

**2016**

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

January 27, 2016



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

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## **The State Board of Education**

The State Board of Education is the governing and policymaking body for the Tennessee system of public elementary and secondary education. Its work touches all facets of education, from accountability and evaluation to curriculum and teacher education. The State Board of Education's vision is to prepare all Tennessee children for successful postsecondary work, education, and citizenship.

## **The Tennessee Higher Education Commission**

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



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## Overview

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

Continuous improvement and the resulting changes are realities in Tennessee's upwardly striving education system. This edition of the *Joint Report* is published at a time of transition that is significant in terms of education policy. Changes in executive leadership have recently occurred at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the State Board of Education, and the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). The 109th General Assembly has just convened for the second year of its two-year term.

In higher education, the policy landscape, which over the last four years has been shaped primarily by the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) of 2010, is evolving to adopt Governor Bill Haslam's higher education reform agenda, collectively known as the "Drive to 55." In response, both the University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Board of Regents systems are weighing potential changes to their business models that they believe are necessary to ensure affordability for students and the future economic viability of their institutions. The THEC master plan addresses these efforts, as well as others aimed at increasing the percentage of Tennesseans holding a postsecondary credential.

Pre-K-12 education has faced a similar transition as Race to the Top funding, which led to major reforms, including higher standards and new methods of teacher evaluation, has ended. The SBE has attempted to adapt to the new requirements of the Drive to 55 while sustaining and improving upon previous reform efforts. The State Board's master plan provides details on how the SBE works transparently to serve all students to address the state's need for increased postsecondary credentials.



## State Needs in Public Education

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

Using data from the 2013 American Community Survey<sup>1</sup> and projections of certificate holders from the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville,<sup>2</sup> THEC estimates that 37.8 percent of working age Tennesseans currently hold a postsecondary credential. To reach the goal outlined by the Drive to 55, 871,309 additional credentials will need to be awarded by 2025.<sup>3</sup> **Table 1** illustrates the growth needed to meet this goal as compared to current postsecondary attainment in Tennessee.

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

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

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

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

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



The natural growth trajectory of Tennessee’s public institutions will comprise a portion of this annual target but is not sufficient on its own. The gap between this natural growth and the needed growth is 77,646 credentials, which must be produced in addition to the projected natural growth between 2015 and 2025.<sup>4</sup>

To meet this need, the State Board collaborated with the Department of Education to develop three overarching student achievement goals that will guide its efforts in increasing postsecondary preparedness and completion.

The first of these goals is that Tennessee will rank in the top half of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by the year 2020. In 2013, Tennessee recorded its greatest improvement in the history of the NAEP test, and in 2015 maintained its status as the state with the greatest growth since 2011. Meeting the targets set by Drive to 55 will require that students enter postsecondary education prepared to succeed, and increasing Tennessee’s overall performance and national ranking on NAEP is one important way of measuring Tennessee students’ readiness to complete high school with the skills and knowledge needed to persist and excel in higher education. Figure 1 below illustrates the change in NAEP scores for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders since 2005, as well as the continued improvement required to move into the top half of states by 2020.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



