SCORE
State Collaborative on Reforming Education

Building
A BRIGHTER FUTURE

2024 State Of Education In Tennessee

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A Letter from
SENATOR BILL FRIST AND DAVID MANSOURI

Dear Friends,

2024 marks 15 years since the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) was founded with a mission to catalyze transformative change in Tennessee education so that all students can achieve success.

Today, our commitment to Tennessee students and their success remains stronger than ever. Grounded in our mission, strengthened by our partnerships, and led by student-focused priorities, we continue to boldly support innovative policies and practices that align with our overall goals that:

» All students receive an excellent public K-12 education.

» All students earn a credential or postsecondary degree of value that prepares them for a career enabling economic independence.

» Economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and rural students see improved success across all goals relative to their peers.

Through the tireless work of so many educators, policymakers, advocates, and community leaders, the past 15 years have laid a strong foundation for sustainable improvement for students and for educational change in our state. Tennessee has been a trailblazer by championing student-centered strategies, setting high expectations for students and educators, holding systems accountable for student outcomes, and investing in research-backed initiatives to improve student learning and preparation for careers. Ultimately, these efforts have led to progress for students from kindergarten to the workforce.

But as we look to the next chapter, Tennessee must do more. While student outcomes in Tennessee are trending in the right direction, far too many students are still being left behind. Just over one-third of elementary students are proficient in English and math, and a closer look at the data suggests opportunity gaps by race and socioeconomic status have widened. Higher education institutions are not graduating enough students to meet workforce demands overall and are even further behind in increasing postsecondary attainment for students from historically underserved groups.

Importantly, as the education landscape is evolving so is the labor market. As new jobs emerge and Tennessee's economy grows, our state's approach must evolve to ensure our education systems are preparing students for jobs that will enable economic independence and choice-filled lives. We must better understand what the data tell us about how students are moving through these pathways, and we must use that information to support all students — particularly those with the highest needs — on pathways to earn degrees and credentials of value.

On the pages that follow, you'll find SCORE's specific recommendations on how, together, we can expand Tennessee's vision for student success and enter the next chapter of education transformations. Our 2024 priorities are:

» Expand student opportunity by strengthening foundational policies.
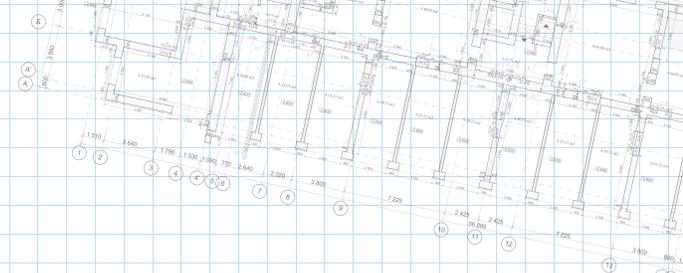
» Build effective pathways between education and careers.

» Ensure K-12 supports meet student needs.

Senator
Bill Frist, MD

The work to build a brighter future for Tennessee students will take all of us, and it will be a continuous journey. We have no doubt that with our shared advocacy efforts and clear focus, Tennessee will shape an education system that is aligned to the new realities of our state's labor market and gives students the opportunities they need and deserve.

Join us as we roll up our sleeves for the next phase of education transformation in Tennessee.
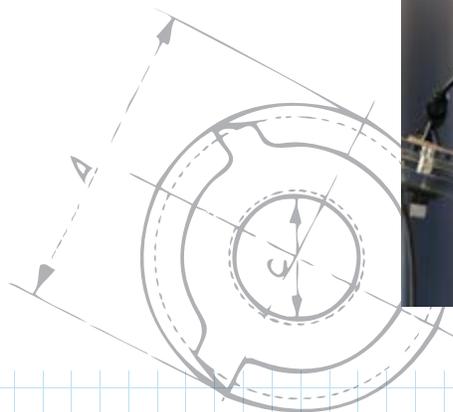
Sincerely,

Senator Bill Frist, MD
SCORE Chairman
and Founder

David Mansouri
SCORE President
and CEO

"**Our state's approach must evolve to ensure our education systems are preparing students for jobs that will enable economic independence and choice-filled lives."**

David Mansouri

The NEXT FRONTIER For TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE

Tennessee is a leader in piloting and scaling efforts to strengthen student success. Foundational strategies have been grounded in high expectations for educators, schools, and students – from the time students enter the classroom to the time they receive a degree or credential. This work is yielding demonstrated results for students. However, while progress has been made, it is clear more needs to be done. Tennessee's next challenge is to expand its vision for education so that each student not only has the opportunity to succeed in school but also has the opportunity to be prepared for a career that enables economic independence.

Laying The Foundation For Success

Tennessee began its journey leading the nation in education transformation after recognizing a failure to meet student needs in the early 2000s. State leaders took bold action to improve student outcomes, creating a foundation of student-centered policies across K-12 and postsecondary education. Tennessee's foundational policies include:

» **High expectations:** Rigorous state-specific K-12 academic standards establish high expectations for students. Together with a multiple-measure teacher evaluation system to support continuous improvement for educators and a statewide district and school accountability system, these policies all contribute to holding Tennessee accountable to high expectations.

» **Data monitoring:** Administering statewide K-12 assessments aligned to Tennessee's academic standards at least once a year and publicly reporting that data allow for monitoring of student progress. Further, the state created a system that links data across sectors to begin understanding how students move between K-12, postsecondary education, and the workforce. This information provides the basis for data-driven decision-making.

» **Postsecondary education outcomes-based funding:** Funding Tennessee's colleges and universities based primarily on student outcomes, including credit accumulation and graduation rates, established the expectation that institutions are rewarded for results rather than only for enrolling students.

» **Access to postsecondary education:** The expansive suite of state scholarships available to students – including Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, and the Dual Enrollment Grant – offers financial assistance to reduce the cost of pursuing education beyond high school.

These foundational policies created a strong base that proved critical as the COVID-19 pandemic created chaos for education systems across the United States. Tennessee responded swiftly with additional student-centered policies and practices. These efforts included:

» **Foundational literacy skills:** The state legislature passed the Tennessee Literacy Success Act to ensure all students receive foundational literacy skills instruction in the classroom, including explicit phonics instruction, and all teachers are prepared to teach those skills through their educator preparation provider (EPP) coursework.[1]
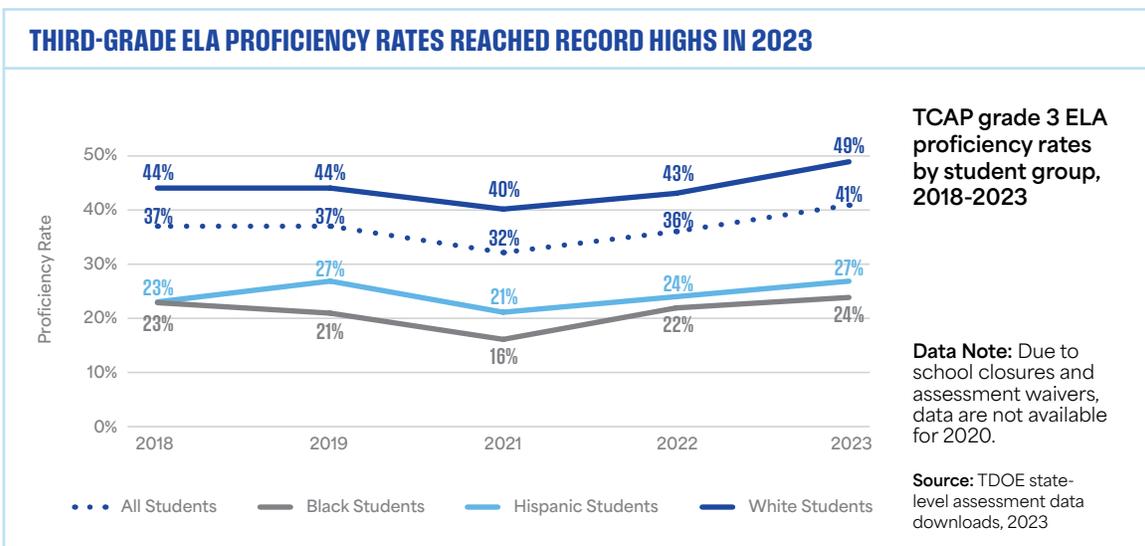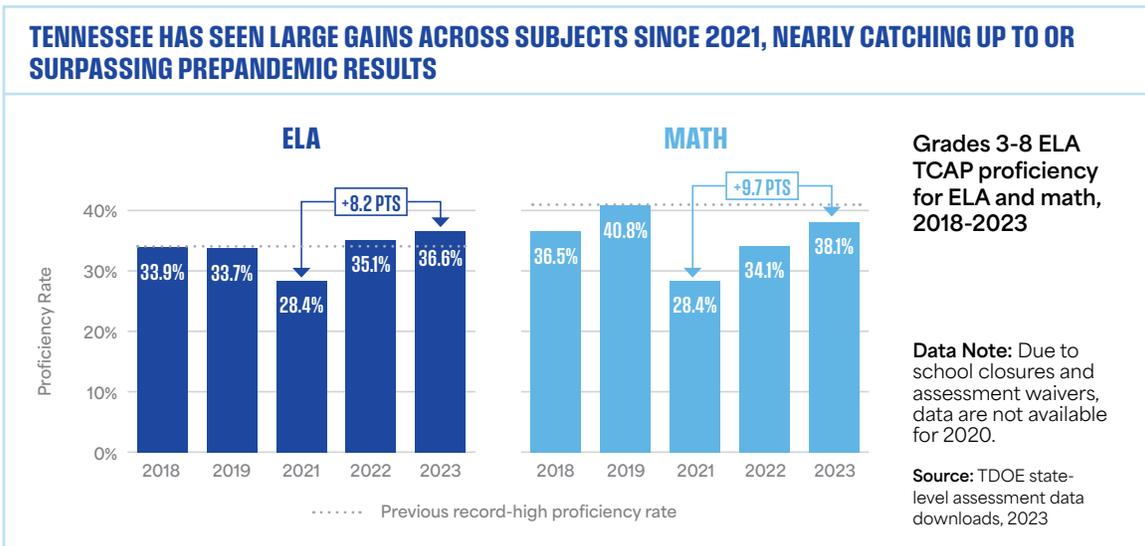
» **K-12 student-based funding:** With the 2022 passage of the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act, the state moved to a student-weighted K-12 funding formula that funds school districts based on the specific needs of each student.[2] This shift from the previous resource-based model ensures that more state dollars flow toward districts with greater need, such as those with higher proportions of students from low-income families and students living in rural communities. The formula also includes per-student direct funding to support key priority areas such as early literacy and career and technical education (CTE), as well as outcome bonuses to reward districts when students achieve certain outcomes.

» **Summer learning and tutoring:** With the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, Tennessee pioneered efforts in statewide summer learning and tutoring programs for students, directing sustained investments toward both initiatives.[3]

» **Dual enrollment expansion:** The state significantly expanded access to the Dual Enrollment Grant by allowing the grant to cover up to five courses for students who maintain eligibility, extending eligibility for dual enrollment at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) to ninth and 10th graders (in addition to juniors and seniors), and lowering the ongoing cumulative GPA requirement from 2.75 to 2.0.[4]

» **Momentum year postsecondary education goals:** In response to notable drops in the state's college-going rate, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) announced a 2023 momentum year initiative with three primary goals to motivate improved outcomes.[5] These goals were increasing the college-going rate, increasing adult enrollment in postsecondary education, and improving alignment in education and workforce training.[6]

Tennessee's leadership in supporting student success and putting students first is clear. As we move into 2024, it is essential to closely monitor student outcomes to build on prior efforts and push for the next phase of improvements.

As A Result Of State Efforts, Student Outcomes Are Improving

Bold initiatives to improve student learning placed Tennessee on the national stage. Data show the state's third to eighth graders made some of the most growth in math and reading scores between 2009 and 2015, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).[7] When COVID-19 disruptions significantly impacted student learning and caused dramatic declines in achievement, education leaders in Tennessee responded with a renewed commitment to advance student learning for pandemic recovery and beyond.[8] That commitment to accelerating student learning is starting to pay off.
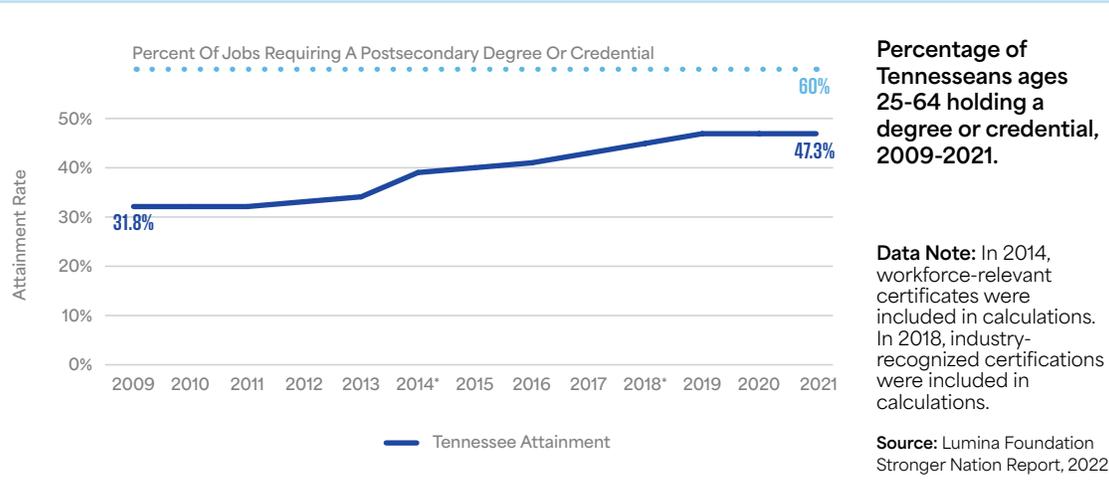
Tennessee students made large gains on state assessments in both English language arts (ELA) and math in the two years since the 2021 lows. **Tennessee is one of the few states exceeding prepandemic ELA proficiency levels, with ELA proficiency rates for all students in grades 3-8 almost 3 percentage points higher than the 2019 rate.**[9] Promisingly, a closer look shows that third-grade ELA proficiency, which has been a primary focus of recent policy changes, reached record highs for all students in 2023. The math proficiency rate for students in grades 3-8 is still shy of the prepandemic high but did improve by almost 10 percentage points between 2021 and 2023. The recent gains across subject areas indicate positive momentum, but with fewer than 40 percent of our state's third to eighth graders reading and writing on grade level today and proficiency rates disproportionately lower for students of color, there is still much more progress to be made.

TENNESSEE HAS SEEN LARGE GAINS ACROSS SUBJECTS SINCE 2021, NEARLY CATCHING UP TO OR SURPASSING PREPANDEMIC RESULTS

Grades 3-8 ELA TCAP proficiency for ELA and math, 2018-2023

Data Note: Due to school closures and assessment waivers, data are not available for 2020.

Source: TDOE state-level assessment data downloads, 2023

THIRD-GRADE ELA PROFICIENCY RATES REACHED RECORD HIGHS IN 2023

TCAP grade 3 ELA proficiency rates by student group, 2018-2023

Data Note: Due to school closures and assessment waivers, data are not available for 2020.

Source: TDOE state-level assessment data downloads, 2023

Postsecondary outcomes are improving as well. The state's college-going rate is rebounding from a pandemic low, marking progress toward the state's momentum year goal with a 1.5 percentage point increase since 2021.[10] Beyond college-going, monitoring the number of Tennesseans with some kind of postsecondary education (i.e. postsecondary attainment) is critically important for understanding how many are prepared for success in the workforce. Around 60 percent of the state's jobs require some kind of postsecondary education.[11] Though not at the 60 percent mark, the state's postsecondary attainment rate continues to trend upward and reached 47.3 percent in 2021.

TENNESSEE'S ATTAINMENT RATE CONTINUES TO INCREASE BUT REMAINS SHORT OF MEETING WORKFORCE NEEDS

Percent Of Jobs Requiring A Postsecondary Degree Or Credential

60%

47.3%

31.8%

Attainment Rate												
2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019	2020	2021

—— Tennessee Attainment

Percentage of Tennesseans ages 25-64 holding a degree or credential, 2009-2021.

Data Note: In 2014, workforce-relevant certificates were included in calculations. In 2018, industry-recognized certifications were included in calculations.

