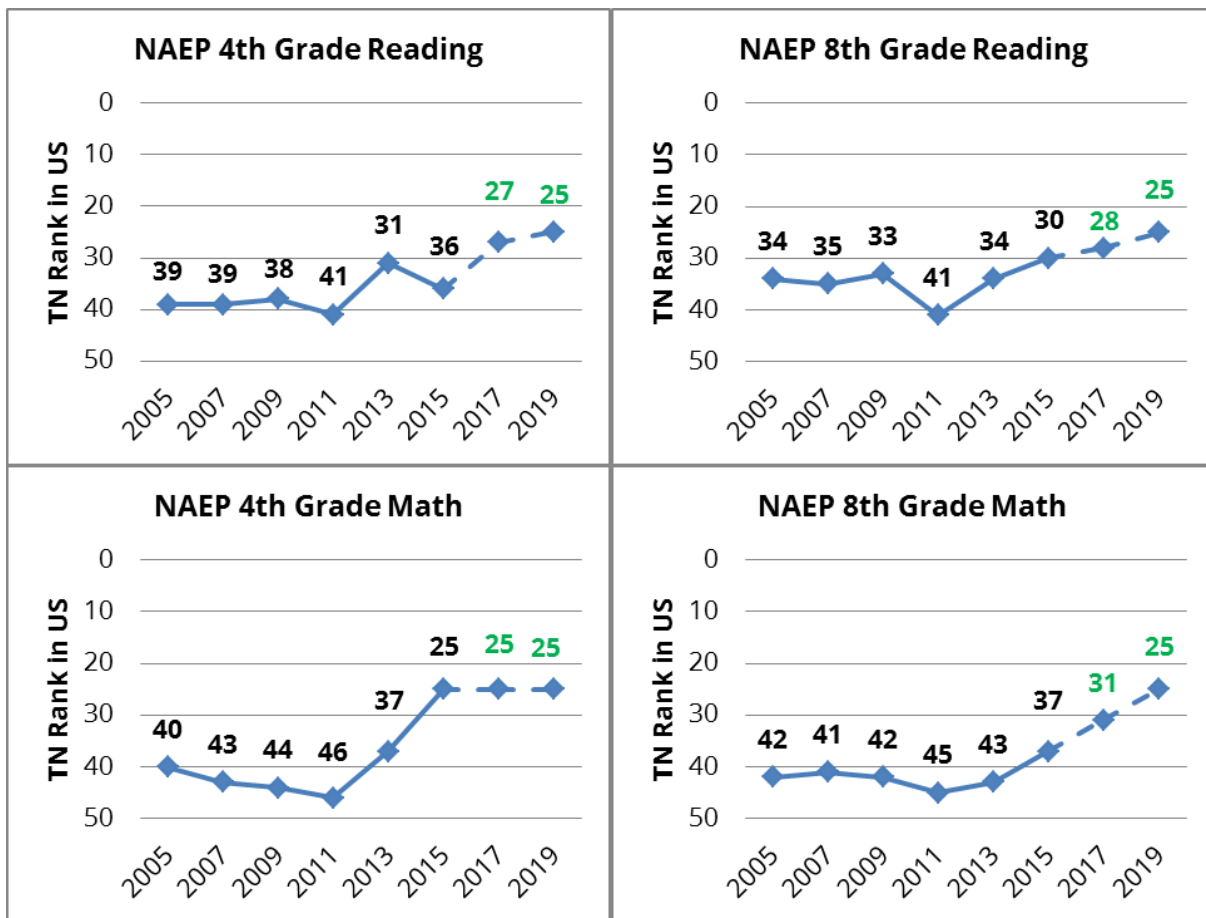


Figure 1: Progress toward the Top Half of States on NAEP

<sup>5</sup> 2015 NAEP results are available on the TDOE’s website at <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/naep-results>





The SBE's second goal is to increase Tennessee's average ACT composite score to 21 by 2020. Tennessee has seen the average ACT score for public high school students increase from 19.0 to 19.9 between 2011 and 2016.<sup>6</sup> **Figure 2** illustrates the progress made between 2011 and 2016 (shown by the black numbers connected with a solid line), as well as the additional improvement necessary to achieve a statewide average score of 21 by 2020 (shown by the green numbers connected with a dashed line). As the SBE continues to push for greater workforce and postsecondary preparedness, tracking growth in ACT scores will provide valuable information about whether the state's high school students are meeting postsecondary readiness benchmarks in the tested subject areas. With students increasingly taking the SAT, in addition to or instead of the ACT, the SBE will also be tracking progress toward raising the average SAT score to 990 by 2020.