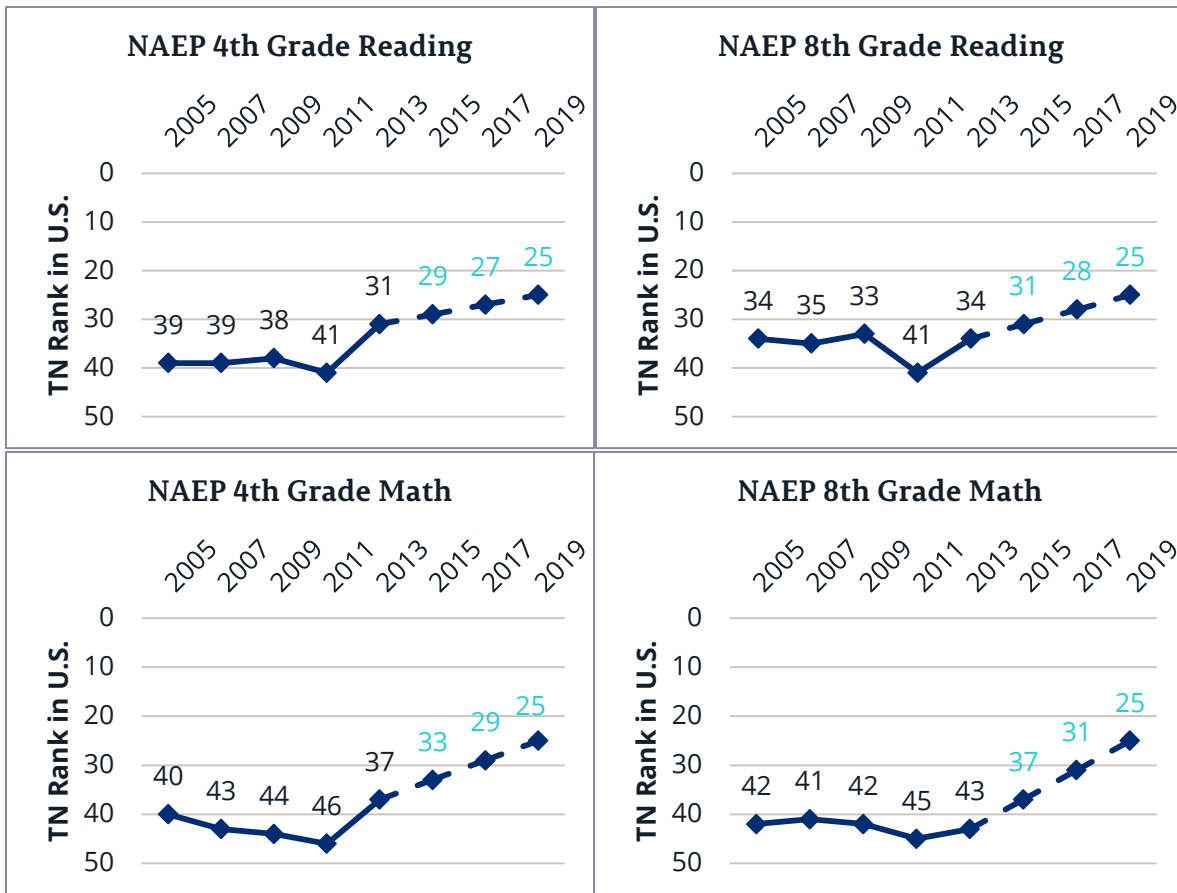


Figure 1: Progress toward the Top Half of States on NAEP

The State Board's second goal is to increase Tennessee's average ACT composite score to 21 by 2020. Tennessee has seen the average ACT score for public high school students increase from 19.0 to 19.4 between 2007 and 2015.<sup>5</sup> Figure 2 illustrates this progress, as well as what it will take to achieve a statewide average score of 21 by 2020. As the SBE continues to push for greater workforce and postsecondary preparedness, tracking growth in ACT scores will provide valuable information about whether the state's high school students are meeting postsecondary readiness benchmarks in the tested subject areas. With students increasingly taking the SAT, in addition to or instead of the ACT, the SBE will also be tracking progress toward raising the average SAT score to 990 by 2020.

<sup>5</sup> TDOE Strategic Plan: <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/strategic-plan>





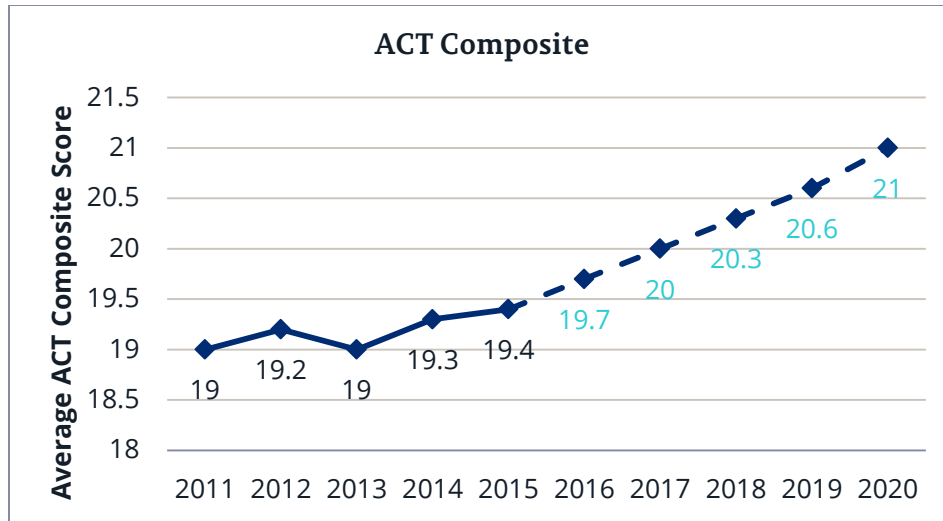


Figure 2: Progress toward Average ACT of 21

The State Board’s third goal is for the majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 to earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree. The high school class of 2014 enrolled 58 percent of graduates into some form of postsecondary education.<sup>6</sup> However, the state’s goals extend beyond enrollment to *completion*. Only 24 percent of the high school class of 2008 attained a postsecondary degree within 6 years.<sup>7</sup> To prepare for a future in which most Tennessee jobs will require a postsecondary credential, the SBE aspires to push this rate to over 50 percent of the graduating high school class of 2020.

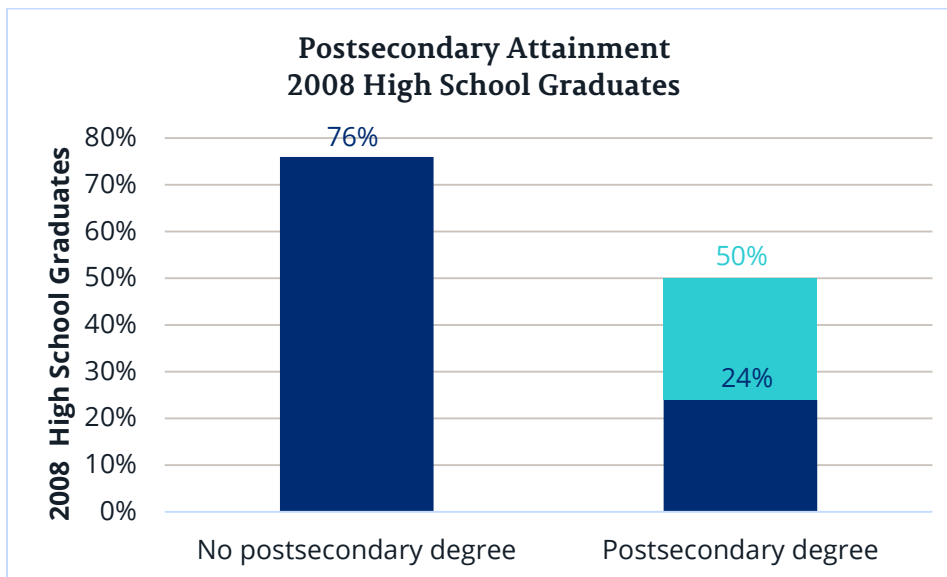


Figure 3: Progress Toward 55 percent Postsecondary Completion Rate for High School Class of 2020

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/strategic-plan>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/strategic-plan>



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

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



## Master Plan Fulfillment

### *State Board of Education*

To prepare all students for postsecondary success, Tennessee seeks to maintain its position as the fastest improving state in the nation and to enter the top half of all states on student outcomes as measured by the NAEP assessment by 2020. As Tennessee furthers its efforts to meet the Drive to 55, it will reinforce its reputation as a leader in the development of a skilled workforce educated and trained on world-class standards, by world-class teachers and leaders, with schools and districts that comprise the strongest and most responsive public education system in the Southeast and in the United States.

At their Fall 2015 Board meeting, the State Board of Education (SBE) approved an updated master plan that defined a series of new strategies for achieving its aforementioned goals. The new master plan is anchored in efforts to increase transparency, and a commitment to serve all students. The master plan focuses on four strategic priority policy areas:

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

The following section details some of the major initiatives the SBE is pursuing in each of these four areas. These descriptions do not reflect a comprehensive explanation of the SBE's work, but rather to offer concrete examples of the State Board's current direction and alignment with the Drive to 55.