Source: Lumina Foundation Stronger Nation Report, 2022

Still, The Path Forward For Students Remains Challenging
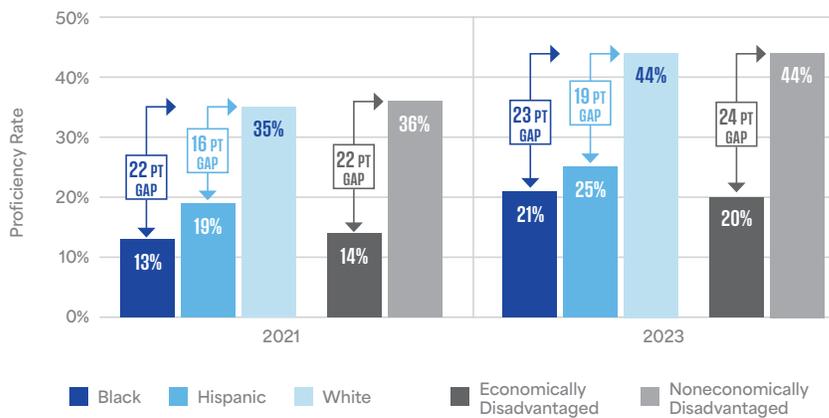
Progress should be celebrated and is helpful in identifying policies and practices that are working for students. However, maintaining the state's commitment to improved student outcomes and a prepared workforce does not mean being content with the current set of policies and practices, particularly when not all students have the supports needed to achieve success.

In Tennessee, proficiency rates are not equal across student groups. White and noneconomically disadvantaged (non-ED) students were larger drivers of the overall grade 3-8 student growth in the past two years, reflecting widening opportunity gaps for students of color and economically disadvantaged (ED) students. In 2023, the White-Black and White-Hispanic ELA proficiency gaps grew to 23 percentage points and 19 percentage points, respectively. The ELA proficiency gap between non-ED and ED students reached 24 percentage points in 2023. This trend is the same for math.[12] **Widening opportunity gaps illustrate that Tennessee is not doing enough to serve students with the greatest needs.**

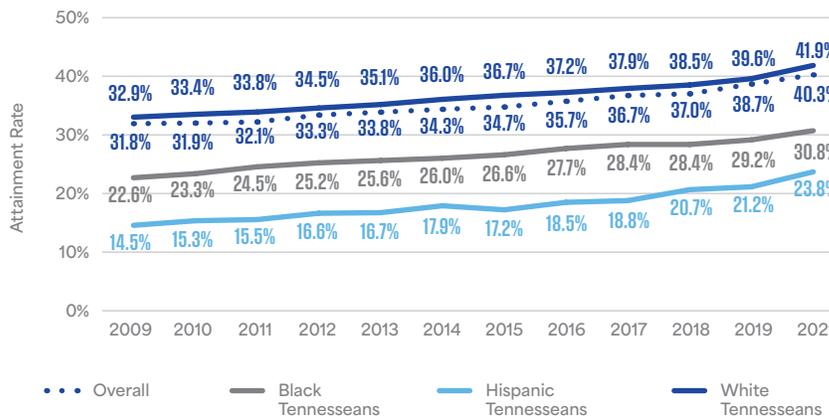## ELA PROFICIENCY RATES DIFFER BY RACE AND INCOME, AND THOSE GAPS CONTINUE TO WIDEN

Grades 3-8 ELA equity gaps by student group, 2023

2021
- Black: 13%
- Hispanic: 19% (22 PT GAP)
- White: 35% (16 PT GAP)
- Economically Disadvantaged: 14%
- Noneconomically Disadvantaged: 36% (22 PT GAP)

2023
- Black: 21%
- Hispanic: 25% (23 PT GAP)
- White: 44% (19 PT GAP)
- Economically Disadvantaged: 20%
- Noneconomically Disadvantaged: 44% (24 PT GAP)

Y-axis: Proficiency Rate (0% – 50%)

Legend: Black | Hispanic | White | Economically Disadvantaged | Noneconomically Disadvantaged

Opportunity gaps for students also persist into post-secondary education. Despite steady progress across groups, Black and Hispanic Tennesseans are far less likely to hold a postsecondary degree than White Tennesseans.[13] A variety of factors may contribute to these gaps including lack of academic preparation in K-12 and financial pressures.[14] To ensure every Tennessean has the opportunity to be prepared for a career that enables economic independence and to fulfill economic needs, the state needs to better support students of color.

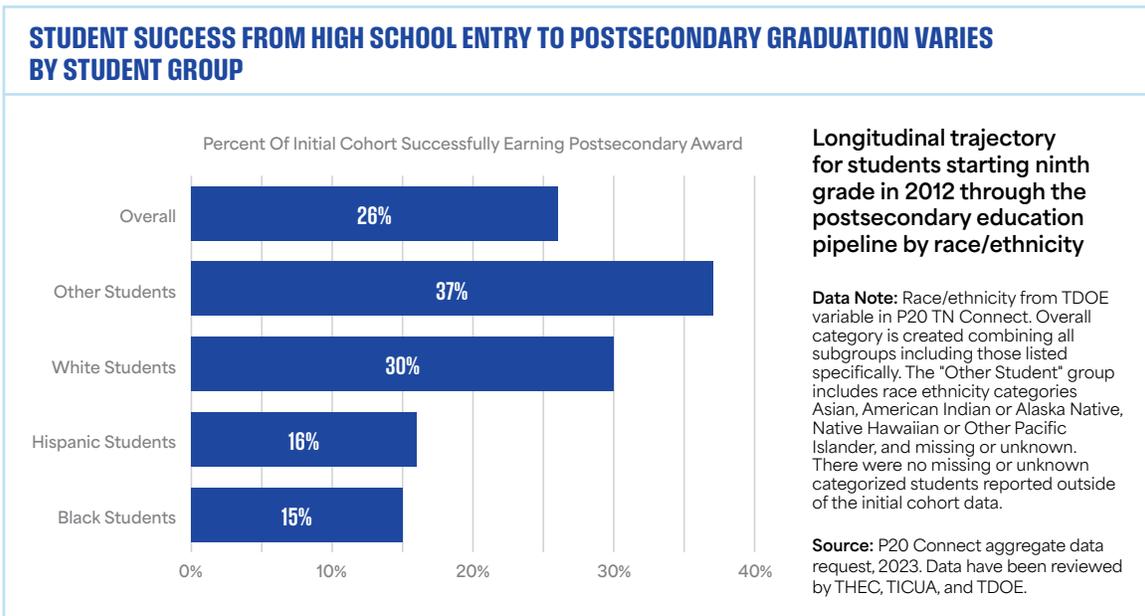## TO MEET WORKFORCE NEEDS, TENNESSEE MUST BETTER SUPPORT HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Percentage of Tennesseans ages 25-64 holding a degree by race/ethnicity, 2009-2021

Y-axis: Attainment Rate (0% – 50%)

Year	Overall	Black Tennesseans	Hispanic Tennesseans	White Tennesseans
2009		22.6%	14.5%	32.9%
2010		23.3%	15.3%	33.4%
2011	31.8%	24.5%	15.5%	33.8%
2012	31.9%	25.2%	16.6%	34.5%
2013	32.1%	25.6%	16.7%	35.1%
2014	33.3%	26.0%	17.9%	36.0%
2015	33.8%	26.6%	17.2%	36.7%
2016	34.3%	27.7%	18.5%	37.2%
2017	34.7%	28.4%	18.8%	37.9%
2018	35.7%	28.4%	20.7%	38.5%
2019	36.7%	29.2%	21.2%	39.6%
2021	37.0% / 38.7% / 40.3%	30.8%	23.8%	41.9%

Legend: • • • Overall | Black Tennesseans | Hispanic Tennesseans | White Tennesseans

Tennessee's current K-12 and postsecondary education systems create a leaky education pipeline for students, particularly those with the highest needs. Only 26 percent of Tennessee students who started high school in 2012 went on to attend college and earn an award by the summer of 2022 (within six years of them graduating high school). When conducting the same analysis for students of color in that cohort, the number is even more alarming. Only 15 percent of Black students and 16 percent of Hispanic students who started high school in 2012 went on to enroll in college and earn a postsecondary degree or credential by the summer of 2022. **The pipeline from K-12 through postsecondary education – and ultimately to the job market – is broken, losing too many Tennesseans along the way who want and deserve better opportunities.**

ONLY ONE-QUARTER OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE POSTSECONDARY PIPELINE

Longitudinal trajectory for students starting ninth grade in 2012 through the postsecondary education pipeline

Data Note: High school graduates were identified using TDOE Accountability protocol: those who received a regular or alternate diploma before the end of Summer 2016. Postsecondary enrollment and completion rates calculated using THEC, TICUA, and NSC data; awards data do not include out-of-state NSC data, industry-recognized credentials, nondegree credentials, or military enlistments, so the true metric is likely higher than that shown by available data.

Source: P20 Connect aggregate data request, 2023. Data have been reviewed by THEC, TICUA, and TDOE.

STUDENT SUCCESS FROM HIGH SCHOOL ENTRY TO POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION VARIES BY STUDENT GROUP

Percent Of Initial Cohort Successfully Earning Postsecondary Award

Longitudinal trajectory for students starting ninth grade in 2012 through the postsecondary education pipeline by race/ethnicity

Data Note: Race/ethnicity from TDOE variable in P20 TN Connect. Overall category is created combining all subgroups including those listed specifically. The "Other Student" group includes race ethnicity categories Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and missing or unknown. There were no missing or unknown categorized students reported outside of the initial cohort data.

Source: P20 Connect aggregate data request, 2023. Data have been reviewed by THEC, TICUA, and TDOE.

The transformative changes to the state's education system up to this point are not yet fully supporting achievement for all students. As Tennessee approaches its next frontier of education transformation, there is a need to both strengthen existing systems and implement promising new initiatives to better meet the needs of all students.

The Education And Economic Landscape Is Evolving

In evaluating areas for improvement in Tennessee's education system, it is critical to recognize the new education and work landscapes. For example, post-secondary education can offer students a path toward a choice-filled life, but only if it's connected to career opportunities. And Tennessee's labor market is changing. Consider the following:

» **Job opportunities are shifting.** Between 2019 and 2022, 8.6 million workers changed jobs across the United States labor market – a 50 percent increase from the previous three years.[15] Projections estimate 12 million more occupational shifts through 2030.[16]

» **There are not enough educated Tennesseans to meet employer needs.** There are 56 available workers for every 100 jobs in the state.[17] Further, almost 70 percent of Tennessee business leaders surveyed in 2023 indicated there are not enough appropriately trained workers to meet their employment needs.[18]
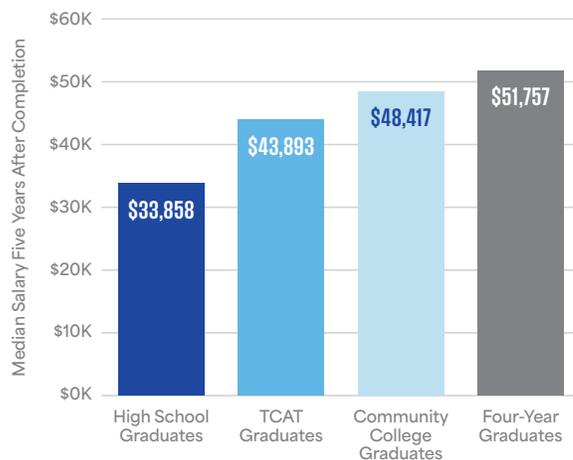
» **New businesses are flocking to Tennessee, and existing businesses are flourishing.** At the beginning of 2023, there were over 20,000 new business filings in the state and almost 200,000 business renewals – both of which are at a record high.[19]

» **The significant economic growth Tennessee has experienced since the pandemic may slow.** The state's economic growth is expected to remain positive, with an overall outlook more optimistic than national estimates.[20] However, economists project the growth will decelerate, suggesting that postsecondary degrees and credentials with employer value will be even more important for individuals navigating the job market.[21]

To prepare Tennesseans for jobs enabling economic independence, the education system must better align and respond to the labor market. This alignment and ability to adapt to the workforce is essential for students. **Tennesseans with postsecondary training valued by employers qualify for a larger portion of the state's jobs, show greater resilience in the job market during economic downturns, and experience greater earnings throughout their lifetime.**
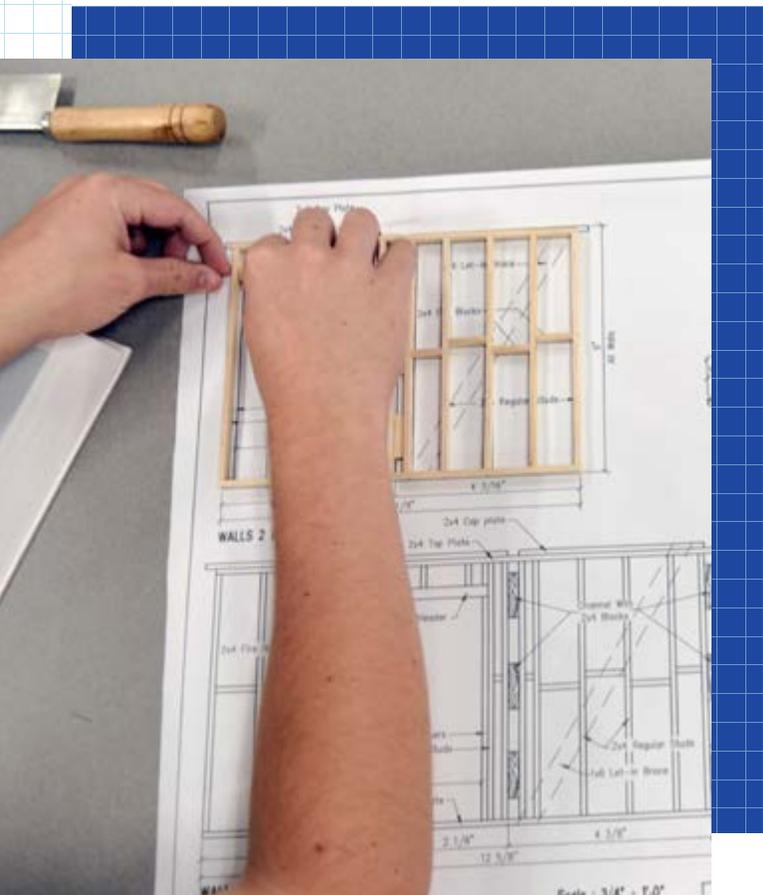
COLLEGE GRADUATES, ON AVERAGE, EARN 1.5 TIMES MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Median Salary Five Years After Completion

Category	Value
High School Graduates	$33,858
TCAT Graduates	$43,893
Community College Graduates	$48,417
Four-Year Graduates	$51,757

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

Source: P20 Connect, 2022

Recent innovations are starting to better connect what students learn in the classroom to what employers need in the workforce. K-12 innovative school model grants were awarded by the state in 2021 and 2023 to build up programs that prepare students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and CTE direct funding through TISA is meant to sustain the programs most beneficial for students.[22] In postsecondary education, the state has greatly expanded access to the Dual Enrollment Grant at TCATs, and community colleges are piloting initiatives to increase student access to career advising and workforce-relevant certificates in their first semester.[23] In addition, employers are partnering with high schools and universities to pioneer programs that lead to in-demand, high-wage job opportunities.[24] These innovations are essential in an ever-changing labor market but are neither expansive nor comprehensive enough to support all students.

A strategic alignment across education and the workforce is necessary to build a brighter future for Tennessee students and prepare them for success in a rapidly evolving economy. Systems must be intentionally designed around this connection. In Tennessee's next phase of education transformations, the end goal cannot just be students earning a degree or credential but instead must be students earning a degree or credential that specifically leads to economic independence. Every Tennessean deserves the opportunity to gain the education and skills needed to succeed in a career and live a choice-filled life.

With this context in mind, SCORE recommends three priorities to drive the state's efforts forward in 2024:

1 **Expand Student Opportunity By Strengthening Foundational Policies**

2 **Build Effective Pathways Between Education And Careers**

3 **Ensure K-12 Supports Meet Student Needs**

Building
A BRIGHTER FUTURE

2024 Priority
EXPAND STUDENT OPPORTUNITY BY STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONAL POLICIES

A willingness to continuously improve characterizes good leadership. As a national education policy leader, Tennessee must consistently work to meet the evolving needs of the state and its students. It is not logical, nor is it effective, to rely on decades-old policy and practice to serve students, particularly when we know that efforts thus far have not yet advanced student outcomes to where they need to be.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENT

When revisiting foundational policies, there are several key student-centered questions state leaders should be asking to drive continued improvement:

- **?** What student outcome did this policy intend to impact? Do data show that outcome has changed since implementation of the policy? Is that outcome still the primary outcome we hope to impact?

- **?** How does this policy impact student success in education, career, and life? Are students experiencing meaningful gains as a result of this policy? Do we have the data needed to answer these questions?

- **?** Were there any unintended consequences of this policy? If so, how could those consequences be addressed?

- **?** What do students, parents, and educators say about their experience with this policy? Are any components of the policy creating barriers to student success?