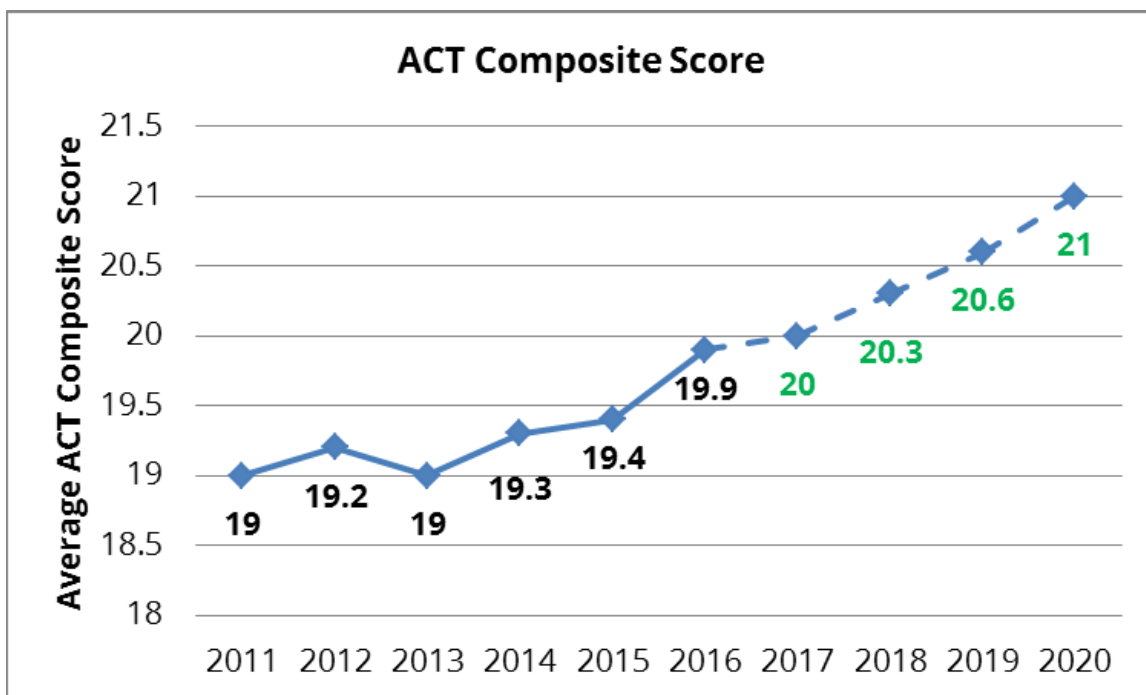


Figure 2: Progress toward Average ACT Composite Score of 21

The SBE's third goal is for the majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 to earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree. The high school class of 2015 enrolled 62.5 percent of graduates into some form of postsecondary education in fall 2015.<sup>7</sup> However, the state's goals extend beyond enrollment to *completion*. Only 25 percent of the high school class of 2009 attained a postsecondary degree within 6 years.<sup>8</sup> To prepare for a

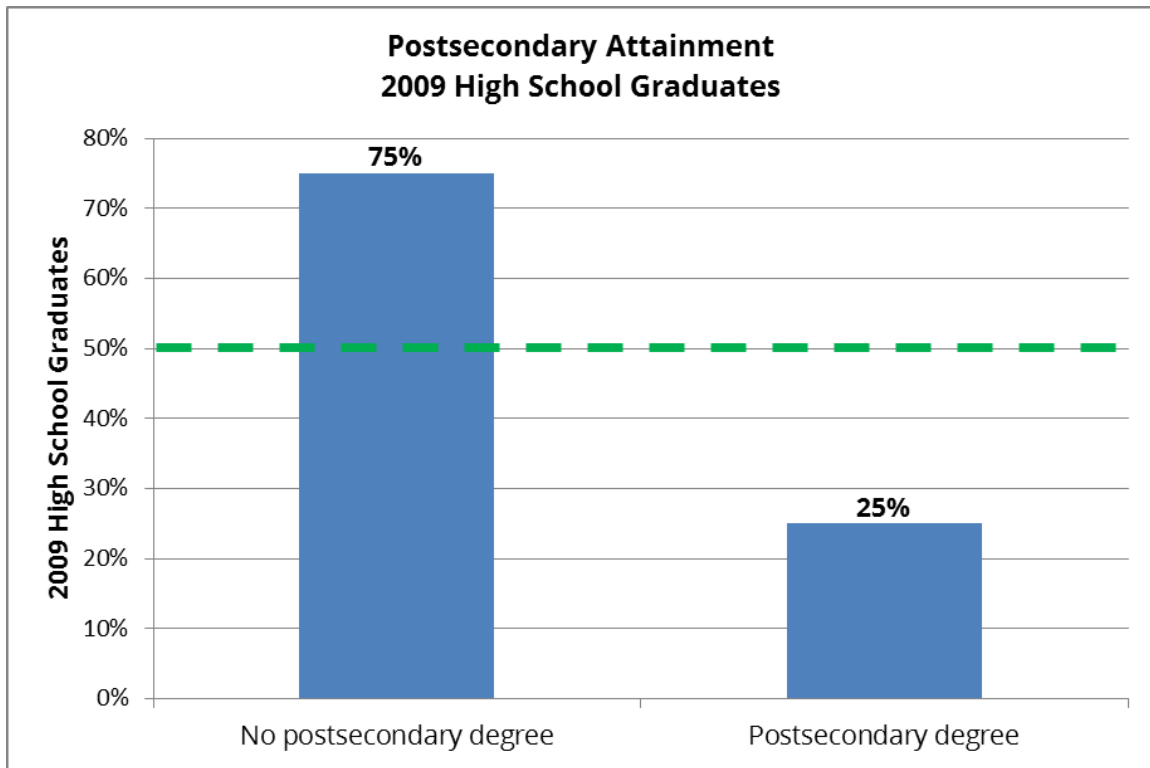
<sup>6</sup> The statewide average ACT Composite score in 2016 is available on the TDOE's Tennessee State Report Card at <https://www.measuretn.gov:444/ReportCard/Main/CurrentReportCard/#/>

<sup>7</sup> Data from THEC's college-going rate calculations, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Data from THEC, 2017. Denominator includes all Tennessee public high school graduates from the class of 2009. Numerator includes only students who completed a postsecondary degree at a Tennessee institution.



future in which most Tennessee jobs will require a postsecondary credential, the SBE aspires to push this rate to over 50 percent of the graduating high school class of 2020. The blue bars in **Figure 3** represent the current postsecondary attainment in the state, and the green dashed line represents the goal of at least 50 percent postsecondary attainment.



*Figure 3: Progress Toward 50 percent Postsecondary Completion Rate for High School Class of 2020*

Because the key components of the Drive to 55 span the K-12 and higher education continuum, achieving this ambitious goal will require engaging multiple stakeholders, adopting innovative ideas and initiatives, and closely tracking the data benchmarks. New programs representing collaborations between K-12 and higher education, such as Tennessee Promise and the Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP), are particularly relevant to this report. Other programs, such as Tennessee Reconnect, are meant to encourage the state’s adult population to reengage with higher education and earn a postsecondary degree or credential.

The following sections of this report detail how the SBE and THEC are working to implement programs in alignment with the Drive to 55 and undertake other important initiatives to support the state’s efforts to achieve the ambitious goals laid out by Governor Haslam.



## Master Plan Fulfillment

### *State Board of Education*

In January 2016, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a new, redesigned Master Plan that places an intense focus on a set of ambitious student achievement goals that include continued progress toward being in the top half of all states on NAEP performance, progress toward meeting the college and career readiness benchmark on the ACT, and postsecondary enrollment and attainment. The 2016 Master Plan outlined the commitments of the Board and the strategic priorities it focused on to further its student achievement goals. The four strategic priority areas identified in 2016 are:

1. High Quality School Options
2. Great Teachers and Leaders
3. High Standards and Quality Measures
4. Public Engagement and Oversight

The following sections detail some of the major policy initiatives the SBE pursued in 2016 within each of these four strategic priority areas and provide insight into the SBE's work for 2017 and beyond.