### *High Quality School Options*

#### **Appellate Charter Authorization**

The State Board of Education was designated by the General Assembly as an appellate authorizer of charter schools that apply to a Local Education Agency (LEA) that contains a priority school, which is a school performing in the bottom 5 percent statewide, on the current or last preceding priority school list as designated by the Tennessee Department of Education. The SBE also serves as the charter school authorizer if an LEA sponsors a charter school. In addition, the law requires that the SBE adopt national authorizing standards in its work as an authorizer of charter schools.

The SBE worked closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers to train board members and SBE staff on the principles and standards of high quality charter school authorizing, and to implement a suite of authorization policies. These policies



established a framework to handle charter school appeals, ensure appropriate monitoring and compliance of authorized schools, and establish guidance for renewal and revocation decisions.

Under the established policies, the State Board can overturn the decision of a local board of education on a charter application only if the SBE determines that the denial of the charter application was contrary to the interests of the pupils, school district, or community. In four of the six appeal cases heard in 2015, the State Board affirmed the districts' decisions to deny the charter school applications. However, in the cases of KIPP Nashville Primary and KIPP Nashville Middle, whose applications had been recommended by the district review committee but denied by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), the State Board voted unanimously to approve the schools' amended applications.

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-142(b)(3) and State Board Policy 2.500, MNPS and the sponsors of these charter schools were given thirty calendar days following the SBE's decision to develop a mutually agreeable plan for MNPS to oversee these two schools. No agreement was reached in that time. As such, the State Board of Education has become the authorizer for KIPP Nashville Primary and KIPP Nashville Middle. KIPP Nashville Primary is slated to open at the start of the 2017-2018 school year, and KIPP Middle will open at the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

### **CTE and Other Pathways**

The State Board continues to explore multiple pathways for students to receive postsecondary credit during high school. Doing so will create a stronger bridge between high school coursework, postsecondary education and workforce opportunities. Options include dual-enrollment programs, partnerships between high schools and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs), and additional dual credit courses. These programs will supplement existing offerings, such as International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement classes, that can also be used to earn early postsecondary credit. In 2015, the State Board approved courses from Cambridge International Examinations, a department within the University of Cambridge that offers rigorous courses comparable to International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses, as an additional option for high school students. Collectively, these early postsecondary opportunities support the aims of the Drive to 55 by accelerating time-to-postsecondary-degree, reducing costs to students and institutions of higher education. The State Board will monitor participation in these courses, and is committed to exploring additional pathways to early postsecondary credit.



## Individual Education Accounts

The Individualized Education Account (IEA) program was established by the General Assembly in 2015, and will be implemented in January 2017. The IEA program redirects per pupil funding for participating students with certain disabilities into a personal account. Parents and families can use this fund to pay for educational expenses that will best meet their child's individual needs. The program is open to students with particular categories of disabilities who reside in any LEA in Tennessee, and there is no cap on the number of eligible students who can participate. The IEA program will begin accepting applications for participation in summer 2016.

The State Board of Education is responsible for the rulemaking process for the IEA program, and is committed to monitoring the program's success during the first and subsequent years of implementation. In Fall 2015, the SBE preliminarily approved the rules of the IEA Program. The draft rules are posted on the SBE website.<sup>8</sup> The rules will be presented to the SBE for a final vote in January 2016. Staff from the SBE and TDOE will work over the next year to construct a research plan to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

## *Great Teachers and Leaders*

### Teacher Preparation Report Card Redesign

In 2007, the Tennessee General Assembly began requiring an annual report on the effectiveness of teacher training programs. This report describes the performance of each program's completers in the following areas: placement and retention rates, Praxis II pass rates, and teacher effectiveness, based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). The *Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs* helps to facilitate improvement for preparation providers. In previous years, THEC produced this report; in 2015, the State Board of Education and the Tennessee Department of Education assumed principal ownership of the report card.

Moving forward, the SBE will redesign the report card with extensive input from stakeholders, to provide a more comprehensive review of providers and completers. This will contrast with the more technical nature of previous report cards, which were often geared toward education providers rather than the general public or other education stakeholders. The Department of Education will still continue to provide more technical reports through the creation of new annual reports.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/sbe/attachments/10-23-15\\_II\\_A\\_Individualized\\_Education\\_Program\\_Rules\\_Attachment\\_Clean\\_Copy.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/sbe/attachments/10-23-15_II_A_Individualized_Education_Program_Rules_Attachment_Clean_Copy.pdf)



Both the State Board and the Department of Education share the goal of placing an effective teacher in every classroom across the state. Focusing the redesign process on maintaining proper data protocols, using input from involved stakeholders will be critical to Tennessee's efforts to better understand and improve teacher preparation in our state.

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

The revised Tennessee Educator Preparation Policy passed by the State Board in October 2014 outlines new standards and a new approval process for teacher preparation programs. This new approval process reflects a dramatic shift from a focus on inputs to a focus on outcomes data. Moving forward, EPPs must submit information for an annual report on the performance of the EPP and its completers. Annual reports will include the following metrics: recruitment and selection, placement, retention, completer satisfaction, employer satisfaction, completer outcomes, completer impacts, and any necessary stipulations cited in the most recent comprehensive review. The reports will be used to determine whether providers and specialty area programs or clusters of programs are below expectations, meet expectations, or are above expectations as defined by the State Board of Education.

The transition to new standards for EPPs and the implementation of the new approval process will take several years. The State Board is committed to monitoring the implementation and the review of EPPs under the policy in upcoming years.

### **Salary Schedule and Differentiated Pay**

In June 2013, the State Board revised the state's differentiated pay policy. The policy was updated to provide additional guidance for T.C.A. § 49-3-306(h), which requires all school districts to implement some form of differentiated pay for educators. This policy revision was intended to highlight the importance of recognizing highly effective teachers, as well as those serving in hard-to-staff areas and those taking on additional instructional roles.