- **?** What has changed in our community, state, or country since the first implementation of this policy? Is the policy meeting the need of today's students?
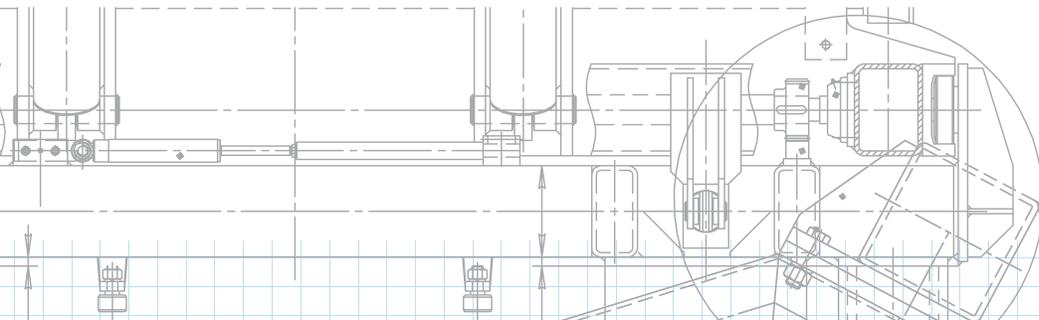
While there are many areas where Tennessee's education policy leadership is evident, three deserve particular attention in the months ahead: longitudinal data, Tennessee Promise, and outcomes-based funding. The state can celebrate its success across data, postsecondary access, and postsecondary completion while also embracing the opportunity to strengthen these nationally recognized policies. We must commit to the important process of evaluating where these efforts are not meeting their full potential and making the necessary adjustments.

As a state dedicated to continuous student-centered improvement, Tennessee should consider the following in its next wave of reforms:

1. **Prioritize the use of longitudinal data to drive student outcomes.**

2. **Enhance the Tennessee Promise scholarship and the community college student experience.**

3. **Revise the postsecondary outcomes-based funding formula to prioritize long-term student success.**

Tennessee's longitudinal data system holds a wealth of information about students' progress through classrooms to careers but is not easily accessible.

Data are foundational for good decision-making.[25] Students and families deserve access to data in order to understand which educational opportunities lead to high-wage careers. School leaders need data to know which K-12 opportunities jumpstart students on the path to postsecondary education and the workforce and to see where opportunity gaps exist. Employers require data to understand which education programs can provide them with the talent they need. And all groups need a line of sight into the connection between educational opportunities and emerging careers to understand how to support students on their paths through school to the workplace. For the power of data to be fully realized, data must be accessible and presented in ways that are meaningful to and actionable for key stakeholders. In meeting that need, Tennessee is behind.

GREATER TOGETHER: A DATA-DRIVEN PARTNERSHIP

Greater Together Clarksville is a data-driven partnership aimed at supporting students as they navigate the transition from K-12 to postsecondary education. Working collaboratively, the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) and its three local partner colleges and universities – Austin Peay State University (APSU), Tennessee College of Applied Technology-Dickson (TCAT-Dickson), and Nashville State Community College (NSCC) – along with tnAchieves, developed an innovative data-sharing agreement (also known as a memorandum of understanding, or MOU) in October 2021. Each partner put in substantial efforts to develop the MOU, and those efforts paid off. The agreement enabled each of the five entities to securely share student-level data, set goals, monitor key indicators of postsecondary success, and ultimately remove barriers to student success.

tnAchieves manages a dashboard of information for each institution to monitor the progress of Tennessee Promise-eligible students through key milestones such as FAFSA completion, submission of applications, and enrollment in summer bridge programs. The dashboard of each postsecondary institution is populated with data on CMCSS seniors who indicated an intention to attend that college on their Promise applications. This information helps partners quickly intervene to ensure that seniors successfully transition to postsecondary education and also supports longer-term efforts to refine programming and supports. For example, colleges may reach out to students who have not completed parts of the application process, and any student enrolled in a college but not signed up for a summer bridge program by the deadline will get a personal phone call from their high school's college counselor.
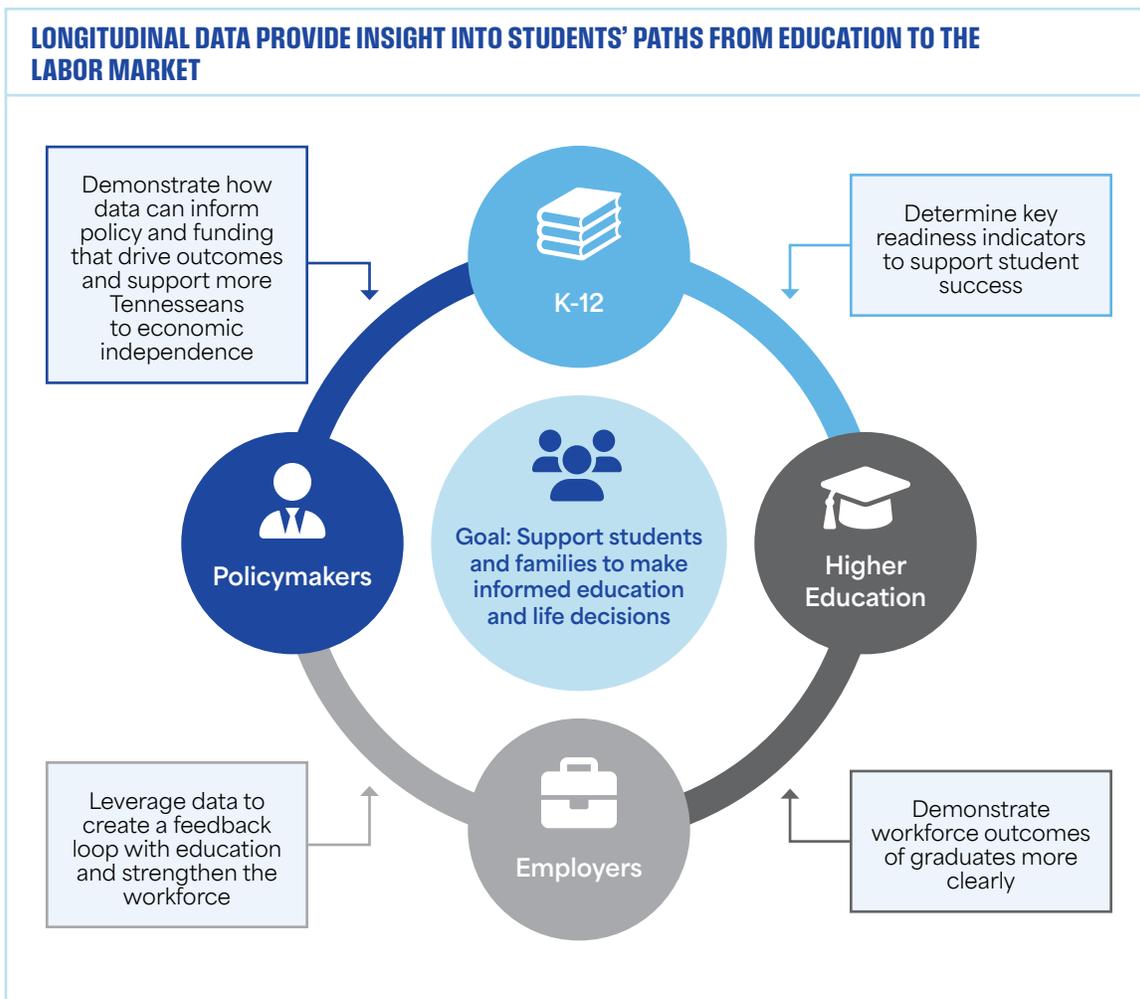
At the crux of the initiative is meaningful data sharing. Regularly collaborating over real-time and straightforward data access enables partners to refine programming to strengthen student readiness and postsecondary success. Greater Together Clarksville exemplifies the promise of an MOU to bridge data gaps between K-12 and postsecondary education and plug holes of the often-leaky education pipeline. Facilitating the development and approval of MOUs would allow more innovative partnerships like Greater Together to thrive.

Longitudinal data systems are key to effective state-level data efforts. A statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) connects data over time to offer insight into students' education-to-work journeys and identify trends that inform decision-making. As a state committed to data collection and monitoring, Tennessee established its SLDS leadership in 2012 with the development of the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System, known as P20 Connect TN, to link student-level information across education, workforce, and social services sectors.[26] That leadership continues today. In 2023, the state established Tennessee's Data Analytics for Transparency and Accountability system (TN DATA), a new cloud-based longitudinal data hub designed to better leverage the data at scale.[27]

Many partner agencies across the state contribute data to the longitudinal system, including the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD), and the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS).[28] As a result, TN DATA includes a range of metrics such as state assessment results, demographics, wages, unemployment claims, and receipt of benefits. The securely linked data, housed by the state's Office of Evidence and Impact (OEI), can be used to evaluate the impact of state investments and better understand the connections between education and work in Tennessee.

Despite the existence of a wealth of information within TN DATA, that information is not easily accessible to those outside of state agencies, including those working most closely with students. Of the 40 states with a longitudinal data system in place, Tennessee is one of only three without a public-facing website for its system.[29] Instead, Tennessee's system is leveraged mainly by internal state analysts and academic researchers who go through a months-long formal research request process to access the data. Academic research is one important use for Tennessee's longitudinal data system, but it does not reflect its full potential.
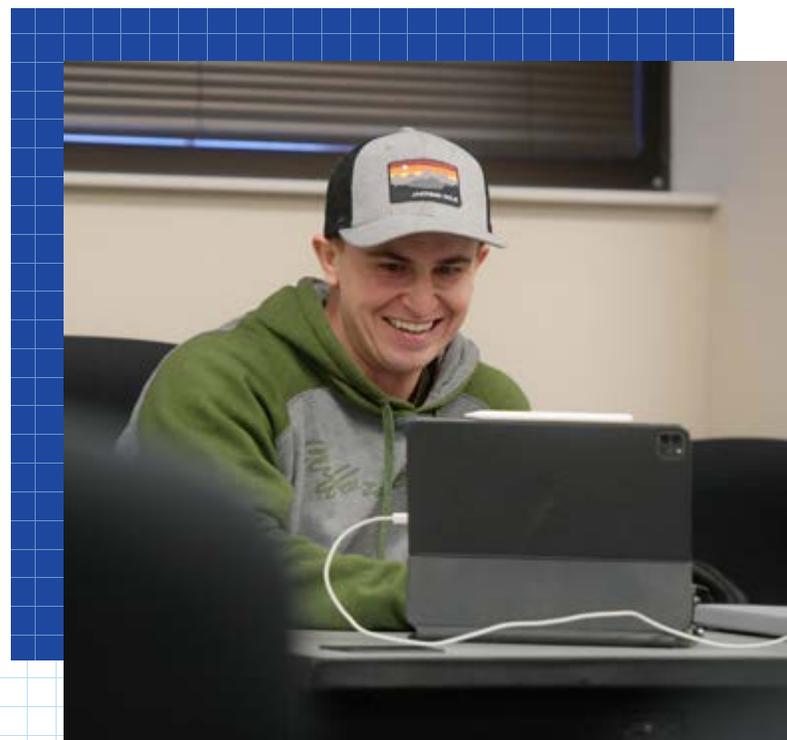
LONGITUDINAL DATA PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO STUDENTS' PATHS FROM EDUCATION TO THE LABOR MARKET

Demonstrate how data can inform policy and funding that drive outcomes and support more Tennesseans to economic independence

Determine key readiness indicators to support student success

K-12

Goal: Support students and families to make informed education and life decisions

Policymakers

Higher Education

Employers

Leverage data to create a feedback loop with education and strengthen the workforce

Demonstrate workforce outcomes of graduates more clearly

SCORE recommends prioritizing the use of longitudinal data to drive student outcomes.

» **Create public-facing dashboards.** OEI should create data dashboards that give the public a powerful tool for understanding student progress through K-12, postsecondary education, and careers. For instance, these dashboards should include information such as how many students who concentrate in CTE go on to an aligned postsecondary program or career, as well as wage outcomes for students based on the degree or credential earned.

» **Add career-relevant information to the TN DATA system.** Requiring TDLWD to collect Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, the recognized classification system for occupations in data systems, and add them to the TN DATA hub would facilitate connections between postsecondary opportunities and particular jobs.

» **Bolster the state's TN DATA efforts.** Elevating and expanding existing longitudinal data efforts through state law will help establish a shared vision for data access and use and ensure that vision persists over time. Further, THEC should launch a data working group made up of OEI, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), TDOE, and the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) to codevelop a model data-sharing MOU for high schools, postsecondary institutions, and student support organizations to use as a template. A model agreement could streamline the development of data-driven partnerships across the state and ensure longitudinal data are more consistently leveraged to support student success.

Tennessee has the basis for data-driven decision-making in place but needs to take the next steps to make data more usable in ways that can support student success. Without access to data that is linked across sectors, it is difficult for schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions to develop supports that drive lifelong student success and to know whether their efforts are having the intended results. Likewise, it's hard for employers to understand how to strengthen partnerships with education entities in order to provide students with opportunities to gain skills for rewarding career opportunities. **The state can strategically share aggregate data with communities, institutions, and employers to drive decision-making, while maintaining all important privacy and security requirements.**

What does it look like to make this kind of data accessible and effectively use it? To answer this question, Tennesseans can look to two other states in our region: Kentucky and Virginia. Kentucky's Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) creates a postsecondary feedback report to monitor student employment outcomes by postsecondary institution, major, credential type, and demographics. The Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) offers an education and workforce alignment dashboard that allows users to compare education programs to workforce needs at the regional level.[30] Both of these examples are tools Tennessee could and should create.

While highlighting critical data needs will be a through line to this report, the following recommendations focus specifically on strengthening the state's longitudinal data efforts. By facilitating secure data sharing and creating public-facing dashboards that examine the education-to-work pipeline, Tennessee could unlock the power of longitudinal data in driving education transformation to better serve students.
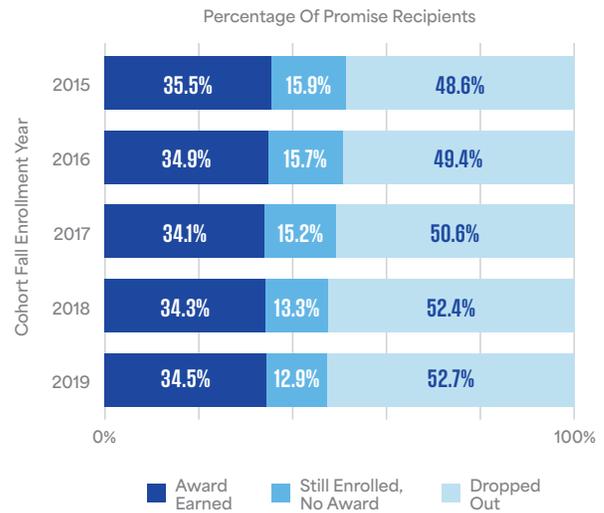
Tennessee Promise paved the way in expanding college access, but students still struggle to successfully navigate the postsecondary experience.

Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that covers the remaining cost of tuition and fees at community and technical colleges for Tennessee high school graduates after other grant aid is applied. Tennessee became the first state to provide statewide tuition-free access to community and technical colleges when the General Assembly established Tennessee Promise in 2014.[31] Since then, at least 19 other states have followed Tennessee's lead and launched similar programs.[32]

Tennessee Promise is a landmark policy for expanding postsecondary access and providing coaching support for students. The introduction of Tennessee Promise resulted in an initial surge of enrollment and an increase to the state's college-going rate for high school graduates of almost 10 percent.[33] Further, Tennessee Promise is not only a scholarship but also a mentoring program.[34] The program's partnering organizations, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust, are responsible for assigning students to mentors who help them through key milestones (like college applications and the financial aid process) across K-12 to postsecondary education.[35] Since 2018, partnering organizations also offer students more proactive coaching to support retention and completion once they are enrolled in a community or technical college.[36]

While Tennessee Promise increased postsecondary access for Tennessee students, it has not gone far enough in supporting completion – suggesting its return on investment is not what it could be. Only 34.5 percent of Promise students in the 2019 cohort earned a degree or credential within six semesters, by which point students were past the five-semester eligibility limit for the scholarship.[37] Moreover, with only 27 percent of community college students overall, 12 percent of Black community college students, and 23 percent of Hispanic community college students graduating within three years, outcomes are not where they need to be across the board.[38] With even more career opportunities today hinging on postsecondary education, it is essential that more community college students, Promise students included, are able to successfully navigate their postsecondary experience.