### *High Quality School Options*

#### **Charter School Appeals and Authorization**

The SBE continues to implement a charter school appeals process based on national best practices and has taken steps to further refine and improve this process. A revised version of the Charter School Appeals Policy, intended to provide additional clarity around the appeals process, passed on final reading at the April 2016 Board meeting. The SBE gathered extensive feedback on the previous appeals seasons in order to continue to improve the appeal process and procedures. A diverse group of 13 external members, including three from outside of Tennessee, served on the Board's charter application review committee in fall 2016.

Under current law, the SBE can overturn the decision of a local board of education on a charter application only if the SBE determines that denial of the charter application was contrary to the interests of the pupils, school district, or community. In two of the three appeal cases heard in fall 2016, the SBE affirmed the districts' decisions to deny the charter school applications. However, in the case of Green Dot Public Schools, whose application



had been denied by Shelby County Schools (SCS), the Board voted unanimously to approve the school's amended application.

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-142(b)(3) and State Board Policy 2.500, SCS and the sponsor of the charter school were given 30 calendar days following the SBE's decision to develop a mutually agreeable plan for SCS to oversee this new school. No agreement was reached in that time. As such, the SBE has become the authorizer for Green Dot Charter High School.<sup>9</sup> Green Dot Charter High School is slated to open at the start of the 2017-2018 school year.

Previously, the SBE worked closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers to train Board members and SBE staff on the principles and standards of high quality charter school authorization and to adopt policies and a framework to oversee charter school appeals, ensure appropriate monitoring and compliance of authorized schools, and establish guidance for renewal and revocation decisions. The SBE continues to develop and strengthen its processes and capacity for charter school authorization.

In April 2016, the Board approved a performance contract regarding terms and conditions of the two KIPP Nashville charter schools, which were authorized in fall 2015. The SBE is prepared to assist with the pre-opening work for KIPP Nashville Primary, although the school is not slated to open until fall 2018. With the authorization of Green Dot Charter High School, SBE staff have begun pre-opening work, in collaboration with the operator, to prepare for this school's opening in fall 2017.

SBE staff continue to develop and hone authorization best practices through such efforts as working with KIPP Nashville and Green Dot Tennessee, meeting with other charter school authorizers, and having conversations with the TDOE. In addition, the passage of Senate Bill 1731 now allows the SBE to receive an annual authorizer fee of up to 4 percent of its charter schools' state and local per student funding. Finally, the Board expanded its staff by hiring a new Coordinator of Charter Schools, who began work in August 2016.

### **Individualized Education Accounts (IEA)**

The Individualized Education Account (IEA) Program was established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2015 and began implementation in January 2017.<sup>10</sup> The IEA Program redirects per pupil funding for participating students with certain disabilities onto a pre-paid debit card. Parents and families can then use this funding to pay for educational expenses that best meet their child's individual needs.

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<sup>9</sup> T.C.A. § 49-13-108

<sup>10</sup> T.C.A. § 49-10-14



The program is open to students with particular categories of disabilities who reside in any school district in Tennessee, and there is no cap on the number of eligible students who can participate. The IEA Program began accepting applications for participation during summer 2016.

The SBE was responsible for the rulemaking process for the IEA Program and is committed to monitoring the program's success during the first and subsequent years of implementation. In fall 2015, the SBE preliminarily approved the rules of the IEA Program and then held a public hearing on these rules in November 2015. The final rules were adopted by the SBE in January 2016.

The SBE has taken other active steps toward achieving its goals of overseeing the IEA Program and reporting on its effectiveness. The data collection process for future IEA Program Annual Reports has begun. The January 2017 IEA report will contain information on the number of students who have applied and enrolled in the program; additional information from sources such as the IEA Annual Financial Audit and the Account Holder Satisfaction Surveys will not be available until the 2018 report. A research plan will be constructed during the next year to evaluate the program's overall effectiveness.

### *Great Teachers and Leaders*

#### **Teacher Preparation Report Card Redesign**

In 2007, the Tennessee General Assembly began requiring a yearly report on the effectiveness of teacher training programs. This report describes the performance of each program's completers in the following areas: placement and retention rates, Praxis II pass rates, and teacher effectiveness, based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS).<sup>11</sup> The Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs is intended to help facilitate improvement for Tennessee's educator preparation providers (EPPs) and provide information for stakeholders across the state about the quality of EPPs.

In spring 2016, the SBE began the process of redesigning the report card by collecting extensive input from more than 450 stakeholders, representing a variety of roles and perspectives in Tennessee education. In addition to offering a more comprehensive review of providers and completers, the new report card was designed to be more user-friendly and accessible to a wider range of stakeholders, including school districts and aspiring teachers. One key feature intended to assist in this goal was the creation of an interactive website on which each EPP's report card can be accessed.

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<sup>11</sup> T.C.A. § 49-5-108



This new user-friendly system contrasts with the more technical nature of previous report cards, which were often geared toward education providers rather than the general public or other education stakeholders. With the TDOE's new annual reports largely filling this technical role, the report card is now structured to provide high-level data organized in an easily digestible performance framework. This new system allows consumers to not only compare the state's EPPs to one another but also to clearly contrast performance on specific metrics as well. As a result of this comprehensive redesign, the report card offers more value to those stakeholders as a tool for improving practice or guiding decision-making.

The redesigned report card was released on December 15, 2016.<sup>12</sup> With its release, the SBE hopes to encourage further progress toward our state's goal of placing an effective teacher in every classroom. By presenting clear, easily understandable data on a comprehensive range of metrics, the SBE also hopes the new report card will be used to launch conversations between EPPs and school districts that will be critical to Tennessee's efforts to improve teacher preparation.

### **Implementation of Revised Educator Preparation Policy**

The revised Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy passed by the State Board in October 2014 outlines new standards and a new approval process for teacher preparation programs.<sup>13</sup> This new approval process reflects a dramatic shift from a focus on inputs to a focus on outcomes data. Moving forward, the Board will review a detailed annual report on the performance of each program (e.g., elementary education, secondary math, special education) within the EPP. Annual reports will include the following metrics: recruitment and selection, placement, retention, completer satisfaction, employer satisfaction, completer outcomes, completer impacts, and any necessary stipulations cited in the most recent comprehensive review. The reports will be used to determine whether EPPs and their associated programs are meeting expectations or whether an interim program review should be conducted.