Between January and June 2014, districts submitted differentiated pay plans and updated salary schedules. Districts proposed a range of strategies to ensure that teachers across the state can earn additional compensation. More than one hundred districts developed plans to recognize teachers taking on additional responsibilities, and nearly half of all districts included hard-to-staff elements. One-third of all districts included some type of individual, school, or district performance incentive. These changes indicate that Tennessee districts are increasingly moving away from a "one size fits all" approach to compensation. Given the diversity of the state, districts are encouraged to develop plans that help solve the unique challenges they face in recruiting, retaining, and recognizing the talented educators needed to reach student achievement goals.



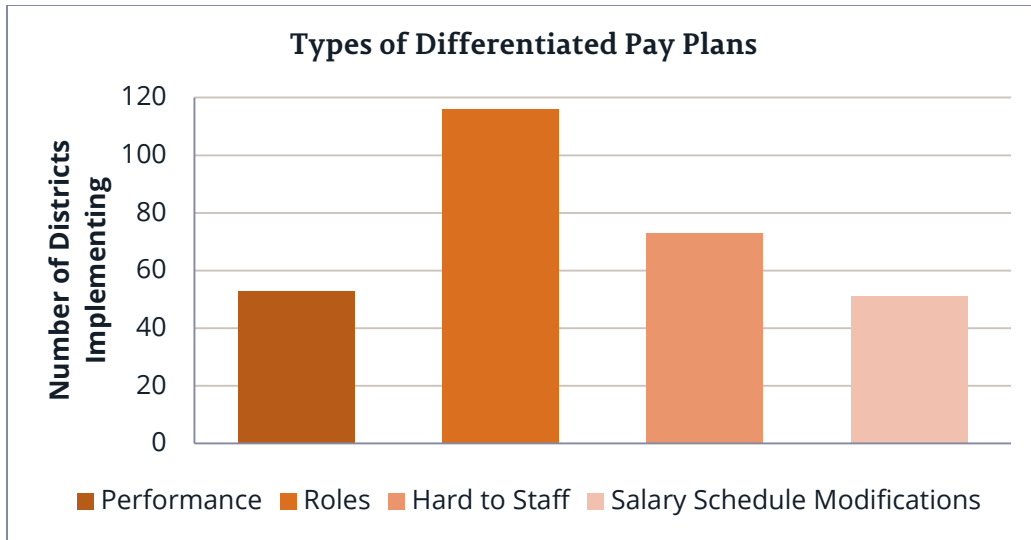


Figure 4: Differentiated Pay Plans Reported for the 2015-2016 Academic Year

Districts submitted updates to their plans for the 2014-15 school year along with an implementation report on the previous school year’s differentiated pay plan. Moving forward, SBE and TDOE will continue to support districts in creating greater differentiation of teacher roles, responsibilities, and salaries. The SBE is committed to implementation of differentiated pay as a key strategy for recognizing and retaining the state’s most effective teachers and leaders.

### Licensure Exams

The State Board and the Department of Education are investigating the effects of raising the minimum scores necessary to make licensure decisions for potential educators. Currently, Tennessee’s cut off is set *higher* than the nationally recommended standard on four licensure exams, *at* the recommended cut off on thirty-one exams, and *below* the recommended score on nineteen exams.

Increasing scores *to* the nationally recommended threshold for those exams with cut scores below recommended levels would have varying effects on the number of licensed educators in different content areas. Based on past licensure exam performance, pass rates on some assessments would change very little, while nearly half of all previously passing test takers in other content areas would have failed if the cut score were at the nationally recommended level. The SBE is analyzing the impact that changing cut scores would have on the supply and demand of teachers across the state to determine the most efficient way to ensure that there are enough highly effective teachers statewide.



## *High Standards and Quality Measures*

### **Standards Review Process**

The State Board of Education is charged with conducting a review of all academic standards at least every six years. In October 2014, Governor Haslam announced a new standards review process for math and English language arts (ELA), which the General Assembly expanded in Public Chapter 423. The SBE is charged with overseeing this process, which included the creation of a public website that allows all Tennesseans to provide feedback on the standards. This review will culminate in the creation of a new set of Tennessee Education Standards to be used in place of the Common Core State Standards.

The website launched in November 2014 and remained accessible through April 2015. The data collected was then compiled and sent to math- and ELA-educator advisory teams, which reviewed and revised the standards. Following this process, a new draft of Tennessee-specific standards was again posted for public feedback in October 2015; this second period of public commentary ended on December 1, 2015.

Throughout the fall of 2015, the legislative- and gubernatorial-appointed Standards Recommendation Committee (SRC) solicited feedback through regional meetings and roundtables with educators, parents, and the higher education community. The SRC used all feedback collected to guide their final recommendations for additional standards revisions. In January 2016, the SRC will present the new standards to the State Board for their first reading, and the final reading for the standards will be in April 2016. After the standards are approved, the 2016-2017 school year will be used to train Tennessee's educators on the new standards; the standards will be implemented and assessed during the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the current standards review for math and English language arts, the State Board of Education has also been charged with reviewing science and social studies standards. Following a similar review process to that described above, the SBE created a website to gather public feedback. The science review process was launched in September 2015 and will culminate in October 2016. The social studies review process will begin in January 2016 and will be completed in April 2017.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive timeline of the math and ELA review process, please see: <http://tn.gov/sbe/article/math-and-english-language-arts>.

<sup>10</sup> For further details regarding the social studies and science review, please see: <http://tn.gov/sbe/topic/standards-review>.