JUST OVER ONE-THIRD OF TENNESSEE PROMISE STUDENTS EARN AN AWARD BY THE END OF SEMESTER SIX

Percentage Of Promise Recipients

Cohort Fall Enrollment Year	Award Earned	Still Enrolled, No Award	Dropped Out
2015	35.5%	15.9%	48.6%
2016	34.9%	15.7%	49.4%
2017	34.1%	15.2%	50.6%
2018	34.3%	13.3%	52.4%
2019	34.5%	12.9%	52.7%

Tennessee Promise student outcomes by cohort enrollment year by semester six of enrollment, 2015-2019
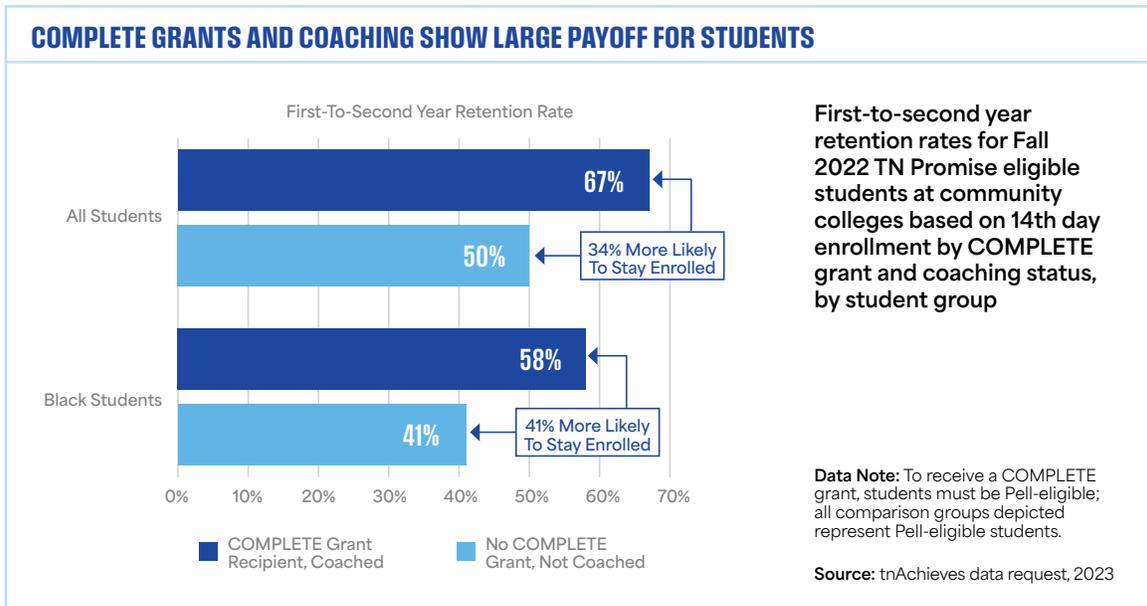
Source: THEC Tennessee Promise Annual Report, 2023

Not only are the majority of Tennessee Promise students not earning a degree or credential, the majority are also not transferring to four-year institutions. Fewer than 20 percent of Promise students in the 2019 cohort transferred to a university after enrolling in a community college.[39] Data show that students who complete an associate degree designed for transfer but do not actually transfer experience lower median wages than those who complete a traditional associate degree.[40] As such, Promise students who intend to transfer to earn a bachelor's degree but do not may be disadvantaged when looking for jobs compared to those who intended to earn an associate degree.

Though completion and transfer rates are not where they should be, there is enormous potential for Tennessee Promise to drive improved graduation rates.[41] Research finds that grant aid positively impacts persistence and degree completion.[42] The value of monetary support is evident through the early results of Promise completion grants, which can be accessed by Tennessee Promise students who participate in the coaching program and experience financial need.[43] The completion grants pilot program serves to remove barriers to postsecondary success by assisting students with costs outside of tuition and fees.[44] There are five

categories of costs covered by the completion grants pilot: food, housing, transportation, books/supplies, and class-specific fees.[45]

In the Fall 2022 Promise cohort, 1,821 students received one or more completion grants from tnAchieves, with an average of $124 awarded per grant.[46] An analysis found that students who received the grant in addition to coaching were 34 percent more likely to remain enrolled following their first year than their peers not involved in the coaching program.[47] Black students who received a grant and coaching experienced an even larger impact, being 41 percent more likely than their peers to stay enrolled.[48] A relatively small per-student investment through these grants is yielding a meaningful impact. However, when the pilot program ends students will no longer benefit from these grants without sustained support.

COMPLETE GRANTS AND COACHING SHOW LARGE PAYOFF FOR STUDENTS

First-To-Second Year Retention Rate

All Students
- COMPLETE Grant Recipient, Coached: 67%
- No COMPLETE Grant, Not Coached: 50%
- 34% More Likely To Stay Enrolled

Black Students
- COMPLETE Grant Recipient, Coached: 58%
- No COMPLETE Grant, Not Coached: 41%
- 41% More Likely To Stay Enrolled

Legend:
- COMPLETE Grant Recipient, Coached
- No COMPLETE Grant, Not Coached

First-to-second year retention rates for Fall 2022 TN Promise eligible students at community colleges based on 14th day enrollment by COMPLETE grant and coaching status, by student group

Data Note: To receive a COMPLETE grant, students must be Pell-eligible; all comparison groups depicted represent Pell-eligible students.

Source: tnAchieves data request, 2023

National research also reveals that community college students often find the path to graduation unclear.[49] A lack of clear information about what courses and programs a student needs to reach their career goals creates barriers to earning a degree or credential valued by employers.[50] Meta-majors, or career clusters of related majors in a broad subject area, are one strategy to outline a clear path toward graduation and a career.[51] However, a 2023 report found that less than half of Tennessee's community colleges operate meta-majors at scale.[52] Students could more effectively navigate community college if all institutions outlined clear pathways aligned with student interests and aspirations.[53]

The state has the opportunity to further improve Tennessee Promise and the community college experience by prioritizing completion and grounding the work in a goal of ensuring every student earns a postsecondary degree or credential that prepares them for a successful career. As the landmark scholarship approaches its 10th year, Tennessee can be a national leader again by reexamining the program to identify ways to maximize its positive impact on the lives of Tennesseans.

SCORE recommends enhancing the Tennessee Promise scholarship and the community college student experience.

» **Incentivize on-time completion and transfer for Tennessee Promise students.** The General Assembly should update statute to allow Promise students who earn an associate degree on time to continue receiving their last-dollar scholarship for their first semester pursuing a bachelor's degree or pursuing another stackable postsecondary opportunity at a community or technical college. As Promise students are eligible for the scholarship for five semesters, this shift would ensure all students can receive their fifth semester of the scholarship, incentivize on-time associate degree completion, and support transfer to four-year institutions for students hoping to earn a bachelor's degree.

» **Make Tennessee Promise completion grants permanent.** Completion grants are having a big impact on student outcomes. By making the pilot program permanent, policymakers can make these supports a completion-focused pillar of the Tennessee Promise program.

» **Scale meta-majors across the state's community colleges.** TBR should ensure every community college is operating meta-majors at scale. Upon selecting a meta-major, students should be arranged into cohorts that include a first-year schedule that fulfills all their core requirements. Each meta-major should also articulate its alignment to K-12 CTE career clusters and dual enrollment courses, as well as high-wage, in-demand degrees and credentials.

» **Publicly report data on the postsecondary programs of study Tennessee Promise students choose to pursue.** To better understand if students are pursuing paths aligned to high-wage, in-demand career paths, the Tennessee Promise annual report should include information on which postsecondary opportunities students are pursuing. THEC should also produce a Promise student dashboard alongside the report to make key student experience and outcome data more accessible to the public. These data can inform career-focused mentoring and coaching efforts, as well as continuous improvement to the program.

While the outcomes-based postsecondary funding formula is a nationally recognized state policy, it could go further to ensure student success.

Tennessee was the first state to systemically incentivize postsecondary outcomes through funding.[54] In 2010, Tennessee adopted an outcomes-based postsecondary funding formula to award the majority of state appropriations via outcomes — a model the state continues to use today.[55] With over 80 percent of state dollars awarded based on outcomes, Tennessee is one of only five states that awards more than 25 percent of appropriations for colleges and universities based on student outcomes.[56] The outcomes-based funding formula was and remains an important model that goes beyond postsecondary access to prioritize completion.

Though outcomes-based funding is an innovative completion-focused policy, the model has had a limited impact on student outcomes on the whole.[57] Tennessee-specific research found that the adoption of the formula did not significantly impact degree earning overall.[58] There was some increase in the production of shorter-term certificates at community colleges, and outcomes for full-time students at all postsecondary institutions were more promising than those for part-time students.[59] While the research suggests an ability for the state's outcomes-based funding formula to drive improved student outcomes, it has not accomplished those improvements across the board.

Tennessee's student outcomes clearly have room for improvement. Today, only one in every four first-time full-time freshmen graduate from community college in three years, and only three in every five graduate from a university in six years.[60] These outcomes also differ greatly across student racial and gender groups. For example, males enrolled in community college experience lower graduation rates than females across racial groups, with the lowest rates for Black males.[61]
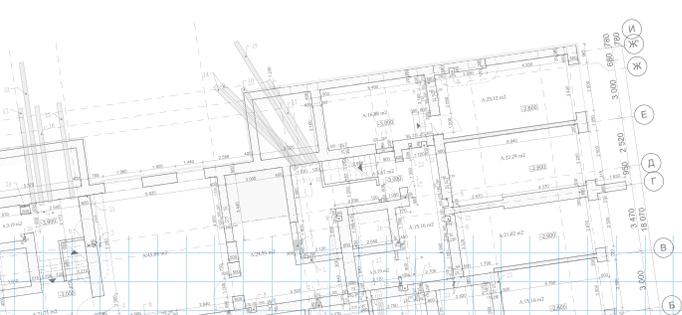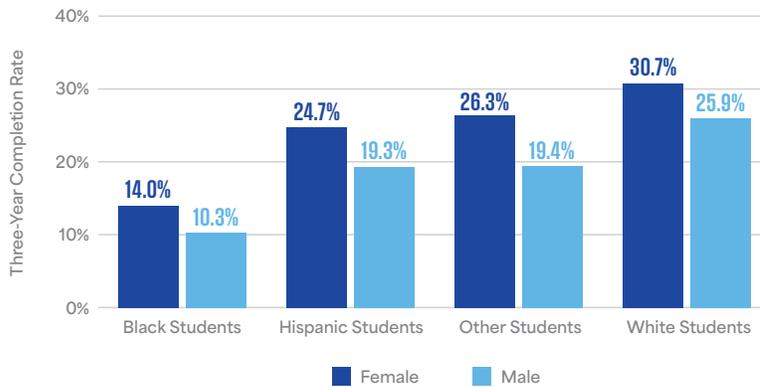
POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION RATES ACROSS SECTORS HAVE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Community College (Three-Year Rate)   Four-Year Universities (Six-Year Rate)

Completion Rate (y-axis): 0% to 80%

Community College (Three-Year Rate):
- White Students: 17%, 18%, 22%, 23%, 26%, 27%
- Hispanic Students: 11%, 13%, 18%, 20%, 20%, 23%
- Black Students: 4%, 5%, 6%, 8%, 10%, 12%

Four-Year Universities (Six-Year Rate):
- White Students: 62%, 65%, 66%, 68%, 70%, 69%
- Hispanic Students: 56%, 58%, 56%, 59%, 60%, 58%
- Black Students: 41%, 46%, 47%, 48%, 47%, 46%

x-axis: 2011 to 2016

Fall Enrollment Year

Legend: — Black Students   — Hispanic Students   — White Students

Source: THEC Fact Book, 2023. 150-percent completion rates for community colleges were retrieved through a data request to THEC.

150-percent time to completion rate for first-time, full-time freshman (FTFTF) at community colleges and four-year universities by student group, Fall enrollment 2011-2016

BOTH GENDER AND RACIAL COMPLETION GAPS EXIST AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES, WITH ONLY ONE IN 10 BLACK MALE STUDENTS GRADUATING IN 2022

Three-Year Completion Rate (y-axis): 0% to 40%

Group	Female	Male
Black Students	14.0%	10.3%
Hispanic Students	24.7%	19.3%
Other Students	26.3%	19.4%
White Students	30.7%	25.9%

Legend: ■ Female   ■ Male

150-percent time to completion rates for community college students by race and gender, 2019 entering cohort

Data Note: The "Other Students" race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races

Source: TBR student graduation rates dashboard, 2023

Bold improvements to the outcomes-based funding formula could better align institutional incentives to student success. It is time for the state, THEC, and THEC's formula review committee to look under the hood to perform a more comprehensive evaluation of the formula's components.[62] For example, the dual enrollment metric remains focused on enrollment rather than outcomes; the credit accumulation metric represents progress toward but not earning of a degree or credential; there is no graduation rate metric for community colleges; and while universities have both a graduation rate and degrees per 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) metric, there is no recognition for on-time university completion. Further, the premium that awards more dollars based on the type of degree or credential earned only applies to high-need STEM fields, excluding in-demand fields such as management and architecture, which have some of the highest median entry-level wages in the state.[63] Finally, there is currently no explicit consideration for high-wage fields.

Tennessee must take steps to shift the formula metrics to reflect the outcomes of highest importance for the state and its students and to incentivize paths toward careers that enable economic independence.

OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING FORMULA METRICS

Community Colleges	Universities
Students Accumulating 12 Hrs.	Students Accumulating 30 Hrs.
Students Accumulating 24 Hrs.	Students Accumulating 60 Hrs.
Students Accumulating 36 Hrs.	Students Accumulating 90 Hrs.
Associate Degrees	Bachelor's And Associate Degrees
Long-Term Certificates	Masters/Ed. Specialist Degrees
Short-Term Certificates	Doctoral/Law Degrees
Dual Enrollment	Research, Service, And Sponsored Programs
Job Placements	Six-Year Graduation Rate
Transfers Out With 12 Hrs.	Degrees Per 100 FTE
Workforce Training/Contact Hours	
Awards Per 100 FTE	

As the first state to adopt outcomes-based funding, Tennessee can set an example of stepping back to evaluate opportunities for significant improvement and boldly moving forward with new approaches. Success will require setting an updated vision for the formula that is in line with state priorities, holds institutions accountable for outcomes most beneficial for students, and prioritizes workforce alignment. The state should not pass up this opportunity to build on its prior work to craft a formula that reflects the importance of a future where all students earn a degree or credential that enables economic independence.

SCORE recommends revising the postsecondary outcomes-based funding formula to prioritize long-term student success.

» **Refine the focus of the formula metrics.** The outcomes in the funding formula should accurately reflect the most important state priorities for student success. As the state takes the first steps to revise the formula, the statutorily required outcomes-based funding review committee should consider which metrics could be removed or streamlined, such as metrics for credit accumulation and degrees per 100 FTE. If certain metrics are removed, it may create space for the addition of other metrics, such as three-year graduation rates for community colleges.

» **Ensure all formula metrics are based on student outcomes.** The dual enrollment metric is currently the only formula metric based solely on enrollment. The bar should be raised to only reward dual enrollment when students take at least 12 credits that apply toward program-of-study requirements, the equivalent to one full-time semester.

» **Ensure the outcomes-based funding premium structure is aligned to student opportunity.** To start, the outcomes-based funding formula review committee should discuss expanding the high-need premium beyond solely STEM fields and adding a high-wage premium. In the future, THEC should explore how to continue aligning the formula to career paths that enable economic independence for students.
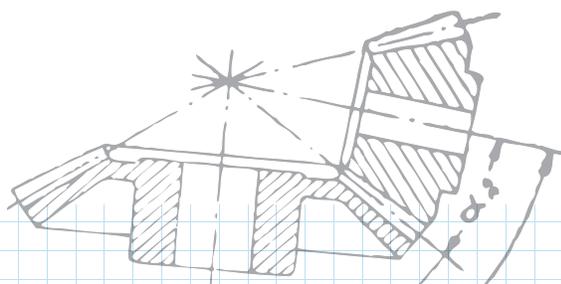
Building

A BRIGHTER FUTURE

BUILD EFFECTIVE PATHWAYS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CAREERS

Education is the foundation for preparing students for careers. More than half of jobs in Tennessee require education beyond high school.[64] But with postsecondary attainment rates currently at 47.3 percent, the state is not fully meeting economic needs.[65] Further, the need for an educated and well-prepared workforce is only intensifying in Tennessee. Jobs that enable economic independence are increasingly shifting toward individuals with more education and skill, and rapid increases in job openings in the past three years have resulted in a severe shortage of qualified workers.[66]

For Tennesseans, a high school diploma alone will not secure a job that leads to long-term economic independence.[67] Students need some kind of education beyond high school, which can range from an industry credential to a degree. A 2023 study estimated that Tennessee students experienced a 14.5 percent return on investment for the time and money spent on earning a bachelor's degree and a 9.5 percent return for earning an associate degree.[68] Nondegree credentials, such as certificates and certifications, can also lead to higher rates of employment and higher median incomes for adults.[69] On a whole, postsecondary education leads to increased earnings and sets students up for a choice-filled life, but degrees and credentials must be connected to career paths with high-demand, high-wage jobs.