The first set of annual reports is expected to be published in February 2017. Throughout 2016, the Board heard frequent updates regarding the development process of the annual reports and had discussions regarding possible consequences for poor annual report performance. The Board is committed to monitoring the implementation of the revised Educator Preparation Policy in upcoming years. This will include participating in both

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<sup>12</sup> The Teacher Preparation Report Card is available online at <http://teacherprepreportcard.tn.gov/>

<sup>13</sup> For more information about the new approval process for teacher preparation programs, please see [http://tn.gov/assets/entities/sbe/attachments/5.504\\_Educator\\_Preparation.pdf](http://tn.gov/assets/entities/sbe/attachments/5.504_Educator_Preparation.pdf)



interim and comprehensive reviews that result from the analysis of annual reports. The SBE's role in this process will further take shape once these reviews begin contributing to program approval decisions.

The Board's other major action in this realm was the creation of the Educator Preparation and Licensure Subcommittee at the April 2016 Board meeting. The subcommittee then convened in May, August, and November in order to provide the members with the opportunity to spend more time in discussion on such topics as the revised Teacher Preparation Report Card and licensure assessments. The subcommittee will continue to hold future meetings to discuss other relevant questions surrounding preparation and licensure.

### **Licensure Exams**

After a period of research and analysis, the SBE and TDOE made strides toward raising the minimum scores on multiple licensure content examinations taken by prospective educators. The SBE's analysis of which scores to raise focused on the impact that changing cut scores would have on the supply of effective teachers within those content areas. In July 2016, the Board amended the Professional Assessments Policy, raising the cut scores on 12 of the Praxis content exams.

At the October 2016 Board meeting, the Board also passed a policy requiring candidates seeking initial licensure to pass the edTPA performance assessment. The edTPA assesses a candidate's skills through review and analysis of lesson plans and video footage of student teaching, providing a more robust measure of pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge. Beginning January 1, 2019, initial license applicants are required to submit qualifying scores on the appropriate edTPA assessment. Tennessee has allowed the use of edTPA as a substitute for the Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) pedagogical assessment for a number of years, and it is already in place at all six of the Tennessee Board of Regents universities, as well as the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Vanderbilt University. Currently, the universities set their own cut scores, but by the time edTPA is officially required for licensure in 2019, candidates must meet the nationally recommended cut score of 42.

### **Licensure Discipline**

The SBE passed a major rewrite to the educator licensure rule in October 2016 that created a new educator discipline schedule. The newly revised rule aims to provide a more standardized approach to disciplinary matters and maximize the Board's transparency





regarding the educator discipline process. The most substantial change included in this revision was the addition of a chart detailing potential disciplinary offenses and their corresponding consequences. In addition, sections including definitions and example cases were added to provide further details. The SBE hopes that the passage of the revised rule will clearly illustrate the types of actions that can result in discipline or action against a teacher's license, the severity of that discipline, and the Board's stance on discipline in a way that will be easily accessible to the general public.

## *High Standards and Quality Measures*

### **Standards Review Process**

The SBE is charged by the Tennessee General Assembly with reviewing all sets of academic standards at least every six years.<sup>14</sup> In 2015, this review process was revised significantly by the General Assembly to include the creation of a public website that allows all Tennesseans to provide feedback on the standards and proposed changes.<sup>15</sup> The new standards review process also capitalizes on the expertise of Tennessee educators and higher education faculty by involving them in the review of public feedback and the revision of standards. The State Board spent much of 2015 and 2016 implementing this revised review process for the four main subjects of mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies as well as several smaller subjects.

The SBE remains committed to ensuring that the review process for all standards is transparent and rigorous. After a lengthy review period, the Board adopted the new Tennessee Academic Standards for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) in April 2016 and new Tennessee Academic Standards for science in July 2016. The 2016-2017 school year is being used to train Tennessee's educators on the new math and ELA standards; these new standards will be implemented during the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>16</sup> The science standards will be implemented during the 2018-2019 school year.

The Board is in the midst of the public review and revision process for the Tennessee Academic Standards for social studies. The social studies review process began in January 2016 and will be completed in July 2017.<sup>17</sup> There continues to be significant public participation in this process, as demonstrated by the more than 300,000 pieces of website feedback received on the standards during multiple public comment periods. The SBE also

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<sup>14</sup> T.C.A. § 49-1-302

<sup>15</sup> T.C.A. § 49-1-311

<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive timeline of the math and ELA review process, please see <http://tn.gov/sbe/article/math-and-english-language-arts>

<sup>17</sup> For further details regarding the social studies review, please see <http://tn.gov/sbe/topic/standards-review>





held teacher and parent roundtables in an effort to further increase public involvement in the standards review process. In addition to engaging top Tennessee educators, the SBE and its staff have solicited feedback from stakeholders in higher education by conducting a separate higher education review on the draft of each set of new standards. Additionally, the legislatively-appointed Standards Recommendation Committee has played a fundamental role in determining needed revisions and facilitating action on those revisions to the standards.

### *Public Engagement and Oversight*

The SBE promotes public engagement and effective oversight throughout its work. These principles contribute to each of the Board's major undertakings detailed in this report and will continue to guide the SBE's contributions to education across the state.

Board members have made efforts to increase their own levels of public engagement through such efforts as holding individual "Day in the District" events, participating in regional superintendent study councils, and working with local stakeholders throughout their districts. The Board has worked to increase its media readiness through a training session that was held at the July 2016 Board meeting. In total, the State Board was the subject of over 150 media stories in 2016. The SBE is encouraged by these efforts and aims to continue to promote increased media and community engagement at the local and state level through both their work in an individual capacity as well as through the body as a whole.

In 2016, SBE staff also completed a policy audit designed to reduce redundancy and increase clarity in rules and policies and make the Board's work and duties more transparent. In 2016, the Board updated 37 rules and policies. Similarly, staff have undertaken efforts to improve the SBE website in order to strengthen the quality and accessibility of the information provided to the public. Both of these efforts will be ongoing as the Board maintains its commitment to public engagement and transparency.