## Early Literacy

Despite Tennessee's status as the fastest-improving state on NAEP assessments, ELA proficiency rates among students in grades 3-5 have remained stagnant or declined since 2010 (see Figure 5). For many students, early intervention is key to future success. Of the approximately 6,000 Tennessee students rated "below basic" in third grade ELA, less than three percent reach proficiency by fifth grade. Furthermore, national data demonstrate that children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times less likely than their peers to graduate from high school by age 19.<sup>11</sup>

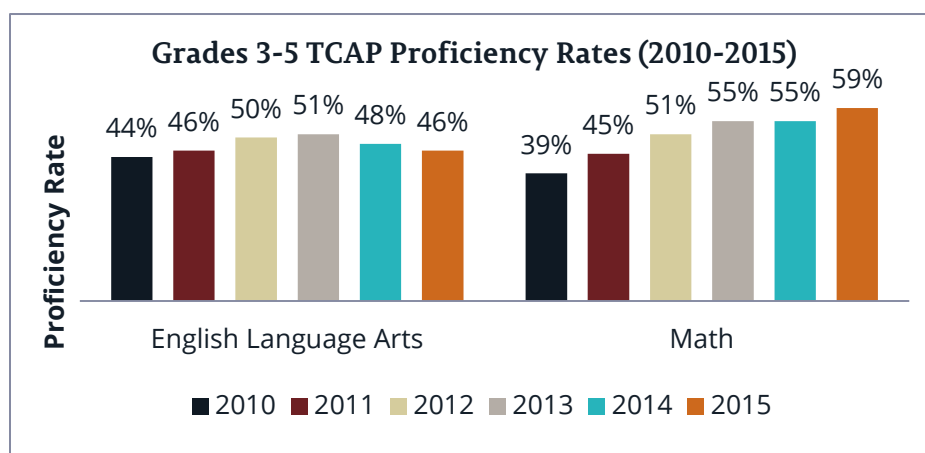


Figure 5: Reading and Math TCAP Proficiency Rates (2010-2015)

Because of the impact of early intervention on later success, early literacy must be a key component in Tennessee's efforts to promote postsecondary and workforce preparedness. The State Board has partnered with the Department of Education to report on the research being conducted regarding early literacy across the state, and what can be done to improve it. Additionally, the SBE and TDOE will work with education preparation providers to ensure that they are adequately preparing teachers to teach reading.

## Public Engagement and Oversight

The State Board of Education promotes public engagement and effective oversight throughout its work. These principles contribute to each of the State Board's major undertakings detailed in this report, and will continue to guide the SBE's contributions to Tennessee's Drive to 55.

<sup>11</sup> Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.



The SBE's recent efforts to facilitate the standards review process illustrate the role that transparent public engagement and oversight serve in guiding the SBE's work. The Tennessee standards review process is the first in the country to provide all residents with the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed standards. Using a multi-tiered review process has helped ensure that stakeholders from different levels of the state's education system are substantively engaged. Collectively, these efforts have produced a community-driven process that will culminate in rigorous standards that reflect the needs and values of public education in Tennessee.

Ongoing SBE initiatives, such as stakeholder meetings in board member districts, revisions to the SBE website, and a comprehensive policy review, seek to further promote public engagement and oversight. Maintaining a strong commitment to meaningful public engagement and effective oversight will help the SBE ensure that it continues to promote positive change in Tennessee education.



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

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

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

Some of the many policy levers and programs currently operating toward fulfillment of the 2015-2025 Plan are described below.<sup>12</sup>

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

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

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<sup>12</sup> The full Master Plan is available at: <https://www.tn.gov/thec/article/statewide-master-plan>



Figure 6 shows that college enrollment rates of recent high school graduates have remained relatively steady in recent years. Projections provided in THEC’s Master Plan demonstrate that the 55 percent postsecondary attainment goal is not achievable merely by improving Tennessee public high school graduation rates, increasing recent high school graduates’ participation in postsecondary education, or improving their college progression and graduation rates. Roughly 900,000 adult Tennesseans with some college but no degree represent the “sleeping giant” that must be awakened to realize the Drive to 55 goal.

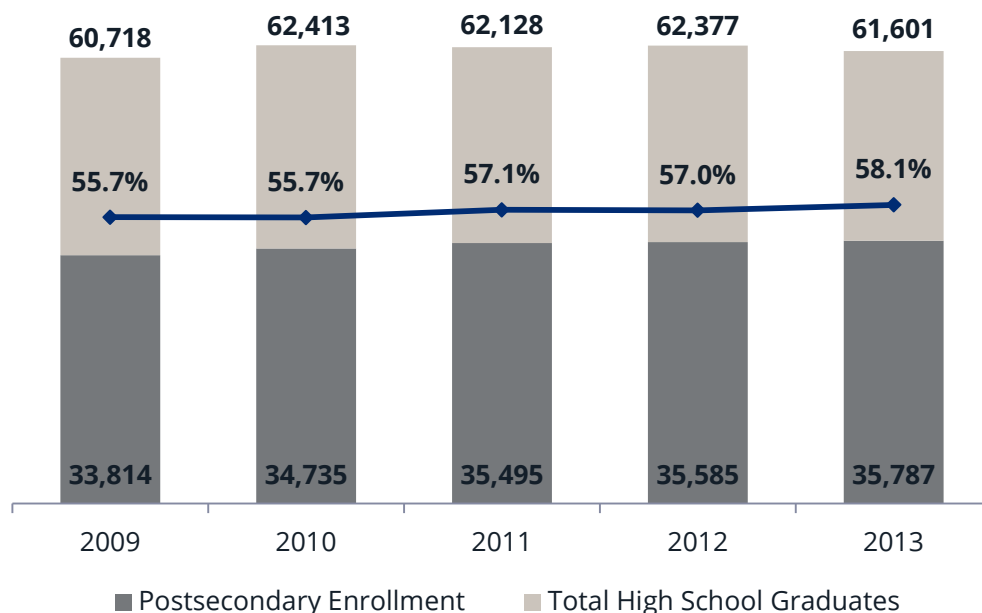


Figure 6: Total High School Graduates and Postsecondary Enrollment, 2009-2013

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

Academically underprepared students (students with an ACT composite score of 18 or lower) also represent a focus population. In the past, students entering postsecondary education at this lower level of preparedness were required to pay for and complete remedial courses at postsecondary institutions before entering credit-bearing courses. This approach leads to higher costs for students, coupled with increased time to degree. The statewide growth of the Seamless Alignment and Learning Support (SAILS) program



provides high school seniors with the opportunity to complete all remedial math requirements before graduating high school and to enroll in college-level math as a credit-bearing course. Additionally, a “co-requisite” model of supplemental instruction while enrolled in a credit-bearing course has become the planned pedagogy method for community colleges in Tennessee.

