



Postsecondary Attainment in the Decade of Decision: The Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education 2015-2025

Functions of the Master Plan

State statute charges the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) with developing a statewide Master Plan for the future development of public universities, community colleges, and colleges of applied technology, with input from the Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees. The overriding function of the Plan is to:

- Direct higher education to be accountable for increasing the educational attainment levels of Tennesseans;
- Address the state’s economic development, workforce development, and research needs;
- Ensure increased degree production within the state’s capacity to support higher education; and
- Use institutional mission differentiation to realize statewide efficiencies through institutional collaboration and minimized redundancy in degree offerings, instructional locations, and competitive research.



The Last Decade

Tennessee has spent much of the past decade in the nation’s higher education spotlight. Innovation from policymakers and campus leaders has driven the strategies and solutions to address student completion and workforce development across the state. The **Making Opportunity Affordable** grant awarded from Lumina Foundation in 2008 paved the way for the major higher education reforms delivered by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2010 through the **Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA)**.

In the five years since the CCTA was passed, the legislation’s reforms have transformed higher education in Tennessee. The heart of the legislation aimed at implementing the nation’s first **outcomes-based funding formula**, which directly links state funding to institutional outcomes rather than enrollments. The CCTA also spurred the development of the Tennessee Transfer Pathways to ease the process of transferring credits between community colleges and public universities. Other reforms included updates to **Quality Assurance Funding**, previously known as Performance Funding, and the development and expansion of SAILS (Seamless Alignment and Integration of Learning Support) which delivers remediation to high school seniors, allowing graduates to begin college taking credit-bearing courses.

In 2013, Governor Bill Haslam launched the **Drive to 55**, Tennessee’s initiative to increase the state postsecondary educational attainment rate to 55 percent by 2025. With support from the legislature, the Drive to 55 kicked off its cornerstone initiatives, including **Tennessee Promise**, **Tennessee Reconnect**, and **LEAP** (Labor Education Alignment Program). These historic programs and the Drive to 55 will guide much of higher education’s path in Tennessee for the next decade.

Master Plan by the Numbers



Snapshot of the Numbers Needed to Reach the Goals of Drive to 55

The goals of the Master Plan are focused on “credentials”- *so what is a credential?*
In the Master Plan, a postsecondary credential includes pre-baccalaureate certificates, associate’s degrees, and bachelor’s degrees.

Current Snapshot

Working age adults
(age 25- 64):
3,419,845

Number of working age adults
with college credentials:
1,294,249

Percent of working-age adults
with college credentials:
37.85%

Drive to 55 Goals

Projected number of working-
age adults (age 25-64), 2025:
3,596,879

Number of credentialed adults
to meet Drive to 55 goal:
1,978,283

Drive to 55 goal of adults with
college credentials:
55%

871,309

Number of credentials that need to be produced between 2015 and 2025 to meet the Drive to 55 goals. This translates to 79,210 credentials produced annually.

Closing the Gap in Credential Production

The necessary number of additional higher education credentials that need to be produced by 2025 in Tennessee to reach the Drive to 55 goals.

Sector	Additional credentials by 2025
Public universities	22,427
Community colleges	11,696
TCATs	8,023
Independent not-for-profit schools	13,560
For-profit or proprietary schools	21,939
Total, all sectors	77,646

Focus Populations of the Master Plan

The Master Plan recognizes that three historically underserved student populations are worthy of focused policy and programmatic attention throughout the coming decade. These three populations of students will play a critical role in reaching the goals of the Drive to 55 and the shape of the state's economic future. For more information on each population and data about their postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, see pages 17 through 24 of the Master Plan.

Adult Learners

The Drive to 55 is not achievable by just focusing on enrollment among recent high school graduates. Some 900,000 adult Tennesseans with some college but no degree represent the "sleeping giant" that must be an active part of the Drive to 55. The Master Plan recommends making adult learners a continuing focus of the outcomes-based funding formula, the Quality Assurance Funding program, and other targeted college completion initiatives.

Low Income Students

Historically, low income students have been at special risk of both not enrolling in college or, if they do enroll, not completing college. At particular risk are low income students who start but don't finish a degree and are at risk of eventual loan default. Enrollment and completion rates are increasing, though, and the number associate's and bachelor's degrees earned has increased every year since the implementation of the outcomes-based funding formula.

Academically Underprepared Students

Students who enter college academically underprepared have often been relegated to remedial or developmental courses. The more remedial and developmental courses a student takes, the less likely he or she is to complete a degree or graduate within the recommended length of time. Recent programs, such as SAILS, have begun to take a proactive approach to early interventions for academically underprepared students.

Available Policy Tools & Strategies

The challenges facing Tennessee in the next decade are many and daunting, yet the state is not without tools and strategies to assist in meeting the goals of the Drive to 55. Each of these policy tools are highlighted in greater detail on pages 25 through 32 of the Master Plan.