Education and work are becoming increasingly interconnected. However, the paths between educational opportunities and careers are murky, and not all opportunities offered across the state effectively help students progress toward economic independence.

The new future of student success hinges on improved alignment across education and careers. To improve alignment and build effective pathways between education and careers, Tennessee should:

1. **Give Tennesseans clear information on which degrees and credentials lead to careers.**

2. **Identify and incentivize quality early postsecondary and career experiences for students.**

3. **Develop strong partnerships across education and industry to increase alignment.**

In a growing landscape of degree and credential opportunities, there is limited available information to understand which opportunities are of highest value.

The credential marketplace in the United States is growing. There are now more than one million unique degree and credential opportunities available for students, an increase of 46 percent since 2019.[70] These opportunities include degrees, licenses, badges, certificates, and microcredentials, among others, and can sometimes stack upon one another to help students progress through their careers.

The entities offering credential opportunities vary from traditional colleges and universities to nonacademic providers (including employers themselves) to
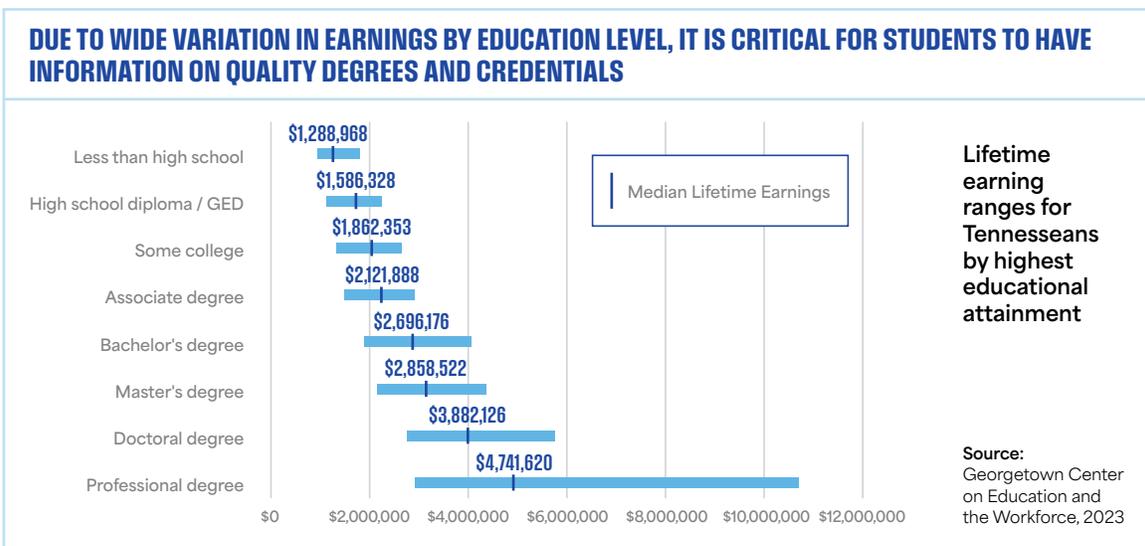
massive open online course (MOOC) providers, with data collection and reporting varying across these entities. Postsecondary institutions generally report more data on participation and outcomes than other providers. However, they still do not report comprehensive data on courses that do not count for college credit, even though estimates suggest that over 40 percent of community college students are enrolled in noncredit programs and many noncredit programs offer targeted training for employers.[71] Though Tennessee's

Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) do report noncredit program data and community colleges report some noncredit workforce training information to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), this reporting does not capture all programs and not all data are publicly available. With so many options and varying levels of data availability, it is not always clear to employers and students which opportunities lead to a career that enables economic independence.

STUDENTS NAVIGATE A COMPLEX MAZE OF DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS WITH CURRENTLY OVER ONE MILLION UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE

Number of degrees and credentials offered by providers, 2019-2022

Data Note: MOOC refers to massive open online courses. Secondary school counts include high school diplomas, alternative certificates from secondary schools, and high school equivalency credentials.

Source: Credential Engine, 2023

Availability of postsecondary opportunities is important, but not all opportunities yield meaningful economic returns. The lifetime earnings of individuals vary largely, and there is overlap in the salary ranges by level of education.[72] For instance, this overlap means some

associate degree holders earn the same or less than some individuals with only a high school diploma. **To ensure students are investing their time and money effectively, they need information on which degrees and credentials lead to economic independence.**

DUE TO WIDE VARIATION IN EARNINGS BY EDUCATION LEVEL, IT IS CRITICAL FOR STUDENTS TO HAVE INFORMATION ON QUALITY DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS

Lifetime earning ranges for Tennesseans by highest educational attainment

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2023

Further, evaluating the economic returns of a postsecondary degree or credential is not a simple task. Research shows that the return on investment of a postsecondary degree widens at midcareer. As such, evaluating earnings immediately after graduation may not be the best time to understand the full scope of postsecondary education's impact on an individual's economic standing. It is difficult to communicate to a prospective student that an opportunity is worth pursuing when the largest benefit is experienced 10, 20, or even 30 years in the future – especially when the data we have are limited to start with. Additionally, students do not always earn just one credential. Many students stack credentials, earning multiple throughout their lifetime to impact their earnings and career opportunities at multiple career stages.

COLLEGE-EDUCATED WORKERS IN TENNESSEE EARN MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL-EDUCATED WORKERS, AND THAT GAP GROWS THROUGH MID-CAREER

Earns almost $10K more with a bachelor's than a HS diploma at age 22

Earn $40K more with a bachelor's than a HS diploma at age 44

Some college, no degree — Associate degree — Bachelor's degree
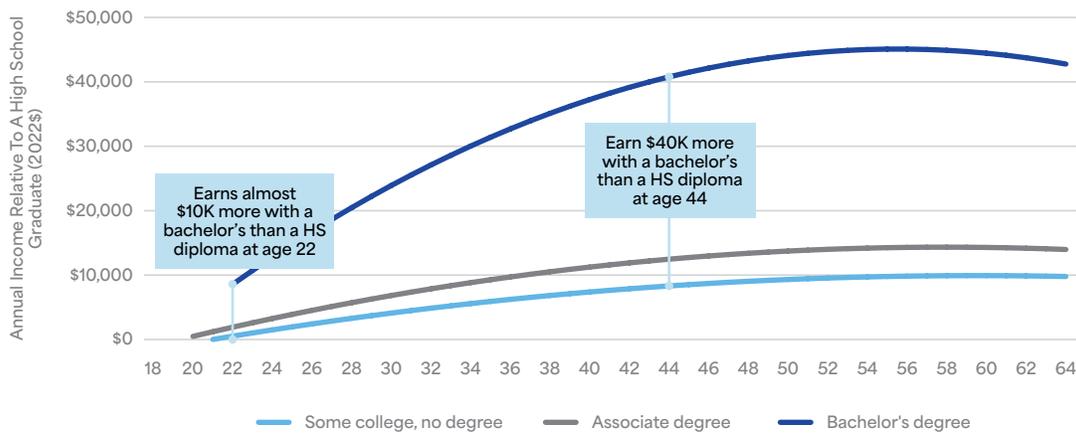
Estimates of additional earnings with a college education in Tennessee, relative to high school-educated workers, by age (2022$)

Data Note: Author's calculations using 2011-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) samples, limited to 18-to-64 year-old high school graduates in the labor force, not attending school, and excluding workers with graduate degrees. Tennessee statistics additionally exclude individuals who have lived in the state less than one year.

Source: Carruthers, Celeste K. *The Value of a College Education in Tennessee*, 2023

Understanding these paths between postsecondary education and careers is particularly important for the state's low-income students, as education beyond high school is a potential catalyst for economic mobility. Currently, Tennessee children are less likely to out-earn their parents in adulthood when compared to similar children across the nation.[73] Even more concerning, when looking at Black and White students in similar neighborhoods, White students experience higher rates of economic mobility than Black students.[74] These trends need to change, and postsecondary education could be the tool to improve economic mobility for the state's low-income students and students of color if there is understanding about which opportunities are of highest value. **Much is at stake for students from historically underserved groups as they choose which opportunities to pursue.**

We know postsecondary education matters but do not always know which opportunities lead to a thriving future. Students deserve access to information that allows them to trust the programs they pursue will translate to quality career opportunities. Counselors and advisors play an important role in supporting students, but they also need data to guide students toward fruitful paths. The new vision for Tennessee students should not be earning degrees or credentials for the sake of it but earning those that allow for a choice-filled life. To accomplish this vision, Tennessee must collect data on educational offerings and workforce needs and determine which degrees and credentials lead to economic independence.

SCORE recommends giving Tennesseans clear information on which degrees and credentials lead to careers.

» **Create a statewide definition for quality postsecondary degrees and credentials.** State agencies, in partnership with employers and nongovernmental education partners, should create a framework to define the elements of quality degrees and credentials. A definition for quality degrees and credentials should include indicators such as alignment to careers that are high-wage, in-demand, and/or offer societal value. Once the definition is identified, the state should align policy and programs to the definition of quality and share information about where those credentials are offered across the state.

» **Collect and report noncredit program data.** The state should require and appropriate funding for the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) to collect data on noncredit programs and capture a complete picture of educational offerings and their alignment with the labor market. Additionally, TBR should launch an alignment taskforce to improve alignment across noncredit and credit programs, creating more pathways for students to continue education.

» **Conduct an analysis of future skills needed for success in the workforce.** The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) should work with employers to determine the durable and technical skills that are most essential to create economic opportunity for Tennesseans. These identified skills should inform the intentional design and revision of postsecondary opportunities to prepare students for the state's future of work.

Early postsecondary and career experiences can be valuable opportunities for students, but quality is often unknown, and access is not equitable.

Early postsecondary and career experiences can kickstart a student's trajectory toward postsecondary education and a career. Unfortunately, limited data make it difficult to get a good picture of the quality of Tennessee's early postsecondary and career opportunities and the outcomes for students who participate.

Tennessee offers various early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) that allow students to earn college credits and valuable workforce training while still in high school. EPSOs include dual enrollment (DE), Advanced Placement (AP), dual credit, International Baccalaureate (IB), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Cambridge International Examinations, and industry certifications.[75] Starting in the 2018-19 school year, the General Assembly required each school district to give its students the opportunity to participate in at least four EPSOs.[76] Currently, Tennessee students participate in DE and AP at the highest rates, and earning postsecondary credit through an EPSO is one factor of whether or not the state considers a student college and career ready.[77]

Available data show that student groups participate in EPSOs at different rates. For almost all EPSOs, publicly available information on participation rates by race and socioeconomic group does not exist. Dual enrollment is the exception, with detailed information on DE at community colleges uniquely available through TBR dashboards. These data show that both Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in dual enrollment compared to overall K-12 demographics.[78]

STUDENTS OF COLOR ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN DUAL ENROLLMENT COMPARED TO THE OVERALL K-12 POPULATION

Percentage Of Students

All Students	60%	24%	13%	3%
Dual Enrollment Students	68%	13%	10%	8%	2%

0%   100%

■ White Students   ■ Black Students   ■ Other Students   ■ Hispanic Students   ■ Asian Students
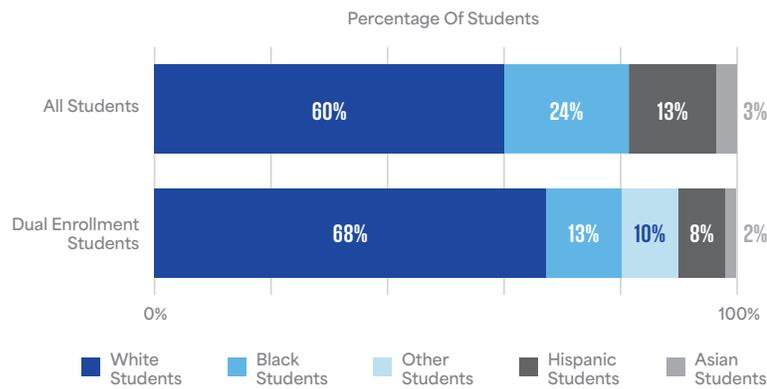
Dual enrollment student demographics across community and technical colleges compared to K-12 overall demographics

Data Note: The "Other Students" race category includes American Indian or Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races

Data Note: Undocumented students do not have access to the Dual Enrollment Grant, which has implications for dual enrollment access

Source: TDOE enrollment data downloads and TBR dual enrollment dashboard, 2023

EPSOs offer benefits to students, though not all are equally valuable or used to their full potential. National research finds that dual enrollment and early college models are associated with improved high school graduation, college enrollment, credit accumulation, and degree attainment outcomes.[79] But despite Tennessee's Dual Enrollment Grant fully covering up to five courses and the state spending on that grant totaling more than $48 million (higher than spending on Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect combined), more than half of community college DE students earn six credits or less – the equivalent of only two courses.[80] Beyond dual enrollment, Tennessee's dual credit exam pass rates are only 6 percent, meaning that fewer than one in 10 students participating in that EPSO receive college credit.[81] Further, research shows, for example, that the state's math dual credit course has no significant impact on postsecondary enrollment rates.[82] **The state and districts need data on the efficacy of EPSOs and their alignment to the labor market in order to evaluate the impact of investments, understand which are positively serving students, and prioritize the ones that are working well.**

Tennessee is also committed to providing students with early career opportunities like career and technical education (CTE), work-based learning (WBL), and industry credentials.[83] Currently, 55 percent of Tennessee students concentrate in CTE (students taking two or more CTE courses in a program of study) and 40,000 are enrolled in an approved WBL course.[84] These experiences can contribute to improved student outcomes, with research showing that CTE concentrators are more likely to pursue postsecondary education and experience larger future earnings when compared to non-CTE concentrators.[85]

Still, the vast majority of data around early career experiences, particularly for WBL and industry credentials, are not publicly available. While the state does have a list of promoted industry credentials aligned with employer need, there is no information on which students are earning those credentials and if they experience any economic return.[86] This lack of information is particularly concerning as national research finds that only some industry-recognized credentials have a positive impact on postsecondary success.[87] For WBL, the public has no consistent insight into the state's offerings and whether they offer value for students. Today, there are few mechanisms to ensure that a student's early career experiences are preparing them for a career enabling economic independence in the future.

QUALITY CYCLE

Evaluate Outcomes → Define Quality → Measure Experiences → Expand Access → (cycle)
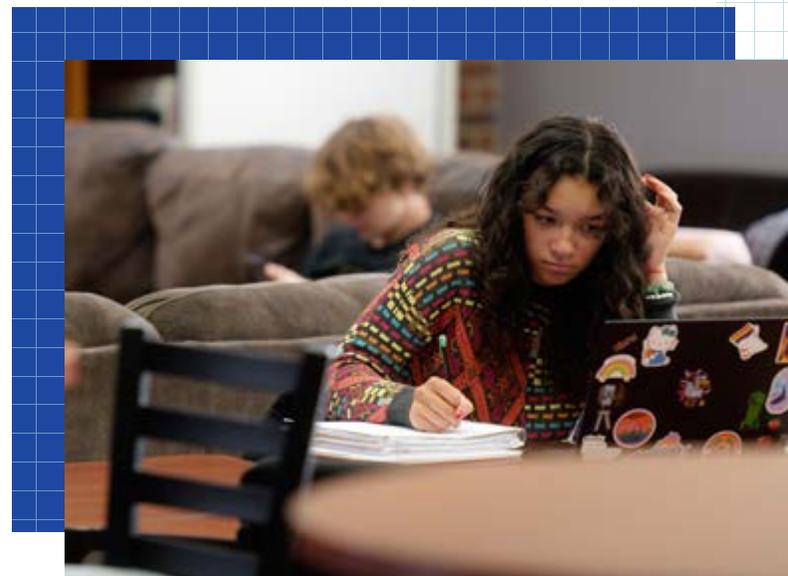
The next phase of policy improvements must go beyond simply offering opportunities and instead focus on quality. Early postsecondary and career experiences should not be offered to check a box. Each experience should be high-quality, positively impacting a students' ability to earn a degree or credential that prepares them for a career. Tennessee needs robust data to evaluate the quality of these experiences so the state can target investments to what is working and focus efforts on increasing equitable access to opportunities that are most beneficial for students.

SCORE recommends identifying and incentivizing quality early postsecondary and career experiences for students.

» **Identify and invest in quality EPSOs.** The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) should audit all EPSOs, publicly release the associated data, and create a promoted list based on which experiences result in improved college and career outcomes for students and are aligned to postsecondary program requirements. Districts should prioritize courses on that list for investments and student access, focusing on equitable access and preparation across racial and socioeconomic student groups and phasing out those not working for students.

» **Implement a rubric for evaluating quality of WBL opportunities.** TDOE, in partnership with TDLWD, should develop an evaluation rubric that identifies the detailed characteristics of high-quality WBL programs. The rubric should be completed for any WBL offering across the state, and these data should be reported publicly.