## ***Tennessee Higher Education Commission***

The *2015-2025 Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education* responds to the charge for THEC to partner with the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees to guide the future development of public universities, community colleges, and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology. The underlying purpose of the Master Plan is to direct higher education to be accountable for increasing postsecondary attainment among Tennesseans. Additionally, the Master Plan seeks to address the state's economic development, workforce development, and research needs; ensure increased degree production within the state's capacity to support higher education; and use institutional mission differentiation to realize statewide efficiencies through increased collaboration and minimized redundancy. Six components comprise the framework of the 2015-2025 Master Plan, which include:

1. Making the case for the continued, focused pursuit of the Drive to 55;
2. Taking stock of important achievements since the passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010;
3. Calculating statewide, sector-specific degree and certificate production targets necessary for meeting the statewide goal;
4. Recognizing three historically underserved student populations worthy of focused policy and programmatic attention throughout the coming decade;
5. Identifying tools and strategies for serving these three historically underserved student populations; and,
6. Offering observations and recommendations intended to guide policymakers, system leaders, and campuses as they carry out their appropriate roles relative to Drive to 55 goal attainment.

Some of the many policy levers and programs currently operating toward fulfillment of the 2015-2025 Master Plan are described below.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Key Populations to Meet the Drive to 55 Goal***

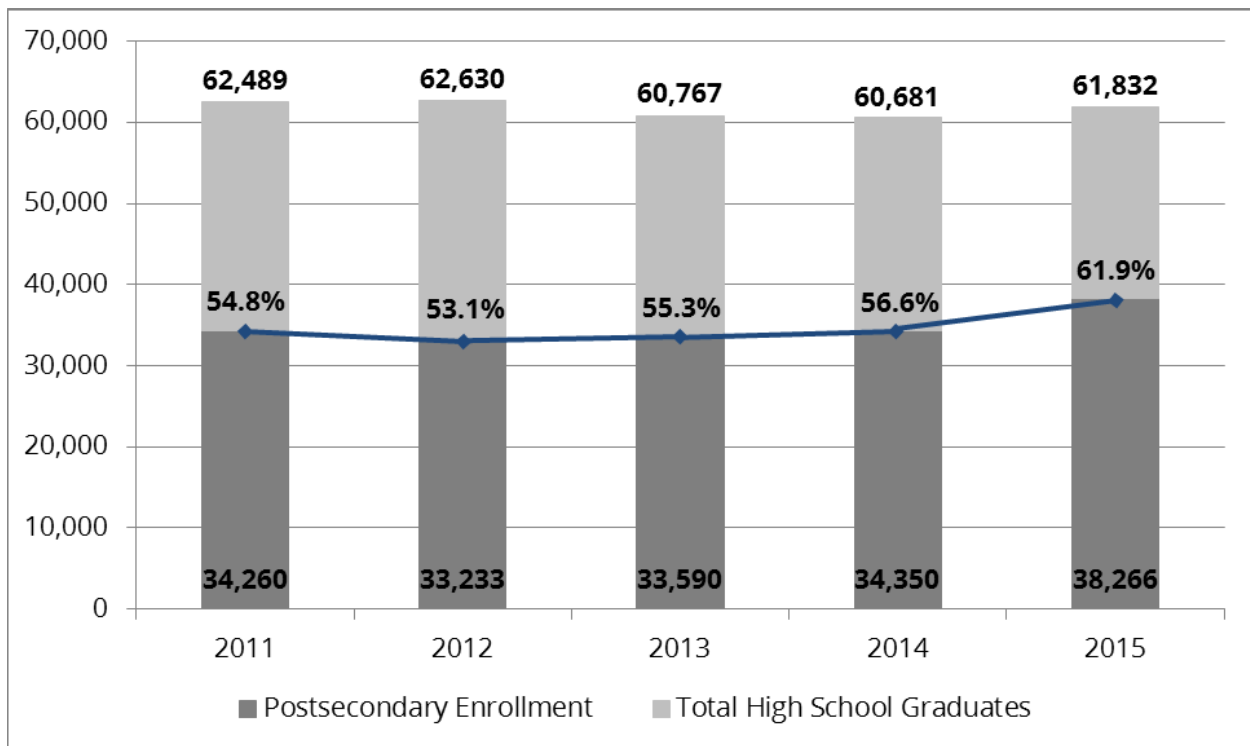
Tennessee cannot meet the Drive to 55 goal without placing an increased focus on enrolling student populations with a history of underrepresentation in higher education. THEC's Master Plan recommends that three groups take priority in terms of both programmatic focus and funding: (1) adult students; (2) low income students; and (3) academically underprepared students.

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<sup>18</sup> The full Master Plan is available at <https://www.tn.gov/thehc/article/statewide-master-plan>



**Figure 4** shows that college enrollment rates of recent high school graduates have increased steadily over the last five years (shown by the dark blue line). However, projections provided in THEC’s Master Plan demonstrate that the 55 percent postsecondary attainment goal is not achievable merely by improving Tennessee public high school graduation rates, increasing recent high school graduates’ enrollment in postsecondary education, or improving their postsecondary progression and completion rates. Roughly 900,000 adult Tennesseans with some college but no degree represent the “sleeping giant” that must be awakened to realize the Drive to 55 goal.



*Figure 4: Total High School Graduates and Postsecondary Enrollment, 2011-2015*

Low income students are at particular risk of not enrolling or completing college. Living on the “economic edge” makes a student more likely to stop or drop out when circumstances (such as family events or changes in responsibilities) upset their financial status. Of particular concern are students who take out loans and do not complete a postsecondary degree due to such circumstances, making them especially vulnerable to loan default.

Academically underprepared students (defined as students with an ACT composite score of 18 or lower) are also a focus population. In the past, academically underprepared students entering postsecondary education were required to pay for and complete remedial courses at postsecondary institutions before entering credit-bearing courses. This approach leads to higher costs for students, coupled with increased time to degree. The statewide growth



of the Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program provides high school seniors with the opportunity to complete all remedial math requirements before graduating high school and enroll in college-level math as a credit-bearing course when they enroll at a postsecondary institution. Additionally, a “co-requisite” model of remedial instruction while enrolled in a credit-bearing course has become the primary pedagogy method for community colleges in Tennessee.<sup>19</sup>

### *Tennessee Promise*

One policy tool available to assist in actualizing the Drive to 55 for recent high school graduates is the Tennessee Promise, which provides eligible students with a last-dollar scholarship. The Tennessee Promise covers tuition and fees beyond the amount covered by the Pell grant, HOPE scholarship, or state student assistance funds. Students may use the scholarship to attend any of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges, 27 colleges of applied technology (TCATs), or other eligible public and independent four-year institutions offering approved associate degree programs.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to removing the financial burden of attending college, Tennessee Promise provides students with individualized guidance from a mentor who assists in navigating the college application process. Attending meetings with these mentors is mandatory for students to remain eligible for the program. Additionally, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to January 17,<sup>21</sup> perform eight hours of community service per term enrolled, attend full-time, and maintain satisfactory academic progress (2.0 GPA) at their institution.