### *Tennessee Promise*

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

In addition to removing the financial burden of attending college, Tennessee Promise provides students with individualized guidance from a mentor who assists in navigating the college application process. Attending meetings with these mentors is mandatory for students to remain eligible for the program. Additionally, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to February 15, perform eight hours of community service per term enrolled, attend full time, and maintain satisfactory academic progress (2.0 GPA) at their institution.

In Fall 2015, the first cohort of 16,291 Tennessee Promise students enrolled in community and technical colleges throughout the state. First-time freshmen enrollment in Tennessee public higher education increased by 10 percent, including a 24.7 percent increase at community colleges and a 20 percent increase at TCATs. The second application cycle for the program concluded on November 2, 2015. As of this date, 59,621 students applied for the Tennessee Promise program, representing over 90 percent of high school seniors in the state.

### *Tennessee Reconnect*

Tennessee Reconnect is a Drive to 55 initiative to help more adults complete a postsecondary degree or credential. Some 900,000 adults with some college but no degree reside in the state and this population is critical to achieving the goals of the Drive to 55. Tennessee Reconnect includes a number of outreach efforts focused on reaching adults

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<sup>13</sup> The complete list of eligible Tennessee Promise postsecondary institutions is available online: <https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/collegepays/attachments/TNPromiseEligibleInstitutions101315.pdf>



across the state to encourage them to “reconnect” with higher education. Reconnect + Complete is a statewide outreach campaign in partnership with the Governor’s Office and higher education institutions to reach adults with some college but no degree. Tennessee Reconnect Communities are locally-driven initiatives to provide community-based services and outreach to adults to re-enroll in postsecondary education. Additional efforts include the launch of an adult learner web portal, [www.TNReconnect.gov](http://www.TNReconnect.gov), and the development of a clear brand for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for adult learners through the TimewiseTN program.

### *Articulation and Transfer Policies*

The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (CCTA) represented a comprehensive reform agenda, including academic, fiscal, and administrative policy changes at the state and institutional levels. Among these shifts in policy was an effort to enhance efficiency among all public community colleges and universities. Such provisions include:

- A universally-transferable, common, 41- credit hour general education core was established such that all public two- and four-year institutions offer and accept as transfer credits a common set of courses.
- A 19-hour, pre-major pathway in 38 baccalaureate degree majors including history, agriculture, civil engineering, and more.
- Concurrent enrollment at a community college and university, providing the benefit of student advising and services from both institutions, and facilitating transfer after completion of an associate’s degree.
- Identification of Associate of Applied Science courses not designed for transfer.
- An identical numbering system between community colleges and universities for lower division courses that meet general education and pre-major pathway requirements, to ensure course equivalency and facilitate transfer.
- 52 Tennessee Transfer Pathways that ensure a seamless transition to a Tennessee public university (and many private universities) after earning an associate degree from one of Tennessee’s community colleges.



- Reverse articulation and transfer agreements regarding a student who transfers to a university from a community college prior to earning an associate degree. Now, if a student earns remaining credits for an associate degree at a university, credits may be transferred back to the community college, which, in turn, may award an associate degree if a degree audit confirms the requirements have been met.

### *FAFSA Completion*

In 2015, Tennessee once again led the nation in FAFSA completion.<sup>14</sup> Of the 74,398 high school seniors in the state of Tennessee, 68% completed the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This is an increase of 7.7% over 2014, due in part to the emphasis placed on the FAFSA during the Tennessee Promise application process.<sup>15</sup> Through TSAC's outreach programs around FAFSA completion, high school students and their parents receive comprehensive support on filling out the FAFSA and information on the State of Tennessee's financial aid programs.

### *LEAP*

The Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) is a core component of the Drive to 55. This program encourages collaboration across education and industry by using regional higher education and workforce collaborations to eliminate skills gaps across the state in a proactive, data-driven, and coordinated manner. LEAP will help ensure that our postsecondary institutions are producing graduates with the skills and credentials that Tennessee employers need to fill vacant positions.

To this end, a grant competition was held in Fall 2014, resulting in a total of \$10 million awarded to 12 successful proposals. These proposals were required to include regional collaborations composed of (but not limited to): local industry partners; postsecondary institutions; K-12 administrators and career and technical education (CTE) faculty; and economic development agents (local chambers of commerce, workforce boards, etc.). Proposals also provided data confirming industry needs and projections for growth; evidence that at least three counties will be served, with the exception of the state's four largest metropolitan centers; and a strong plan for long-term sustainability beyond the grant period.

LEAP coursework and job training commenced in Fall 2015 in 51 counties (see Figure 7). Over 1,500 high school students have enrolled in courses that have been initiated or

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<sup>14</sup> FAFSA Completion data available online at: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school>

<sup>15</sup> Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation Newsroom: <https://www.tn.gov/collegepays/article/tsac-newsroom>



expanded by LEAP programs as of December 2015. Students completing these courses will be eligible to apply their training to earn college credit in a variety of high-demand fields. Additionally, 630 college students have enrolled in community college and TCAT programs supported by LEAP-funded equipment and instructors. These students are eligible to earn Mechatronics and Industrial Maintenance certificates or an Associate of Applied Science degree. LEAP-funded extra-curricular programming, including career readiness initiatives, work-based learning experiences, academic clubs, and career exploration programs, have served over 13,000 students across middle school, secondary, and postsecondary education levels.

