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Tennessee Promise Marks a Decade of Success with Over 150,000 Students Enrolling Since It's Implementation

Nashville, Tennessee – May, 8, 2024 - The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is proud to announce the 10-year anniversary of the Tennessee Promise program on May 12, 2024, a milestone in the state's ongoing commitment to increasing access to higher education.

Tennessee was the first state in the country to implement a college promise program for students to access free tuition. Since 2014, \$207 million in funding has supported the enrollment of more than 150,000 students in pursuing their dreams of college, creating a more skilled and competitive workforce in Tennessee.

Tennessee Promise offers eligible high school seniors the opportunity to obtain a technical certificate or associate degree tuition-free, paying for tuition and mandatory fees not covered by other financial aid sources. THEC partners with tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust to administer the Tennessee Promise, with both organizations closely working with applicants to ensure consistent communication and oversee additional requirements like mandatory meetings and manage eight hours of community service.

Following the implementation of Tennessee Promise for the high school class of 2015, the college-going rate climbed nearly six percentage points over the prior year to 64.4%. This represented nearly 4,000 additional students enrolling in college immediately following high school graduation. In the latest update, the class of 2024 marked a significant milestone with over 66,000 seniors applying for Tennessee Promise, [the largest applicant pool in Tennessee Promise history](#).

"The Tennessee Promise program has been life changing for countless students across Tennessee, opening doors to higher education and career opportunities," said Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director of THEC. "As we celebrate this 10-year milestone, we are proud of the program's success and the positive impact it has had on our state's workforce readiness, economic development, and overall quality of life."

"Tennessee Promise has had a tremendous impact on students, families, and communities statewide by empowering Tennesseans to pursue higher education while mitigating the burden of financial barriers," said Gentile.

Tennessee Promise's success is also evident in the increasing number of Tennesseans earning technical credentials from TCAT campuses, now representing nearly 17% of Tennessee Promise enrollments compared to 12% in the program's first year. Governor Bill Lee's ongoing commitment to Tennessee Promise includes a [nearly \\$1 billion investment to the Tennessee Board of Regents \(TBR\) to expand TCAT growth in 2023](#) which continues to support affordable education and workforce-aligned programs, benefiting students and Tennessee's economic development.

“Tennessee Promise has been a model for the nation that enables many thousands of students each year to attend college and improve their lives. Promise is a tremendous value for students attending our public community and technical colleges. The generational \$1 billion investment by Governor Lee and the General Assembly will greatly expand the educational opportunities available at our colleges. The new buildings and campuses – 29 major projects across the state – are already underway and will open in 2025 and 2026,” said Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor Flora W. Tydings.

Governor Lee’s administration also stands strong in their steadfast support of Tennessee Promise. Senator Jon Lundberg (R – Bristol), Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, stated, “I’m most proud of the thousands of students this has, and continues to impact. The Promise is just that – a promise to stand alongside these students and families on their higher education journey.”

Senator Mark White (R – Memphis), Chairman of House Education Administration Committee, state, “I want to congratulate Tennessee for its commitment to offering every Tennessee high school graduate free tuition for a trade school degree or a two-year community college degree. Tennessee is committed to our young people in education and workforce opportunity.”

As Tennessee looks ahead to continuing the upward trend in higher education that Tennessee Promise has initiated, THEC remains committed to building on the success of Tennessee Promise and continuing to create pathways to educational attainment for all Tennesseans.

For more information about Tennessee Promise and the most recent Tennessee Promise report, visit collegefortn.org/tnpromise.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is the state's coordinating agency for higher education. Guided by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission Act of 1967, as amended, THEC is responsible for developing and implementing policies and initiatives to support and enhance postsecondary education opportunities for Tennesseans.