Of the 58,286 students who applied in the first year of Tennessee Promise, 16,291 enrolled at community colleges and TCATs throughout the state in fall 2015. As a result, first-time freshmen enrollment at Tennessee public institutions increased by 10.1 percent, including a 24.7 percent increase at community colleges and a 20 percent increase at TCATs. This first cohort had a retention rate of 81 percent from fall 2015 to spring 2016.

The second application cycle for Tennessee Promise yielded 59,621 applicants, and 16,736 of those students enrolled in fall 2016. The third application cycle, which ended on

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<sup>19</sup> For more information about co-requisite remediation, please visit the Tennessee Board of Regents’ website at <https://www.tbr.edu/academics/co-requisite-remediation>

<sup>20</sup> The complete list of eligible Tennessee Promise postsecondary institutions in 2017-2018 is available online at [http://tn.gov/assets/entities/collegepays/attachments/TNPromiseListofInstitutions\\_101116.pdf](http://tn.gov/assets/entities/collegepays/attachments/TNPromiseListofInstitutions_101116.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> January 17 is the new FAFSA deadline, beginning with the third cohort. For the first two cohorts, the FAFSA deadline was February 15.



November 1, 2016, yielded 60,780 total applications. Additional data about the enrollment and progression of the second and third cohorts are forthcoming.

### *Tennessee Reconnect*

Tennessee Reconnect is a Drive to 55 initiative designed to help more adults complete a postsecondary degree or credential. Approximately 900,000 adults with some college experience but no degree reside in the state and engaging this population is critical to achieving the goal of the Drive to 55. Tennessee Reconnect includes a number of outreach efforts focused on reaching adults across the state and encouraging and supporting them to “reconnect” with higher education. Reconnect + Complete is a statewide outreach campaign in partnership with the Governor’s Office and postsecondary institutions to reach adults with some college credits but no degree and to encourage them to complete. Tennessee Reconnect Communities are locally-driven initiatives providing free community-based advising services and outreach to help adults re-enroll in postsecondary education. Additional efforts include the launch of an adult learner web portal, [www.TNReconnect.gov](http://www.TNReconnect.gov), grants to postsecondary institutions to support adult learners and student veterans on campus, last dollar scholarship opportunities for adults to attend a TCAT or community college, and the development of a clear brand for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for adult learners through the TimewiseTN program.<sup>22</sup>

### *Articulation and Transfer Policies*

The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 represented a comprehensive reform agenda, including changes to academic, fiscal, and administrative policies at both the state and institutional level. Among these policy shifts was an effort to enhance efficiency at the state’s public institutions. Such provisions include:

- A universally transferable general education core comprised of 41 credit hours was established such that all public two- and four-year institutions offer and accept in transfer a common set of courses in its entirety or by completed general education subject field;
- A 19-hour, pre-major pathway in 38 baccalaureate degree majors (e.g., history, agriculture, civil engineering), with additional pre-major pathways under construction;

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<sup>22</sup> For additional information about adult learner initiatives, please visit the THEC website at <http://tn.gov/thec/topic/adult-learner-initiatives>



- Concurrent enrollment at a community college and university, providing the benefit of student advising and services from both institutions and facilitating transfer after completion of an associate degree;
- Identification of Associate of Applied Science courses not designed for transfer;
- Common course numbering between community colleges and universities for lower division courses that meet general education and pre-major pathway requirements, to ensure course equivalency and facilitate transfer;
- 52 Tennessee Transfer Pathways that ensure a seamless transition to a Tennessee public university (and many private universities) after earning an associate degree from one of Tennessee's community colleges;<sup>23</sup> and,
- Reverse articulation and transfer agreements regarding a student who transfers to a university from a community college prior to earning an associate degree. If a student earns the remaining credits for an associate degree at a university, credits may be transferred back to the community college, and the community college may award an associate degree if a degree audit confirms the requirements have been met.

### *FAFSA Filing Rate*

For the second consecutive year, Tennessee led the nation with a FAFSA filing rate of 70.3 percent in 2016.<sup>24</sup> Twenty-seven of the state's 95 counties had a FAFSA filing rate of 80 percent or above, 3 of which had a filing rate of over 90 percent. The 2016 filing rate is up slightly from one year ago, when the filing rate was 69.5 percent for the class of 2015, and is up nearly 10 percentage points from the 2014 rate, due in part to the emphasis placed on the FAFSA during the Tennessee Promise application process. Through the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation's (TSAC) outreach programs focused on the FAFSA, high school students and their parents receive comprehensive support for filling out the FAFSA and information on the State of Tennessee's financial aid programs.

### *LEAP*

The Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) serves as the alignment and accountability component of the Drive to 55 by ensuring that Tennessee community colleges and TCATs are producing graduates that have gained the necessary skills to meet the requirements of high-skill and high-technology jobs demanded by industry leaders in the state. LEAP

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<sup>23</sup> A detailed list of all Tennessee Transfer Pathway programs is available online at <http://www.tntransferpathway.org/transfer-major>

<sup>24</sup> Data for FAFSA filing rate calculation available online at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school>



accomplishes this goal by providing grant funding to communities that develop a framework for regional partnerships – comprised of TCATs and community colleges, industry partners, workforce development professionals, and K-12 educators, particularly those associated with Career and Technical Education (CTE). Collectively, these collaboratives create tailored workforce pipelines designed to provide the requisite technical skills that local employers need.

To this end, grant competitions were held in fall 2014 (LEAP 1.0) and summer 2016 (LEAP 2.0), resulting in a total of \$20 million being awarded to 24 successful proposals. Altogether, these proposals serve 67 counties across the state, as shown in **Figure 5**. Successful proposals provided data indicating industry needs and projections for workforce growth, evidence that at least three counties will be served (with the exception of the state’s four largest metropolitan areas), and a plan for sustainability beyond the grant period. Selected proposals work to close skills gaps through a variety of methods including, but not limited to, purchasing training equipment, training of faculty to deliver new certifications and programs, enhancing or initiating dual enrollment programs, optimizing employer engagement in curriculum development, and providing work-based learning opportunities including job-shadowing, internships, and extracurricular activities.