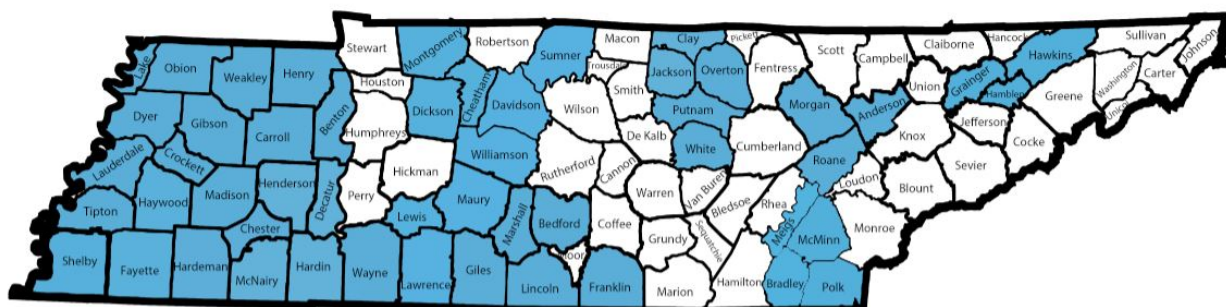


Figure 7: Map of Counties in LEAP Communities

### *P-16 Initiatives*

THEC oversees several programs that ensure students' academic preparation for postsecondary coursework and support the monitoring and evaluation of postsecondary student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. With this end in mind, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's Office of P-16 Initiatives designs and implements college access and success initiatives to empower communities, local education agencies, and partner organizations to create a statewide culture of college-going and attainment. Several of the Office of P-16 Initiatives programs are described below. Further detail is available on the THEC website.<sup>16</sup>

### **College Access Challenge Grant**

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG), a federal grant program administered by the United States Department of Education, focuses on developing partnerships to promote college access and success. Tennessee's CACG program is designed to build on previous CACG successes and the state's current college completion-oriented policy environment.

<sup>16</sup> For a full description of programs managed by THEC's Office of P-16 Initiatives, please visit their website: <http://tn.gov/thec/topic/p-16-initiatives>





The program strives to address three focus areas: expand statewide college access and success efforts, build capacity to meet college access and completion goals, and bolster “Go Back and Finish” initiatives that focus on outreach to adult learners, including the development and execution of coordinated adult outreach strategy, and sub-grants to higher education institutions to develop or expand completion programs for adults.

Statewide college access and success initiatives include “Path to College” events that expand on College Application Week and College Goal Tennessee. Two such events are College Signing Day, a statewide initiative to promote and celebrate schools’ college-going cultures, and College Planning Night, a program aimed at engaging parents with the college-going process. Another tool is CollegeforTN.org, Tennessee’s comprehensive online postsecondary planning resource, which provides all Tennesseans with career, academic, college, and financial aid planning resources. Over the last year, the site has had over 222,579 visits, comprising 3,154,706 page views. Using CACG funds, THEC is expanding the use and implementation of the web portal through robust educator professional development, the creation of instructional resources and collateral materials, and increased alignment with Drive to 55 initiatives. In addition to Path to College Events and CollegeforTN.org, Tennessee hosted regional meetings with counselors, administrators, not-for-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to bolster implementation of the Tennessee Promise program.

To build Tennessee’s capacity to meet college access and completion goals, CACG funds were sub-granted to the Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN) for the creation and implementation of professional development opportunities, including at least one statewide conference. TCASN is a not for profit 501(c)3 professional organization with the mission of connecting college access and success programs with other organizations for the purpose of increasing the number of Tennesseans participating and succeeding in postsecondary opportunities. TCASN was originally established through a Lumina Foundation grant and expanded through Race to the Top funds.

CACG funds were used to award Tennessee Promise Forward mini-grants to seven community colleges to support the successful completion of Tennessee Promise students. Promise Forward was designed to pick up where mentorship provided through the Tennessee Promise program concludes – upon enrollment in community college. THEC aims to support the state’s innovative reform environment through implementation of Promise Forward, which is designed to retain and graduate Tennessee Promise students by changing the way Tennessee’s community colleges support students.



## **GEAR UP TN**

In spring 2012, the United States Department of Education awarded a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in the amount of \$29,590,28. GEAR UP, a seven-year discretionary grant program, aims to increase the number of low-income, first generation students enrolling and succeeding in college. Tennessee's program, GEAR UP TN, began implementation in fall 2012, with direct services across the state beginning in January 2013.

GEAR UP TN sub-grants fund programs in 15 school districts across the state, providing direct services in 88 schools. The program is structured to serve approximately 7,500 students in the Class of 2018 (currently in 10<sup>th</sup> grade) and 5,000 seniors in GEAR UP TN high schools each year. The Class of 2018 cohort began receiving services in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and will continue to be served by the program through their first year of postsecondary education. Direct services provided to students and their families include academic support, mentoring, advising, college and job site visits, family engagement, and financial aid counseling. Sub-grant funding also provides for professional development for teachers, counselors, and school administration on best practices for creating and sustaining a college access culture.

## **Latino Student Success Grant**

The Lumina-funded Latino Student Success (LSS) grant, which concluded in Fall 2015, focused on increased Latino student success in Memphis through a community-wide, collaborative partnership and development of the Abriendo Puertas college access program. Abriendo Puertas provided mentoring and college-preparatory events to approximately 400 students at seven high schools, of which 90 percent enrolled in higher education. As a result of this project, \$12.5 million in scholarships has been pledged to support LSS scholarships at Christian Brothers University. In addition, Memphis received a Community Partnership for Attainment grant from the Lumina Foundation, which will continue to focus on Latino students. The college access work will be sustained by Latino Memphis through local funds and donations.

## ***SAILS***

The Seamless Alignment of Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program began at Chattanooga State Community College and has been scaled up statewide. Initial development of SAILS leveraged K-12 teachers and higher education faculty, resulting in a blended learning model that allows students to work at their own pace using online instruction, and seek additional help as needed from an instructor on a one-on-one basis.



This structure also allows the instructors to focus on overall progress and tailor interventions based on individual student performance when appropriate.

By taking SAILS math during their senior year, students who have not achieved college readiness benchmarks (measured by the ACT) can demonstrate mastery of all five Tennessee Board of Regents math competencies. Those who successfully complete SAILS can then begin their postsecondary education in a credit-bearing college math course, or even enter college having completed all required math courses.

In the 2015-16 school year, the SAILS Math program is available to over 17,000 Tennessee high school seniors, representing over half of the students who have not met college ready benchmarks by the senior year of high school. As of December 2015, 4,616 students had already completed the program. Additionally, the SAILS English program is currently being piloted at five Tennessee high schools.