» **Support access to National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data.** The state should dedicate funds to a statewide NSC data contract that covers districts, postsecondary institutions, and their partner organizations. Stakeholders should leverage this data access to identify areas where they need to improve equitable access, expand supports for programs that are serving students well, and sunset programs that do not align well with postsecondary opportunities. Further, TBR should start submitting TCAT data to NSC to make it a more comprehensive accounting of Tennessee's postsecondary options.

Partnerships between education and industry are a promising, though often underutilized, model to create clear pathways toward careers.

Clear and effective pathways between education and careers are characterized by strong partnerships. Partnerships facilitate employer involvement with education to ensure educational offerings prepare students with the durable and technical skills needed to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow. Simultaneously, partnerships give students a more direct path toward career opportunities.
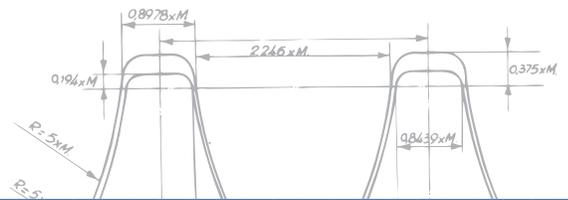
RHODE ISLAND NURSES INSTITUTE: AN INNOVATIVE CAREER-CONNECTED SCHOOL MODEL

The Rhode Island Nurses Institute (RINI) Middle College Charter High School in Providence, Rhode Island, trains its students to become nurses through rigorous curriculum and internships at local medical institutions. RINI was founded in 2011 as the first charter school in the country dedicated to the healthcare profession in response to a critical nursing shortage, especially for nurses of color. The model stands out for supporting its students to graduate with up to 20 college credits toward healthcare majors as well as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) license.

RINI infuses college preparation and health knowledge across both nursing and general education courses. All RINI students take college-level courses through institutional partnerships with the University of Rhode Island, the Community College of Rhode Island, and Nurses Middle College. Earning college credits while at RINI lessens the financial burden of a college degree and creates multiple pathways for students to choose from as they advance in the healthcare profession. To ensure learning is aligned to the skills currently needed in the healthcare profession, skilled nurses act as content experts that guide all teachers to integrate healthcare knowledge into all core content classes. Nurses from the industry also take on leadership and teaching roles within the school.

RINI serves students from across the state of Rhode Island, with 94 percent of RINI students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and over 80 percent identifying as students of color. Additionally, many RINI students enter ninth grade below grade level. RINI's positive impact on students is clear: 75 percent of graduates enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation and 76 percent of those enrollees returned for a second year. Additionally, every student who graduated in the Class of 2022 from RINI earned an industry credential and participated in work-based learning or an internship. Given this considerable success, RINI is planning to expand the model to other states, including Tennessee.

As Tennessee continues to invest in innovative school models, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College is a clear example of how we can reimagine traditional education models to ensure more students are prepared for careers through rigorous coursework, workforce-aligned early college and career experiences, and student-focused partnerships with postsecondary institutions and industry.

For partnerships to be most impactful, they must start with data. Employers must quantify their talent needs and analyze data to uncover their employment barriers. Educational institutions must have a clear understanding not only of students and their career aspirations but also of program design requirements and staffing capacity. The information should not be considered in silos, and both parties must be engaged throughout the process.

When used together, shared information across education and employers allows partnerships to maximize their impact for students. As an example, a partnership between BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST),

East Tennessee State University (ETSU), and Hamilton County Schools emerged when BCBST identified that only about 1,000 qualified Tennessee graduates were available for 4,100 of the company's IT job openings, and Hamilton County Schools identified a diverse cohort of interested students. The resulting BlueSky Institute offers an accelerated bachelor's degree program in computing and guarantees students a job upon successful completion of the program.[88] Ultimately, data can be leveraged to inform a variety of partnership opportunities that meet urgent employer needs, ranging from postsecondary degrees to internships and apprenticeships.

HTL UNIVERSITY:
A WORKFORCE-ALIGNED PARTNERSHIP

Ford Motor Company's $5.6 billion investment in BlueOval City, a sustainable vehicle manufacturing megacampus located in West Tennessee, presented local education leaders with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the region's economic future. To prepare for the 3,600-acre megacampus (set to open in 2025), superintendents Amie Marsh of Haywood County, Dr. John Combs of Tipton County, and Shawn Kimble of Lauderdale County engaged in a collaborative strategic planning process to create HTL University. The districts sought to better equip students with the foundational and specialized science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills needed to thrive in technical fields like those that will be in demand at BlueOval City. By forming a tridistrict collaborative, HTL University harnesses economies of scale to share expertise and maximize the efficiency of workforce-aligned investments in the educational community of the region.

To prepare for the projected 5,800 jobs that Blue-Oval City will bring to the region, HTL University takes a multipronged approach. For students, it expands in-demand pathways such as engineering and mechatronics, designs career exposure opportunities like preapprenticeships and work-based learning, and creates skills-based STEM learning experiences. To strengthen STEM teaching capacity, HTL University hopes to support robust educator training and invest in STEM teacher fellowships and stipends. HTL University also plans to embed family and student advising into its programming to improve access to postsecondary and industry opportunities at all levels. Lastly, industry partners will have a seat at the table through an advisory committee, keeping business voices central to key decision-making.

HTL University is unique in that it is a rural district collaborative designed to proactively respond to a large-scale regional industry investment. This innovative partnership repositions the employer as a catalyst for change in the education system to prepare students for future labor market needs. By investing in the students, teachers, and families of West Tennessee, HTL University is preparing its community to meet the needs of BlueOval City. HTL University creates a roadmap for future rural district collaboratives that hope to proactively take advantage of industry investment to create effective pathways toward careers for Tennessee students.
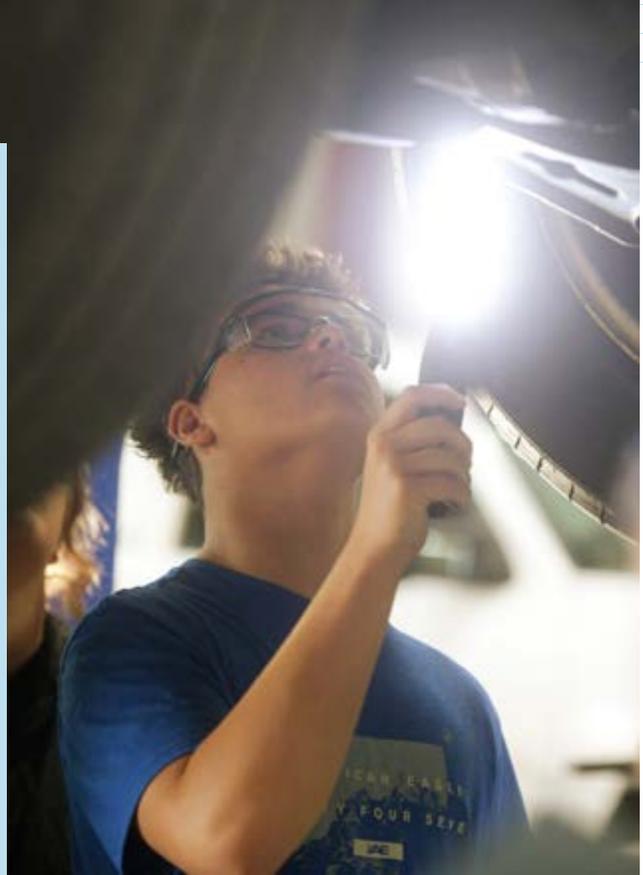
Apprenticeships are an education-employer partnership model that provide students with credentials aligned to workforce need. These are paid work-based learning programs that prepare apprentices with skills that lead to full-time employment, closing the work experience gap students often face.[89] There are also preapprenticeships, which integrate academic and technical training for students as early as high school.[90] Through these valuable opportunities, students are exposed to the world of work with a direct path to a career. Research shows that employers retain 94 percent of apprentices and receive an estimated return of $1.46 for every $1 invested in apprenticeships.[91] Apprenticeships are so impactful, in part, because they are characterized by extensive employer involvement, from start to finish, that ensures the experience is highly relevant and valuable.

Despite these benefits, apprenticeship programs are not common in the United States, although they are starting to grow in popularity.[92] There are 7,231 active apprentices in Tennessee – up 6 percent from the previous year and 65 percent from 10 years ago.[93] Integrating the apprenticeship model in Tennessee's education system creates opportunities for students to gain durable, portable skills that set them up for long-term career success and to earn a valuable degree or credential through paid training.

Partnerships are also a tool to offer students early career exposure. In a 2023 Gallup and Walton Family Foundation survey of students in grades 5-12, students gave their schools a C+ for teaching them about potential careers, suggesting low levels of career connectiveness in K-12.[94] Bringing experienced industry leaders into the classroom is one way to prioritize career connectiveness. However, challenges with recruitment and retention can pose barriers to bringing professionals into the classroom.[95] Schools can also commit to exploring partnership opportunities through CTE programs, preapprenticeships, and employer visits. Partnerships that start early on and prioritize employer engagement can provide valuable early workforce exposure for students, helping them recognize their passions and preparing them for a long-term career and choice-filled life.

Partnerships between industry and education benefit both students and employers and should, therefore, be a pillar of education and work systems. **Bringing together systems of education and work must be of central importance as the state responds to evolving workforce needs.** By prioritizing data-driven partnerships between employers and education providers, Tennessee can create a vision of student success that spans education and industry to move the needle for employers and students alike.
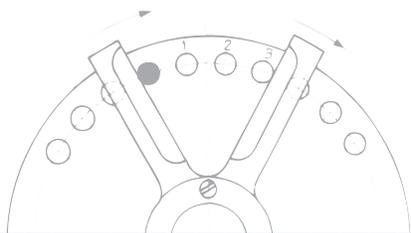
SCORE recommends developing strong partnerships across education and industry to increase alignment.

» **Incubate data-driven partnerships.** Employers and educational institutions across the state should commit to using data to drive partnerships. Further, data should be leveraged to monitor progress toward goals and evaluate partnerships. To support one form of data-driven partnership, the state should launch a state-funded grant for institutions to engage employers and redesign postsecondary academic programs to better align with labor market need.

» **Incentivize apprenticeship programs that lead to degrees or credentials.** TDLWD should launch a state-funded grant for businesses to partner with colleges, universities, and other intermediaries to develop data-driven apprenticeship programs that offer students a job-embedded pathway toward a postsecondary degree or credential.

» **Identify opportunities for career partnerships in K-12 to increase early career exposure.** TDOE should support avenues for industry professionals to deliver instructional content, either through partnership with a licensed teacher or other flexible staffing approaches. For example, updating state law to allow maximum class size waivers for classrooms where industry experts are coteaching could encourage the use of career-focused innovative staffing models. Further, TDOE should identify additional opportunities for early career experiences such as preapprenticeships.

Building
A BRIGHTER FUTURE

2024 Priority
ENSURE K-12 SUPPORTS MEET STUDENT NEEDS

K-12 schools and school districts experienced several major changes over the last three years. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unexpected need for remote instruction, exacerbated existing challenges of recruiting licensed educators, and disrupted student learning at all levels. The landmark Tennessee Literacy Success Act changed the way educator preparation providers (EPPs) and educators teach literacy by centering instruction around foundational literacy skills and standards. Schools launched nationally leading high-dosage tutoring (HDT) and summer learning programs to accelerate student learning. And the state comprehensively modernized the way Tennessee school districts are funded by passing the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act, which ensures that state dollars are allocated according to student need. K-12 leaders are still navigating the implications of the pandemic and the implementation of these new important initiatives.

As the state adjusts to these shifts, it is important to maintain momentum on the path to improved student outcomes. Moving forward requires identifying the most impactful ways to prioritize student learning in the context of recent changes and supporting the most effective approaches. Educators, instruction, and learning environments are three levers the state can explore to support all students to achieve and mark the next frontier for its education system.

To ensure K-12 supports are meeting student needs, Tennessee should:

1. **Support teachers at each stage of their career to further student access to excellent educators.**

2. **Adopt a plan for instructional coherence to maximize learning for the state's lowest-performing students.**

3. **Solve Tennessee's charter school facilities challenge.**

With teachers as the leading contributor to student success, inequitable access to highly effective teachers is of greatest concern.

Teachers are the most important in-school factor impacting student achievement.[96] However, many school districts and charter management organizations struggle to find qualified teachers. In Fall 2022, there were over 1,000 vacant positions across the state (defined as unfilled teaching positions that result in the lack of course availability), with vacancies concentrated in middle grades, English as a Second Language (ESL), world language, and special education.[97] Importantly, shortages in Tennessee are highly localized and dependent on factors such as subject area, distance from EPPs, size of district salary increases, and working conditions.[98] Relatedly, there is an inequitable distribution of effective teachers across the state; **research shows that Tennessee's low-income students and students of**

color were between 5 and 15 percentage points less likely to be exposed to highly effective teachers.[99]

There are many strategies in place in Tennessee to address these teacher pipeline challenges; these include the statewide Grow Your Own teacher apprenticeship program, local residency models, and teaching as a profession programs of study for high school students.[100] But it is difficult to gauge the impact of these strategies as they are in the early stages of implementation, operate on a small scale, and/or have minimal reporting to monitor progress. We do know that overall, the total number of teacher vacancies across the state changed very little over the last two reporting periods.[101] In the coming years, continuously innovating and improving pipeline strategies and expanding their reach to the regions and subject areas most impacted by vacancies is imperative to maximize their impact.

INNOVATING TO SUPPORT TALENT PIPELINES: NASHVILLE CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL

Nashville Classical Charter School (NCCS) is one of the top-performing elementary and middle schools in the state, serving a racially, economically, and geographically diverse group of students in grades K-8. NCCS is in the process of opening two new schools by 2030, while already facing staffing challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help meet its staffing demands, NCCS created the Lead Mentor Teacher program in 2022.

The NCCS Lead Mentor Teacher program intends to strengthen the school's existing resident teacher program and support highly effective teachers to stay in the classroom long term or to assume school-level leadership positions in the future. Lead mentor teachers (LMTs) receive a $10,000 annual stipend and participate in biweekly cohort meetings and school culture walkthroughs. Teacher residents receive weekly professional development and mentorship from LMTs and are given the opportunity to teach full-length classes once a week to advance their skills.

Together, the programs advance several key priorities:

» **Increasing student achievement** by bolstering staff capacity to provide students with support

» **Accelerating leadership development** by offering LMTs robust professional development and on-the-job training opportunities to equip them for future leadership roles

» **Improving teacher retention of new and veteran educators** by providing mentoring for new teachers and increased compensation, flexibility, and sense of purpose for LMTs

» **Building and sustaining a diverse school community** by creating new teaching and leadership pathways with a goal of ensuring the school's staff match the diversity of the student body

These programs have potential to prepare new teachers to be highly effective, retain highly effective veteran teachers who want to stay in the classroom long term, and develop a pipeline of future leaders. Looking forward, NCCS will focus on refining professional development, adjusting supports for teacher residents, and identifying sustainable funding in order to improve and scale the LMT and resident teacher programs and maximize their positive impact on educators and students.

In addition to Grow Your Own and teacher residencies, school districts are increasingly using permits to address pipeline challenges. Permits are emergency credentials used when districts cannot find a licensed educator to fill a position. Recent policy changes have allowed districts more flexibility in the awarding of permits.[102] These flexibilities have contributed to the number of initial permits issued more than tripling between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.[103]

While permit holders have expressed an interest in teaching, barriers to them obtaining full licensure remain. Less than half of permits awarded during the 2018-19 school year were converted to licensure within the three-year time frame that permits are active, and less than one-fifth of permits issued in the 2021-22 school year were converted to full licensure after one year.[104] While many factors may contribute to this low conversion rate, financial considerations may be one of them. A study of Tennessee EPPs found that financial burdens of education costs are the primary concern for current and prospective educators – a concern which could reasonably apply for permit holders as well, alongside other factors.[105] Supporting permit holders to complete their licensure affords those staffing hard-to-fill positions the foundational training to be a highly effective teacher and is a strategy to retain interested talent in the educator workforce.