Drive to 55

The initiatives of the Drive to 55 have transformed higher education in Tennessee. Governor Haslam's focus on higher education has paved the way for groundbreaking Drive to 55 programs such as Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, and LEAP.

Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010

In 2010, the CCTA reformed public higher education through changes to academic, fiscal, and administrative policies. The new Public Agenda for Tennessee established a direct link between economic development and the education system.

Finance Policy Alignment

Tennessee's higher education finance policies have been a visible component of the CCTA, including the outcomes-based funding formula, changes to capital funding, and updated tuition and financial aid policies aligned with state goals for access and completion.

Access and Success

THEC's access and success programs provide resources and strategies to reach a wide set of students, including those from the Master Plan's focus populations. The Office of P-16 Initiatives and the Adult Learner Initiatives team have both developed major access and success outreach strategies.

Articulation and Transfer Provisions

With the reforms from the CCTA, articulation and transfer have become more transparent for both students and institutions through dual admission agreements, common course numbering, reverse transfer, and Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTPs).

Accountability and Improvement

Higher education policy in Tennessee has enabled a number of tools and resources for ongoing evaluation to promote public accountability and institutional improvement through the Quality Assurance Funding program and Master Plan progress reports.

Recommendations of the Master Plan

How Many Credentials? Charting a Glide Path to the State Goal for Postsecondary Attainment

- Develop **working definitions** of terms currently in wide use (degree, certificate, etc.) and some emerging ones (certification, badges, etc.) to better guide the fundamental attainment goals and ensure inclusiveness in those definitions.
- **Reassess the 55 percent goal** in five years in light of intra- and inter-state contexts that are likely to change.
- Establish **credential production targets** for postsecondary systems, sectors, and award levels.
- Make THEC responsible for **tracking system and state progress** toward the Drive to 55.

Credentials for What: Aligning Postsecondary Outputs and Outcomes with Economic Needs

- Develop a **list of the most under-supplied high-skill and/or high-wage occupations** to inform outreach campaigns and possible future iterations of finance policy.
- Use larger **“catchment areas” of related skills, academic and training programs, and occupations** that require those skills to inform stakeholder thinking on education/workforce supply and demand.
- Reiterate **value of liberal arts and social science degrees** as workforce degrees.
- Continue the role of the **Governor’s Workforce Sub-Cabinet** to determine information needs, adopt performance metrics, and set priorities.
- Study and make recommendations concerning phasing in **certificate and degree requirement for “real world” work experience**.

The Complete College Tennessee Act Revisited

- Undertake a formal **review of existing transfer and articulation agreements**, take inventory of any considerations that govern institutions’ decisions to forge or forgo these agreements, and make recommendations to stakeholders concerning continuation and/or improvement of the dual admission process.
- TBR, UT, and TICUA should **continuously review the Tennessee Transfer Pathways** and associated course-level information.
- TTPs should be sequenced to specific recommended semesters.
- The funding formula should also factor **reverse transfer** into its calculations.
- Fully fund the **productivity gains** captured by the outcomes-based funding formula.
- **Degree and credential production metrics** should carry equivalent or very similar weights across community colleges.
- Update the **benchmarks of student progression** in the funding formula.
- Create a task force to discuss **long-term financing strategies for the Drive to 55**.

Constructing a Culture of Access and Success: Building Capacity in Tennessee Communities

- Develop and publish **county-specific data** to inform each locality’s “share” of the Drive to 55 goal.
- Develop a concentrated campaign to **engage previously enrolled adult learners**.
- Encourage all institutions to become **Adult Learner Friendly Institutions**, possibly as part of the Quality Assurance Funding process.

Optimizing Online Education

- Re-imagine the Regents Online Campus Cooperative as a **statewide electronic campus** with information about every course and program offered online by TBR and UT.
- Publish transparent and easily-accessible **information about alternative, online, and competency-based providers**.

Assessing Competency

- Continue to build on and explore opportunities for the responsible use of **competency-based education**.
 - Make prior learning assessment (PLA) **usable for general education, in major, and elective credit**.
 - Publish an **inventory of existing PLA opportunities**.
 - Develop a statewide **PLA network**.
 - **Reward PLA** through the outcomes-based funding formula.
 - Once transcribed, **PLA credit should not be subject to re-evaluation** by other public institutions.
 - Promote **collaboration with the American Council on Education or Council on Adult & Experiential Learning** to promote opportunities for Tennessee institutions
- ## Evaluation for Improvement and Accountability
- The **Quality Assurance Funding program should continue as a counter-balance** to the highly-quantified and productivity-oriented outcomes-based funding formula.
 - Leverage the power of **labor market data** to inform the job placement standard.
 - Publish an **annual Master Plan Progress Report** that tracks progress toward meeting the goals of the Drive to 55.