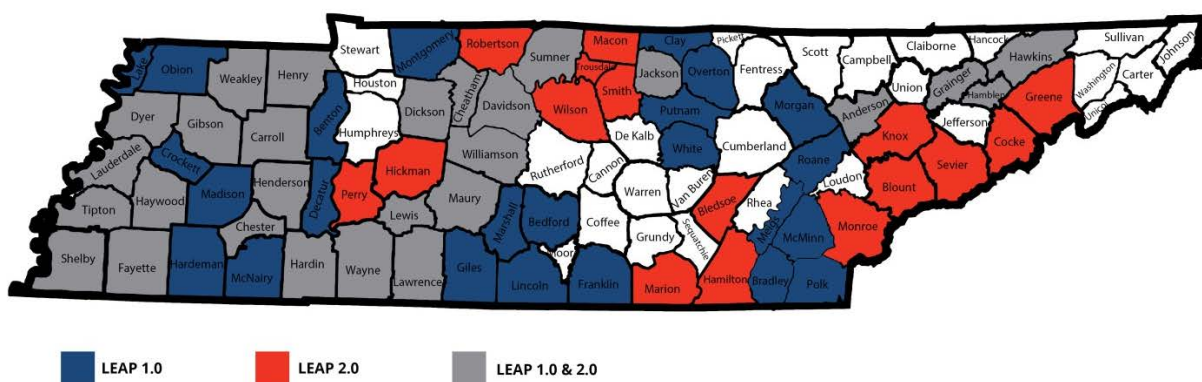


Figure 5: Service Map for LEAP 1.0 & 2.0

### College Access and Success

THEC oversees several programs that ensure students’ academic preparation for postsecondary coursework and support the monitoring and evaluation of postsecondary student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. With this end in mind, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s Division of College Access and Success designs and implements initiatives to empower communities, local education agencies, and partner





organizations to create a statewide culture of college-going and attainment. Several of the Division of College Access and Success' programs are described below. Further detail is available on the THEC website.<sup>25</sup>

### **Path to College Events**

THEC has continued implementation of Path to College Events, a suite of school-based college access initiatives aimed at building a college-going culture. Path to College Events, which center on key college-going milestones, include College Planning Night (planning), College Application Week (applying), Tennessee FAFSA Frenzy (paying), and College Signing Day (going). Tennessee FAFSA Frenzy is a partnership between THEC, TSAC, the Ayers Foundation, tnAchieves, and the Southwest Tennessee Development District's Regional Economic Development Initiative. Combined, the four Path to College Events serve as a venue to inform students and their families of college options and the benefits of each option. Particular emphasis is placed on helping students pursue the college choice that is best suited for their goals and needs. The events are typically hosted by high schools, college access organizations, and elementary and middle schools as a means of building students' awareness of college options. Typically, a school counselor or similar staff member at a partnering non-profit organization manages implementation of each event. During the last academic year, 263 schools across the state participated in at least one Path to College Event.

### **CollegeforTN.org**

CollegeforTN.org, Tennessee's web-based career and educational planning system, provides career, academic, college, and financial aid planning resources to all Tennesseans at no cost. The site assists students to enhance self-awareness, build individualized education and career plans, and prepare for the postsecondary transition. The results of all online student activities are stored in an interactive portfolio. Educators can engage students through provided online management tools and resources. Over the last year, THEC relaunched the site with enhanced capabilities. Since the relaunch, over 11,000 students have created an account on the site. THEC is expanding the use and implementation of the web portal through robust educator professional development, the creation of instructional resources and collateral materials, and increased alignment with Drive to 55 initiatives. Specifically, THEC is partnering with the TDOE to implement an

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<sup>25</sup> For a full description of programs managed by THEC's Division of College Access and Success, please visit their website at <http://tn.gov/thec/topic/college-access-and-success>





Institute for Education Sciences grant focused on leveraging technology to build a college-going culture.

## **GEAR UP TN**

In spring 2012, the United States Department of Education awarded a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in the amount of \$29,590,281. GEAR UP, a seven-year discretionary grant program, aims to increase the number of low-income, first generation students enrolling and succeeding in college. Tennessee's program, GEAR UP TN, began implementation in fall 2012, with direct services across the state beginning in January 2013.

GEAR UP TN sub-grants fund programs in 15 school districts across the state, providing direct services in 88 schools. The program is structured to serve approximately 7,500 students in the Class of 2018 (currently in 11<sup>th</sup> grade) and 5,000 seniors in GEAR UP TN high schools each year. The Class of 2018 cohort began receiving services in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and will continue to be served by the program through their first year of postsecondary education. Direct services provided to students and their families include academic support, mentoring, advising, college and job site visits, family engagement, and financial aid counseling. Sub-grant funding also provides professional development for teachers, counselors, and school administrators on best practices for creating and sustaining a college access culture.

## **Advise TN**

Advise TN is a college advising and capacity-building program developed by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and the Office of Governor Bill Haslam. Driven by the belief that every student has the potential to attend and thrive in postsecondary education, Advise TN aims to increase the number of Tennesseans accessing higher education by partnering with high schools and providing college advising services to up to 10,000 junior and senior students across Tennessee. Thirty schools currently have an Advise TN college advisor.<sup>26</sup>

Advisors provide services to all juniors and seniors at each participating high school with the intention of helping students enroll at the postsecondary institution where they will be most likely to succeed and persist to a degree or credential – be it a four-year university,

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<sup>26</sup> For a list of partnering high schools, please visit the Advise TN webpage at <http://tn.gov/thec/topic/advisetn>



community college, Tennessee College of Applied Technology, or other form of quality postsecondary education.

### *SAILS*

The Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program targets students that have not achieved college readiness benchmarks by introducing the college developmental curriculum into the high school senior year. Developed by K-12 teachers and higher education faculty, SAILS embeds the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Learning Support competencies into the high school senior year math and English courses, allowing students to begin their higher education career prepared for credit-bearing coursework. SAILS uses a blended learning model that allows students to work at their own pace using online instruction and receive assistance as needed from a licensed K-12 teacher.