TENNESSEE MUST ENSURE TEACHING PERMITS ARE CONVERTING TO LICENSED EDUCATORS

	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22*
Initial Permits Issued	447	528	462	1465
Permits Converted To Licensure (to date)	190	193	156	290
Conversation Rate (to date)	43%	37%	34%	20%

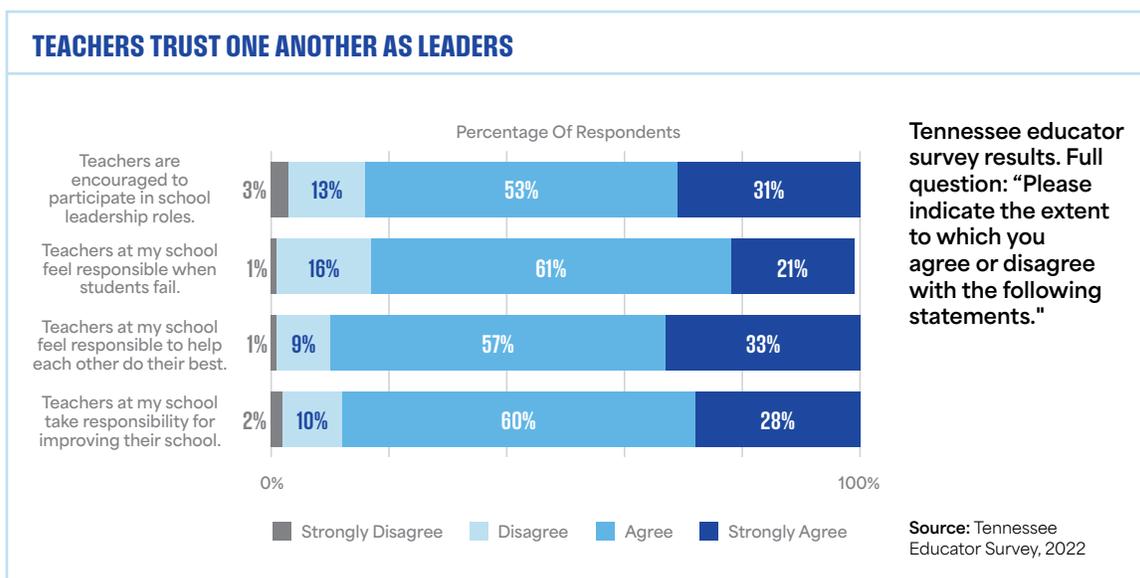**Number of permits issued and converted over time (to date)**

Data Note: Permit holders have three years to convert their permit to a teaching license. 2019-20 permits expired in 2022-23, 2020-21 permits expire in 2023-24, and 2021-22 permits expire in 2024-25. Permit holders have until permit expiration to convert to licensure, and therefore the conversion rate in this table (shaded cells) will require continued updates.

Source: TDOE teacher vacancy data presentation for SBE, 2023

There is also a need to better support and leverage experienced educators. In Tennessee, teachers are viewed by their peers as leaders in the classroom and school. For instance, 90 percent of respondents to the state's 2023 educator survey believe that teachers feel responsible for helping each other do their best, and 88 percent agree that teachers take responsibility for improving their school.[106] However, these leadership roles are often not formalized or rewarded. Modifying the structure of teaching roles with a strategy known as advanced teaching roles introduces formalized leadership functions to maximize the impact of the most effective teachers while creating a system of support for other teachers.[107] An example of advanced teacher roles is the multiclassroom leader (MCL), a highly effective teacher who receives additional compensation for maintaining their own class roster while assuming mentorship and coaching responsibilities for a team of two to six teachers.[108] Research shows that in schools implementing MCLs, student achievement improves and the involved teachers become more effective.[109]

TEACHERS TRUST ONE ANOTHER AS LEADERS

Percentage Of Respondents

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	3%	13%	53%	31%
Teachers at my school feel responsible when students fail.	1%	16%	61%	21%
Teachers at my school feel responsible to help each other do their best.	1%	9%	57%	33%
Teachers at my school take responsibility for improving their school.	2%	10%	60%	28%

0% — 100%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Tennessee educator survey results. Full question: "Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements."

Source: Tennessee Educator Survey, 2022

Data access is essential to successfully implement strategies to increase student access to highly effective educators. State and district leaders do not currently have the necessary human capital insights to make decisions related to educator effectiveness, preparation, recruitment, retention, and development – decisions that are even more important to tackle strategically in order to maximize the impact of the new TISA funding formula.[110] For example, information on aggregate educator level of effectiveness is not publicly available, making it difficult for state leaders to know which communities struggle with access to highly effective teachers and to evaluate how recent pipeline strategies impact student access to excellent educators. Additionally, district leaders could benefit from reports that identify and compare state and district trends in educator retention by race, level of effectiveness, and experience level. These actionable insights would help districts develop targeted retention strategies, use investments strategically, and monitor progress to solve educator workforce challenges. It is imperative that stakeholders have data to improve their understanding of the educator workforce and make data-driven decisions about future changes to educator policy.

Building a brighter future for Tennessee students starts with support for an expanded educator pipeline and better supported educators. As the state ensures the necessary educator supports exist, better data will allow for the evaluation of new strategies to bolster the teacher pipeline as well as the implementation of innovative strategies to further student access to highly effective educators.

SCORE recommends supporting teachers at each stage of their career to further student access to excellent educators.

» **Innovate to bolster the teacher pipeline.** The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) should evaluate teacher pipeline initiatives, such as Grow Your Own, to understand their reach and efficacy, using those data to both continuously improve

programs and to replicate what works in communities with the greatest need. Further, staffing models that leverage advanced teacher roles – such as the multiclassroom leader – should be piloted so that teachers have compensated opportunities for career advancement in the classroom and more students have access to highly effective teachers. Findings of the pilot should be publicly reported in an effort to scale effective practices.

» **Remove barriers to licensure for permit holders.** The state should invest in a grant fund for permit-holding teachers to offset the cost of completing EPP coursework toward licensure.

» **Commit to data collection and public reporting.** TDOE should publish updated educator labor market reports that include disaggregated teacher effectiveness data. The data should be used to identify areas experiencing the largest shortages, inform implementation of long-term strategies to address pipeline challenges, and make strategic decisions to increase student access to highly effective teachers.

Tennessee has shown a consistent commitment to improving K-12 instruction, but not all recent efforts seamlessly integrate into existing practice.

In 2021, the state passed and invested in two landmark policies impacting K-12 instruction. First, the Tennessee Literacy Success Act required systematic foundational literacy skills instruction in the classroom and mandated adoption and purchase of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) in English language arts (ELA).[111] Second, the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act launched the TN ALL Corps to deliver HDT, created summer learning camps to accelerate student learning, and required tutoring and/or summer learning camps for third graders not yet proficient in ELA before they could move on to fourth grade.[112] These steps reflect the state's strong commitment to improving early literacy instruction, though there was not a comprehensive discussion about how these efforts functioned alongside existing practices.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING

High-dosage tutoring is an instructional structure through which student supports are provided. The following design principles are characteristic of high-quality high-dosage tutoring programs.[113]

Design Principle	Best Practice
Frequency	Three or more sessions per week, with each lasting 30-60 minutes
Group Size	Tutor ratios of 1:3 in grades K-5 and of 1:4 in grades 6-12
Scheduling	Sessions integrated into the school day
Materials	Use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) aligned to classroom content
Prioritization	Targeting lower-performing students who can benefit from additional instruction
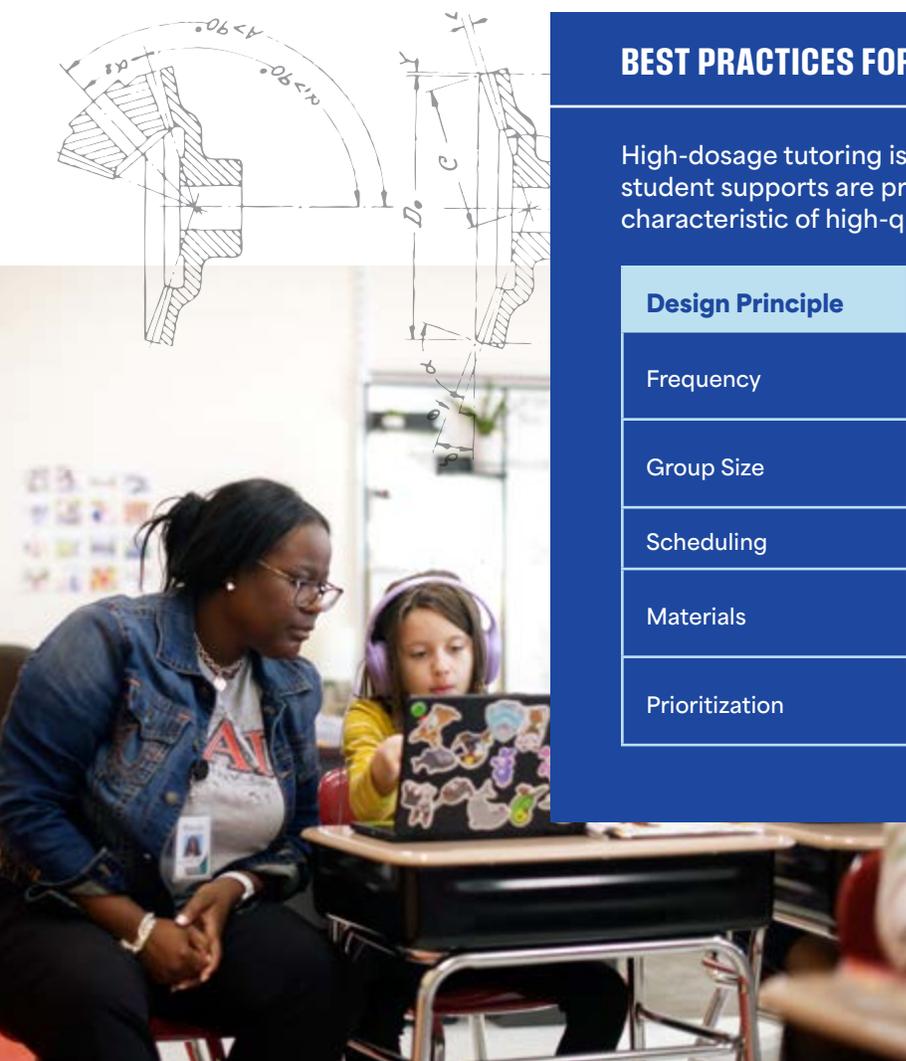
The recent policy introductions and investments are not the state's first time focusing on improving instruction. In 2014, the state introduced the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) Framework to support students performing below grade level in ELA and math.[114] RTI² was intended to identify individual student needs as early as possible and provide tiered intervention before evaluation for special education services, working to meet the instructional needs of students who needed additional supports but not necessarily special education. Additionally, a goal of RTI² was to prevent overidentification of learning disabilities. With RTI², schools are required to schedule and staff two tiers of small-group intervention based on student need (Tier 2 and Tier 3) for between 30 and 60 minutes each day. Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports are offered for students working below grade level outside of the Tier 1 core instructional time, and districts are encouraged to use different materials than those used in the classroom. Tier 3 supports are reserved for students who are furthest behind.[115] The RTI² system was further improved in 2016 when a revised framework reemphasized the importance of Tier 1 core instruction for all students in addition to the Tier 2 and 3 interventions, but recommendations around use of different materials and assessments during intervention blocks remained intact.

EARLY LITERACY CONTEXT IN TENNESSEE

Over the last decade, Tennessee has worked hard to improve early literacy instruction.

| Revised ELA standards and adopted the RTI² Framework	Revised the RTI² Framework to emphasize a focus on core instruction	Passed the Tennessee Literacy Success Act and the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation & Student Acceleration Act
2014	**2016**	**2021**
TN decided what it would teach across grade levels and how it would remediate students who were behind through tiered support.	TN created a clear focus on strong core instruction for all students alongside tiered support that was different from core instruction.	TN required adoption of HQIM for core literacy instruction, instruction grounded in foundational skills, and provided funding for HDT as another setting for student academic support.

Source: SCORE Early Literacy Success For All Students, 2023
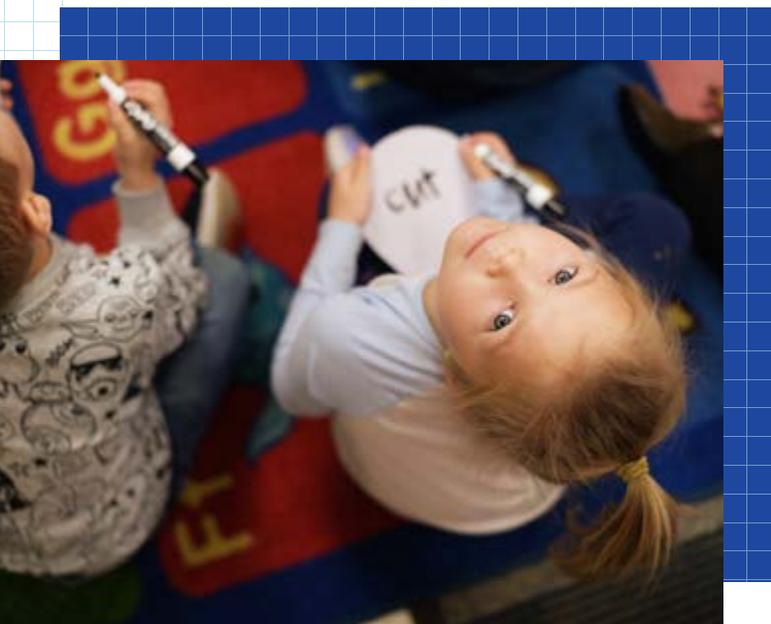
While RTI², the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, and the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act were all critical steps toward improving student learning, they do not yet seamlessly fit together. For instance, the lowest-performing students on the state's third-grade ELA assessment are statutorily required to receive HDT to be promoted to fourth grade. In the RTI² framework, those same students would likely be identified for Tier 3 instruction. Schools are left with the difficult question of how to fit both HDT and Tier 3 into a student's day. This confusion may result in students receiving tutoring misaligned to research-backed best practices in order to overcome logistical hurdles. For example, schools may provide tutoring outside of the school day, in less intensive environments (e.g. not in small groups), or at a lower frequency. When districts must dedicate limited resources to navigating logistics and compliance, it threatens the quality of student supports and takes the focus away from student needs.

To better understand the complex intersection of instructional supports, SCORE conducted a case study with four districts to monitor student growth when participating in different support structures according to the districts' reading screeners. The case study found that students who started the furthest behind grew the most in an HDT structure that leveraged HQIM aligned with the content of core instruction. Moreover, placement in RTI^2 Tier 3 instruction, where high-quality instructional materials from the classroom were not utilized, resulted in a decline in performance for most students. Placing students in two different settings with different materials — when they were already struggling — was not an effective literacy support strategy. Ultimately, the instructionally coherent HDT structure (with aligned HQIM) was more effective at improving ELA performance for students who started out further behind when compared to placing them in Tier 2 and Tier 3 structures. The case study results align with numerous studies that show HDT meaningfully increases student achievement.[116]

HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING EFFECTIVELY DRIVES GROWTH FOR STUDENTS THE FURTHEST BEHIND

Students Without IEPs: Average Composite Score Percentile Growth From Beginning To End Of Year				
Beginning-Of-Year Percentile Performance Range	Core Literacy Instruction Only	HDT + Core Instruction	RTI^2 Tier 2 + Core Instruction	RTI^2 Tier 3 + Core Instruction
1st-10th Percentile	8.6	19.3*	11.0	5.7
11th-25th Percentile	11.5	11.7	7.8*	-1.2*
26th-40th Percentile	6.5	5.7	1.6*	-1.6*
41st-99th Percentile	-0.5	-1.6	0.8*	-5.9*

Average percentile growth on the composite score of Tennessee's universal literacy screeners between the beginning and end of year administration for 15,937 1st-3rd grade students without IEPs

Data Note: Statistically significant results are displayed with an asterisk using a .05 level of significance. The trends above were also consistent when analyzing growth between the beginning and midyear administrations of universal literacy screeners as well as midyear and end-of-year administrations, separately.

Data Note: Results in this table are for students without individualized education plans (IEPs). The participation rate for students with IEPs in HDT was too low for analysis.

Source: SCORE Early Literacy Success For All Students, 2023

As this case study was limited to four districts and only inclusive of ELA, there remains more to learn. There are remaining questions about how the data look statewide, the role of summer learning, and which instructional supports are most effective at improving math instruction. Conducting additional analysis to learn which strategies best support students, and aligning funding to those strategies, is an essential next step.

BRISTOL TENNESSEE CITY SCHOOLS: AN INSTRUCTIONALLY COHERENT VISION FOR EARLY LITERACY

Throughout the 2022-23 school year, Bristol Tennessee City Schools (BTCS) engaged in a pilot to enhance their high-dosage tutoring (HDT) programs by developing and implementing a new vision for K-3 early literacy support. This new vision aims to systematically support students in meeting grade-level expectations by ensuring the students working below grade level receive additional instruction aligned with the high-quality instructional materials and assessments used for core instruction — rather than a different suite of materials used specifically for intervention.

Once this instructionally coherent vision for early literacy support was established, the district was able to break down silos between core instruction and intervention, enabling a more strategic use of staff and time. BTCS leadership reimagined the RTI^2 block with interventionists pushing into the classroom after core reading instruction, providing a second lesson a day for the students working below grade level. They also identified an opportunity to increase total staffing while minimizing costs by utilizing part-time educational assistant (EA) roles, which are paid on the district's hourly wage scale instead of the teacher salary scale. Lastly, the district used the curriculum-embedded assessment from the Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement to track student progress and tailor instruction across staff and settings.