## Conclusion

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



## Appendix 1: Minimizing Duplication

Both the State Board and THEC have developed Master Plans to guide policy development and resource allocation in public education. The plans place particular emphasis on progressive student achievement from pre- kindergarten through higher education, while minimizing duplication across educational levels. The following highlights progress in these areas.

### **Tennessee Longitudinal Data System**

Through the development of the Measure Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS), Tennessee has expanded its use of data to provide an information-rich view of student influencers and student achievement. Multiple data sources are linked to inform stakeholders, guide policymakers, and support data-driven decision making across K-12 and higher education. The data will allow for identification of areas where duplication may be present and subsequently minimized.

The development and implementation of the database took place throughout 2014. In 2015, the data team successfully transitioned to project sustainability. The TLDS project has been funded to continue operating in the Governor's budget for 2015-16, appearing as a recurring budget item. A contract between the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and the University of Tennessee (UT) is required each year.

In January 2015, direct access to the database was made available to approved agency research personnel at TDOE, THEC, and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD).

TLDS also finalized the publication of the third annual TDOE Report Card, available on the TDOE website. The Report Card includes information about student achievement, graduation rates, and ACT scores.

The University of Tennessee Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) staff partnered with TDLWD to submit a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant application to the U.S. Department of Labor for the upgrade/expansion of TLDS data and dashboards, along with policy research. This expansion project was awarded funding through June 30, 2018, and is currently in the planning stage.

Finally, TLDS staff also provided support to TDOE for the submission of a Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems grant to the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) to expand the



use of the K-12 SLDS and P-20 TLDS in two primary areas: College and Career Readiness and Educator Talent Management. TLDS will be used to provide data for the portal that will be developed to provide students with a view of their progress in preparing for entry into college.



## Appendix 2: Compatibility

The requirements for high school graduation are compatible with the admission requirements at Tennessee’s public universities. In 2007, Tennessee joined the American Diploma Project network, which resulted in the implementation of the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP). Using the priorities of the TDP, high school graduation requirements were revised to better align with undergraduate admission requirements beginning with the graduating class of 2013.

Three years ago, the State Board of Education clarified high school end of course examination requirements. Students, who have successfully completed college courses, earning both college and high school credit, are eligible for exemption except in the testing areas currently required to meet the goals of federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

To meet Tennessee college and university admission requirements, students must have high school diplomas or earn a GED diploma with scores that meet institutional requirements. Institutions determine admissions criteria, including required GPAs and ACT or SAT scores. The Tennessee Board of Regents requires degree-seeking students who have ACT subject scores below 19 in the areas of English, reading, and math to be placed into “Learning Support” for diagnostic assessment and appropriate interventions to address specific competencies needed for their chosen field of study. Institutions within the University of Tennessee System may establish specific placement requirements and placement exam threshold scores at the campus level.

The Tennessee high school graduation requirements, as well as the current high school course requirements for regular undergraduate admission in Tennessee public universities, are listed in the tables below.



Table 1: Tennessee High School Graduation Requirements<sup>17</sup>

Previous High School Graduation Requirements	High School Graduation Requirements for Students Beginning High School in Fall 2009
<b>TOTAL CREDITS REQUIRED: 20</b>	<b>TOTAL CREDITS REQUIRED: 22</b>
<b>MATH: 3 Credits</b> Including either Geometry or Algebra II	<b>MATH: 4 Credits</b> Including Algebra I, II, Geometry and a fourth higher level math course
<b>SCIENCE: 3 Credits</b> Including one physical science course and Biology	<b>SCIENCE: 3 Credits</b> Including Biology, Chemistry or Physics, and a third lab course
<b>ENGLISH: 4 Credits</b>	<b>ENGLISH: 4 Credits</b>
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES: 3 Credits</b>	<b>SOCIAL STUDIES: 3 Credits</b>
<b>WELLNESS: 1 Credit</b>	<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND WELLNESS: 1.5 Credits</b>
<b>ELECTIVE: 6 Credits</b>	<b>PERSONAL FINANCE: .5 Credits</b>
	<b>FOREIGN LANGUAGE: 2 Credits FINE ARTS: 1 Credit</b> May be waived for students not going to a University to expand the elective focus
	<b>ELECTIVE FOCUS: 3 Credits</b> Math and Science, Career and Technical Education, Fine Arts, Humanities, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB)
	<b>CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE:</b> Requirements to be determined by local Board of Education

<sup>17</sup> The graduating class of 2013 was the first cohort to complete these requirements.





Table 2: Minimum High School Course Requirements for Regular Undergraduate Admissions to Tennessee Public Higher Education Institutions

<b>Subject Area and Units High School Courses Fulfilling Requirements Beginning Fall 2010</b>	
<p><b>English</b></p> <p><i>4 units required</i></p> <p>English I, II, III, and IV Applied Communication substitutes for English III or IV</p>	<p><b>Algebra I and II</b></p> <p><i>2 units required</i></p> <p>Algebra I and II Technical Algebra (Formerly known as Math for Technology II)</p>
<p><b>Visual/ Performing Arts</b></p> <p><i>1 unit required</i></p> <p>Theatre Arts Visual Arts Music Theory Music History Vocal Music Instrumental Music Art History</p> <p>General Music</p>	<p><b>Advanced Mathematics</b></p> <p><i>1 unit of geometry or an advanced course with geometry as significant component required</i></p> <p>Technical Geometry Pre-Calculus</p> <p>Calculus Probability and Statistics Math IV Trigonometry</p>
<p><b>Foreign Language</b></p> <p><i>2 units in same language required</i></p> <p>Latin Spanish German Russian Japanese</p>	<p><b>Natural/ Physical Sciences</b></p> <p><i>2 units required one must be a laboratory course in biology, chemistry, or physics</i></p> <p>Biology I and II Physical Science</p> <p>Chemistry I and II Physics Principle of Technology I Ecology and Conservation of Natural Resources Principles of Technology II Nutrition Science Physiology Biology for Technology Science 1-A (Ag Science) Geology</p>
<p><b>U.S. History</b></p> <p><i>1 unit required</i></p> <p>U.S. History</p> <p><b>Social Studies</b></p> <p><i>1 unit required</i></p> <p>World History Ancient History Modern History World Geography European History</p>	