By taking SAILS Math during their senior year, students who have not achieved ACT's college readiness benchmarks can demonstrate mastery of all five TBR math competencies while earning high school Bridge Math credit. Those who successfully complete SAILS can then begin their postsecondary education in a credit-bearing college math course without the need for co-requisite learning support. In the 2016-17 school year, the SAILS Math program is available to over 17,000 Tennessee high school students, representing over half of the 30,000 students who have not met college readiness benchmarks by their senior year of high school. Since SAILS math was implemented in 2012, there has been a 15.6 percent decrease in the number of students that enter community college in need of math remediation. Additionally, the SAILS English program is currently being piloted at 19 Tennessee high schools to address both reading and writing deficiencies prior to enrolling in postsecondary education.



## **Duplication in Elementary, Secondary, and Postsecondary Education**

Both the SBE and THEC have developed master plans to guide policy development and resource allocation in public education. The plans place particular emphasis on progressive student achievement from pre-kindergarten through higher education, while minimizing duplication across all levels of education. The following subsections demonstrate progress in this area.

### ***Overlap Between Secondary and Postsecondary Education***

Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 has placed a significant focus on increasing postsecondary attainment across the state. It has become clear that strengthening the collaboration between secondary and postsecondary education is necessary in order to achieve the ambitious goal of 55 percent postsecondary attainment. As described in the preceding section, THEC and TSAC have many existing partnerships with high schools across the state to provide additional support and resources for high school students and their parents.

For instance, Path to College events are hosted by high schools and designed to build momentum and excitement around the college-going process during a student's junior and senior year of high school. GEAR UP TN aims to expand the college-going culture by providing support services to low income and first-generation students across the state. Similarly, the Advise TN program partners with high schools to provide college advising services to underserved schools. TSAC staff travel to high schools across the state, teaching students about the financial aid available and helping them complete the FAFSA. The SAILS program allows students to complete remedial coursework while still in high school so they are able to enroll in credit-bearing courses when they get to college. These programs (and others not mentioned here) exist not to replace or duplicate the efforts of high school guidance counselors but to enhance the services we provide for students who aspire to attend college. By partnering with high schools, THEC and TSAC are able to reach more students, bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education, and ultimately bolster the success of all in pursuit of the Drive to 55.

### ***Tennessee Longitudinal Data System***

Through the development of the Measure Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS), Tennessee has expanded its use of data to provide a more comprehensive view of student achievement and the factors that influence it. Multiple data sources are linked to inform stakeholders, guide policymakers, and support data-driven decision making across K-12 and higher education. The data allow for identification of areas where duplication may be



present and subsequently minimized. Approved agency research personnel at TDOE, THEC, and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) received direct access to the database beginning in 2015.

Also in 2015, the University of Tennessee's Center for Business and Economic Research staff partnered with TDLWD to submit a Workforce Data Quality Initiative grant application to the U.S. Department of Labor for the upgrade and expansion of TLDS data and dashboards, along with policy research. This expansion project was awarded funding through June 30, 2018 and is currently well under way.



## Compatibility of Graduation and Admission Requirements

The requirements for high school graduation are compatible with the admission requirements at Tennessee’s public universities. In 2007, Tennessee joined the American Diploma Project network, implementing the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP) shortly after. Based on the priorities of the TDP, high school graduation requirements were revised to better align with undergraduate admission requirements beginning with the high school graduating class of 2013. Specific high school graduation requirements are included in **Table 2** below.

The admission requirements of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) require that students have a high school diploma or equivalent. Effective January 1, 2014, the TBR agreed to accept the curriculum requirements as set by the TDOE with the implementation of the 2009 TDP. Admission is granted to freshmen applicants who hold a recognized high school diploma that includes a distribution of college preparatory courses, such as those required in the core elements of the Tennessee High School Diploma (as outlined in **Table 2**). Applicants who hold a high school diploma but graduated prior to the adoption of the TDP curriculum by the TBR are exempt from the diploma requirements. Out-of-state applicants are subject to the same admission requirements as in-state applicants.<sup>27</sup>

Institutions within the TBR system determine other admission criteria, including required GPA and ACT or SAT score. The TBR requires degree-seeking students with ACT subject scores below 19 in English, reading, and math to be placed in Learning Support for diagnostic assessment and appropriate intervention to develop specific competencies for their chosen field of study. Institutions within the University of Tennessee system may establish specific placement requirements and placement exam threshold scores at the campus level.

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<sup>27</sup> For more information about the TBR’s admission policies, please visit their website at <https://policies.tbr.edu/policies/admissions#Provisions-for-all-Institutions>



Table 2: Tennessee High School Graduation Requirements<sup>28</sup>

Students Beginning High School Before Fall 2009	Students Beginning High School in Fall 2009 or Later
<b>Total credits required: 20</b>	<b>Total credits required: 22</b>
<b>Math: 3 credits</b> Including either Geometry or Algebra II	<b>Math: 4 credits</b> Including Algebra I, II, Geometry and a fourth higher level math course
<b>Science: 3 credits</b> Including one Physical Science course and Biology	<b>Science: 3 credits</b> Including Biology, Chemistry or Physics, and a third lab course
<b>English: 4 credits</b>	<b>English: 4 credits</b>
<b>Social Studies: 3 credits</b>	<b>Social Studies: 3 credits</b> Including U.S. History and Geography, World History and Geography, U.S. Government and Civics, and Economics
<b>Wellness: 1 credit</b>	<b>Physical Education and Wellness: 1.5 credits</b>
<b>Elective: 6 credits</b>	<b>Personal Finance: 0.5 credits</b>
	<b>Foreign Language: 2 credits</b> <b>Fine Arts: 1 credit</b> May be waived under certain circumstances to expand the elective focus <b>Elective Focus: 3 credits</b> Consisting of Math and Science, Career and Technical Education, Fine Arts, Humanities, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) or other locally determined areas of focus

<sup>28</sup> The high school graduating class of 2013 was the first cohort to complete these requirements.



## Conclusion

In today's increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy, it is vital that Tennessee not only produces an adequate number of adults with a postsecondary credential but also ensures that students are trained in the areas and at the levels needed to meet the needs of Tennessee's future economy. Recent State Board initiatives, such as the standards review process and its charter authorization role, reaffirm the SBE's commitment to ensuring that all Tennessee students are ready for postsecondary education and the workforce. Transitional programs, such as THEC's SAILS initiative and the Tennessee Promise, help to bridge academic and financial gaps that would otherwise serve as barriers to postsecondary enrollment and attainment. Nonetheless, achieving the goals outlined in this report will require continued collaboration at all levels of education to ensure that Tennessee persists toward the goal of increasing educational attainment and economic vitality.