With the new model, the district was able to serve more students by the end of the year, and students in the pilot showed significant growth in reading. BTCS now plans to implement this instructionally coherent model across all first- and second-grade classrooms. The BTCS example demonstrates that by strategically using existing resources aligned to a coherent academic vision, the path for all students to read on grade level is achievable, sustainable, and scalable.

Early skills in reading and math set up students for long-term success, and all students deserve a strong start in elementary school that prepares them for success in education and the workforce.[117] Using data to determine which instructional practices have the greatest potential to positively impact student achievement and then prioritizing those practices is critical as the state takes the next steps in effecting transformative change for students. The data that are available suggest a need to adopt an instructionally coherent approach by intentionally aligning Tennessee's RTI[2] system with the best practices of HDT structures.

SCORE recommends adopting a plan for instructional coherence to maximize learning for the state's lowest-performing students.

» **Revise the RTI[2] framework.** TDOE should revise the framework to establish and define the elements of high-quality high-dosage tutoring as the research-based structure for small-group support beyond core instruction and RTI[2] as the process that guides decision-making. The State Board of Education should update its academic rules to reflect the new framework and emphasize the importance of instructional coherence.

» **Improve reporting to better understand the full suite of academic supports students are receiving.** Students may be receiving high-dosage tutoring, summer learning, Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports, or any mixture of the three. It is important for TDOE to improve reporting on the services students are receiving so the state can evaluate its recent investments and illuminate which supports are driving positive impacts for students in both literacy and math.

» **Align funding to the strategies working for students.** Currently, districts are using a variety of state and federal funds for student learning supports. As TISA is implemented and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds wind down, TDOE should prioritize allocating resources to support the most effective strategies for improving literacy and math performance for students.


Public charter schools contribute to improved student outcomes in Tennessee, particularly for students with the highest needs, but these schools lack access to affordable facilities where students can learn.

There are 114 public charter schools in Tennessee serving more than 43,000 students and operating under six different authorizers.[118] The state's charter schools are public schools, free to attend, operated by nonprofit organizations, and must enroll any student who applies regardless of special needs or prior academic performance.[119] Research suggests that charter schools are an effective strategy to support students from historically underserved groups — a finding that resonates with evidence from Tennessee.[120] Tennessee's public charter schools serve, on average, a higher percentage of students of color and economically disadvantaged students than their district counterparts.[121] In the 2022-23 school year, 80 percent of public charter schools met or exceeded student growth expectations (scored a TVAAS Level 3 or higher) compared to 60 percent of noncharters in the same districts.[122]

80 PERCENT OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS MET OR EXCEEDED GROWTH EXPECTATIONS
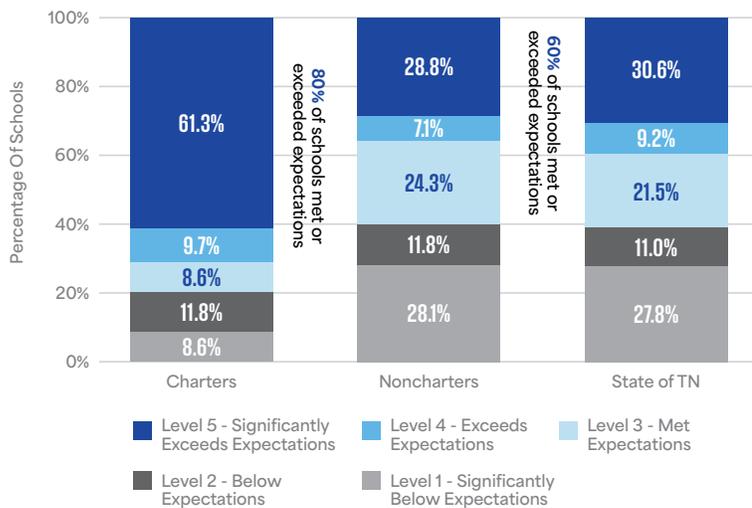
Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) ratings distribution by school type compared to the state, 2023

Percentage Of Schools

	Charters	Noncharters	State of TN
Level 5 - Significantly Exceeds Expectations	61.3%	28.8%	30.6%
Level 4 - Exceeds Expectations	9.7%	7.1%	9.2%
Level 3 - Met Expectations	8.6%	24.3%	21.5%
Level 2 - Below Expectations	11.8%	11.8%	11.0%
Level 1 - Significantly Below Expectations	8.6%	28.1%	27.8%

80% of schools met or exceeded expectations (Charters)
60% of schools met or exceeded expectations (Noncharters)

Data Note: Charter and noncharter data are not inclusive of the Achievement School District (ASD). Noncharter data reflect performance of noncharter schools in districts with public charter options

Source: TDOE TVAAS composites data downloads, 2023

Though public charter schools are one important way to advance student achievement, they do not do so without challenges. Tennessee's public charter schools do not have the same ability as traditional public schools to support building costs through bonds and tax revenues, creating an obstacle to get students in a physical building for learning.[123] Tennessee has made progress in addressing this challenge with the inclusion of a charter direct allocation in TISA; however, despite that improvement, charters still face a notable gap between the funds available to cover facilities costs and the actual cost of facilities.[124] An analysis of the "facility gap" for Tennessee charter schools found an unmet need of more than $700 per student – the equivalent of hiring around six additional teachers per school.[125] This gap requires charter schools to make significant tradeoffs. For example, schools may have to divert funds from other sources to cover facilities costs, taking money away from resources to support student instruction, or may have to delay opening due to inability to secure a facility.

Tennessee's public charter school students, who are primarily economically disadvantaged and students of color, deserve access to high-quality school buildings. All students should be able to attend school in a building conducive to learning without funds being diverted from student instruction. And no student should have to wait to access a high-quality public charter school because of the lack of a facility. As the next priority for advancing the state's high-quality charter sector, Tennessee should remove this obstacle to improving student achievement by comprehensively meeting the facilities needs of its public charter schools.

SCORE recommends solving Tennessee's charter school facilities challenge.

» **Recommit to the state's charter facilities fund.** The previously existing charter facilities fund is no longer in operation. By reviving the fund with at least $22 million in recurring funding, its previous balance, the state could provide public charter schools a sustainable source of financial support for ongoing facilities costs.

» **Create a revolving loan fund with philanthropic support.** A one-time $10 million state investment could be matched by philanthropic dollars to create a fully sustainable revolving low-interest loan fund to reduce the initial cost of facilities financing. This initial investment could be leveraged to create an overall fund of hundreds of millions of dollars that recycles itself every several years. This revolving fund could be a solution for the upfront hurdle of facility purchase, construction, or renovation, paving the way for the opening of additional high-quality public charter schools.

» **Increase access to existing publicly funded facilities.** The legislature should update state law to establish clear definitions for underutilized and vacant district facilities and procedures for charter schools to have priority for accessing those facilities at a fair price. While these facilities have already been financed with taxpayers' money, there is not currently a complete picture of how many exist and how public charter schools can access them. Facilitating access to properties already designed as schools that would otherwise sit empty is good stewardship of taxpayer dollars, helps remove a large burden for charter schools, and allows for more focus on what matters most – student learning.

Building

A BRIGHTER FUTURE

2024 ADVOCACY AGENDA

Expand Student Opportunity By Strengthening Foundational Policies

As a state dedicated to continuous student-centered improvement, Tennessee should consider the following in its next wave of reforms:

PRIORITIZE THE USE OF LONGITUDINAL DATA TO DRIVE STUDENT OUTCOMES.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Create public-facing dashboards.	Office of Evidence and Impact (OEI)
Add career-relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes to the TN DATA system.	Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) OEI
Bolster the state's TN DATA system by elevating efforts through state law and developing a model data-sharing agreement.	General Assembly OEI Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA)

ENHANCE THE TENNESSEE PROMISE SCHOLARSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Incentivize on-time completion and transfer by allowing Tennessee Promise students who earn an associate degree on time to continue receiving their last-dollar scholarship for one semester of continued education.	General Assembly
Fund Tennessee Promise completion grants permanently.	General Assembly
Scale meta-majors across the state's community colleges.	TBR
Publicly report data on the postsecondary programs of study Tennessee Promise students choose to pursue.	THEC

REVISE THE POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING FORMULA TO PRIORITIZE LONG-TERM STUDENT SUCCESS.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Refine the focus of the outcomes-based funding formula metrics.	THEC Formula review committee
Ensure all outcomes-based funding formula metrics are based on student outcomes.	
Ensure the outcomes-based funding premium structure is aligned to student opportunity.	

*Review the full priority and recommendation information starting on **page 14** of the report.*

Build Effective Pathways Between Education And Careers

The new future of student success hinges on improved alignment across education and careers. To improve alignment and build effective pathways between education and careers, Tennessee should:

GIVE TENNESSEANS CLEAR INFORMATION ON WHICH DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS LEAD TO CAREERS.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Create a statewide definition for quality postsecondary degrees and credentials.	THEC TBR TDOE TDLWD Employers Nongovernment education partners
Collect and report noncredit program data.	TBR General Assembly
Conduct an analysis of future skills needed for success in the workforce.	TDLWD Employers

IDENTIFY AND INCENTIVIZE QUALITY EARLY POSTSECONDARY AND CAREER EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Identify and invest in quality early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs).	TDOE Districts
Implement a rubric for evaluating quality of work-based learning opportunities.	TDOE TDLWD Districts
Support access to National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data with a statewide contract.	General Assembly

DEVELOP STRONG PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY TO INCREASE ALIGNMENT.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Incubate data-driven partnerships.	Employers Postsecondary institutions General Assembly
Incentivize apprenticeship programs that lead to degrees or credentials.	TDLWD General Assembly Employers Postsecondary institutions
Identify opportunities for career partnerships in K-12 that support industry professionals to deliver instructional content to increase early career exposure.	TDOE General Assembly
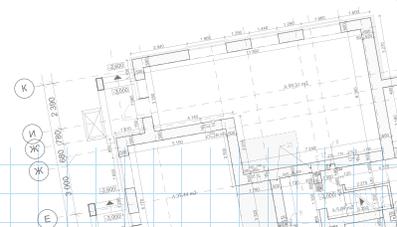
Ensure K-12 Supports Meet Student Needs

Educators, instruction, and learning environments are three levers the state can explore to support all students to achieve and mark the next frontier for its education system. To ensure K-12 supports are meeting student needs, Tennessee should:

SUPPORT TEACHERS AT EACH STAGE OF THEIR CAREER TO FURTHER STUDENT ACCESS TO EXCELLENT EDUCATORS.

| Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Innovate to bolster the teacher pipeline by evaluating the impact of current initiatives and piloting new initiatives such as advanced teacher roles.	TDOE
Remove barriers to licensure for permit holders by investing in a grant fund to offset the cost of completing educator preparation provider (EPP) coursework.	General Assembly
Commit to educator labor market data collection and public reporting.	TDOE

ADOPT A PLAN FOR INSTRUCTIONAL COHERENCE TO MAXIMIZE LEARNING FOR THE STATE'S LOWEST-PERFORMING STUDENTS.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Revise the RTI^2 framework to establish and define the elements of high-quality high-dosage tutoring as the research-based structure for small-group support beyond core instruction and RTI^2 as the process that guides decision-making.	TDOE State Board of Education (SBE)
Improve reporting to better understand the full suite of academic supports students are receiving and which are driving positive impacts for students in both literacy and math.	TDOE
Align funding to the instructional strategies working for students.	TDOE

## SOLVE TENNESSEE'S CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES CHALLENGE.

Recommendation	Key Actor(s)
Recommit to the state's charter facilities fund.	General Assembly
Create a revolving loan fund with philanthropic support.	General Assembly Philanthropy
Increase access to existing publicly funded facilities.	General Assembly
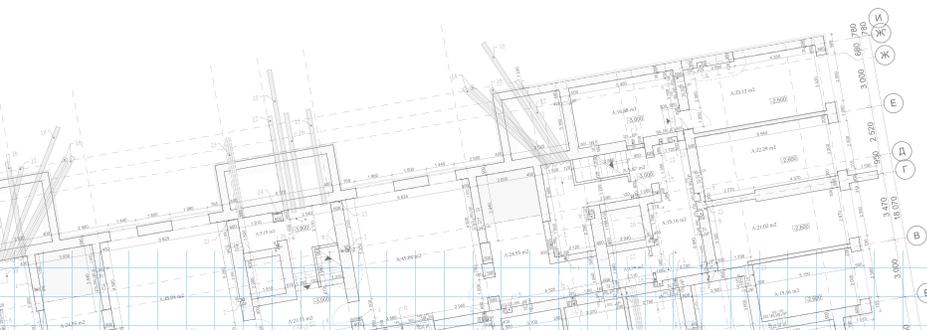
About SCORE

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, with a mission to catalyze transformative change in Tennessee education so all students can achieve success.
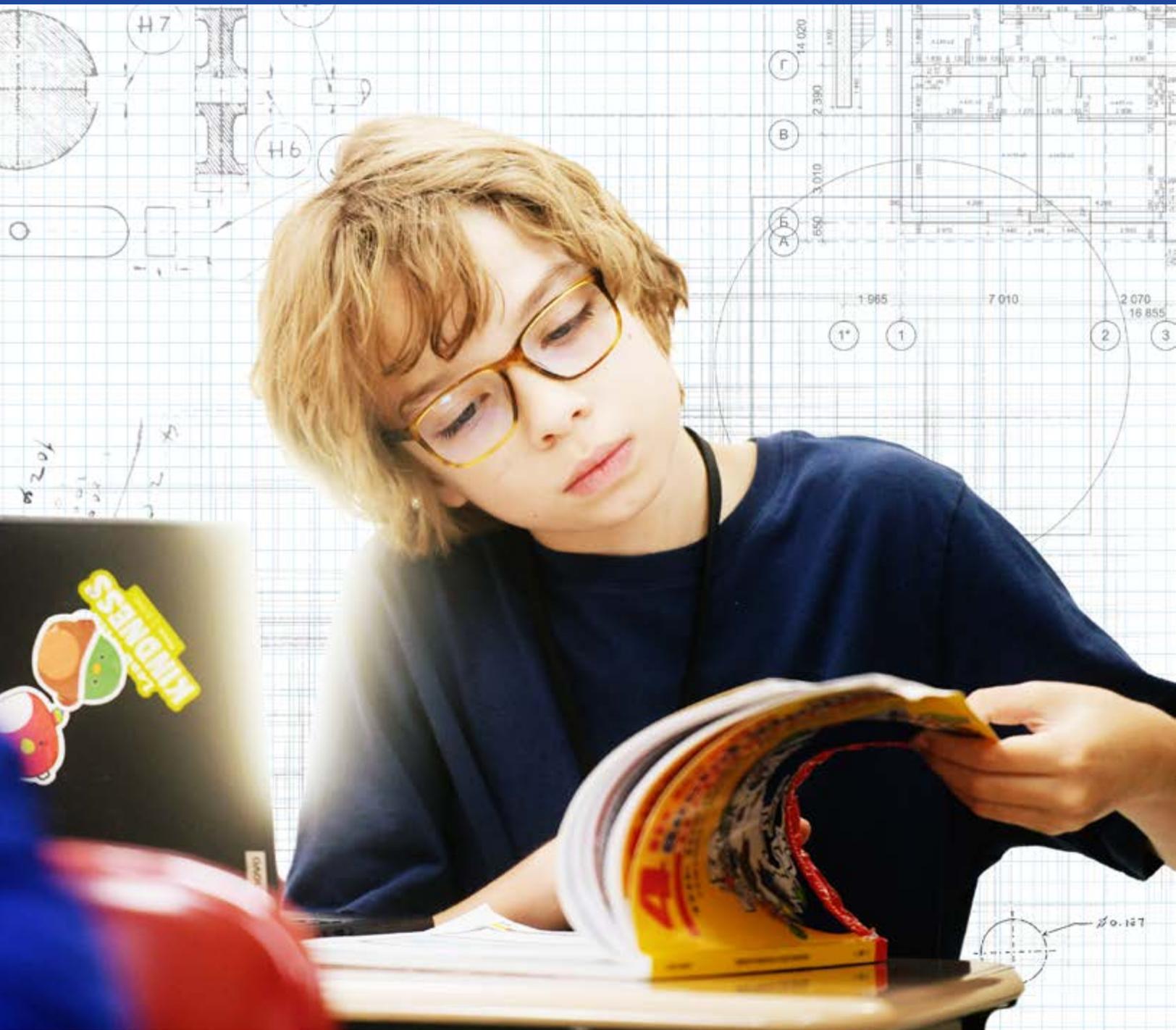
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