

# Education Recovery and Innovation Commission: April 29th Meeting

## Site Visit Summary: West Creek High School and Nashville State Community College Clarksville, April 11, 2022

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### Visitors in Attendance

- **ERIC:** Chair Tara Scarlett, Commissioner Frank Rothermel
- **State Board of Education:** Nathan James, Nate Morrow, Ali Gaffey
- **SCORE:** Dr. Sharon Roberts, Janelle Brown, Dr. Jamia Stokes, Dr. Shawn Boyd
- **Bellwether Education Partners:** Dr. Paul Beach, Lynne Graziano

### Overview of the Site Visit

The site visit began at West Creek High School with two student panel discussions, a student-guided school tour, and a round table discussion with school and district administrators. The attendees transitioned to Nashville State Community College for lunch with school and district administrators as well as community college leaders and staff. The site visit concluded with a community college student panel discussion and a campus tour.

The following summary provides a brief overview of each event, and the highlighted themes from students and administrators.

### West Creek High School — Student Panel #1

The first student panel was composed of seven students from several different career academies, including K-12 teaching; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), agriculture; Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC); construction; health care; and cosmetology. Highlighted themes from the first student panel included:

- Students expressed feeling well supported in their pathways by parents, teachers, and staff.
- Each student indicated they made a good personal choice and are enjoying the pathways chosen in 8th grade, often based on a middle school interest.
- Students found this ability to choose (and make informed choices) across the various sites and programs was helpful in finding a match to their interests.

### West Creek High — School Tour

Attendees were divided into small groups for a student-guided tour of the school, visiting classrooms such as the teaching academy, criminal justice and law, AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination), the arts academy, and the JROTC.

### West Creek High School — Student Panel #2

The second student panel included nine students representing several schools in the district, including but not limited to West Creek High School, Middle College, Early Technical College, and the district's K-12 Virtual School. Some of the students were in the same career academies as the first panel. Similar to the first student panel, these students expressed satisfaction with their chosen pathways. Highlighted themes from the second student panel included:

- Students reported that their pathways provided life skills (e.g., financial literacy, leadership skills, discipline) in addition to career- and college-specific skills.
- Students found informal mentors in teachers, coaches, and parents as well as formal mentors such as college advisers and guidance counselors.
- Students indicated switching pathways is challenging after grade 9 (though none of these students switched).

### **West Creek High School — Round Table Discussion with Staff**

Two main themes emerged from the short round table discussion with school and district administrators: teacher recruitment, retention, and diversification, and student mental health.

- Teacher recruitment, retention, and diversification
  - District administrators have been working to diversify their workforce to more closely match student demographics. Approximately 16% of teachers in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System identify as people of color, while about 50% of students in the district are students of color.
  - The district offers several teacher residency programs, including the first registered teacher apprenticeship program in the nation. Postsecondary partners for this work include Nashville State Community College, Austin Peay State University, and Lipscomb University. According to one administrator, the state's Grow-Your-Own grants program is "modeled after a lot of their work."
  - Administrators see PRAXIS (teacher licensure exam) as a barrier to teacher retention and diversification, especially in math, and advocate for policies where teachers can waive PRAXIS if they demonstrate competency through consistently high TVAAS scores.
- Student mental health issues
  - Cases of behavioral issues and suicide/self-harm instances have more than doubled since the pandemic began.
  - Administrators identified weaknesses in the broader mental health support system in the community, including inadequate space in existing facilities.
  - Administrators stressed that mental health needs will continue post-pandemic and outlast funding provided by pandemic relief funding programs.

### **Nashville State Community College Clarksville (NSCCC) — Lunch Discussion with Staff**

NSCCC President Dr. Shanna Jackson offered introductory remarks, and the attendees engaged in a discussion with the campus administrators and faculty during and after lunch. Themes from the lunch discussion included:

- The value of investing in student-staff relationships.
- The importance of partnerships between K-12, community colleges, and employers.
- Improving student experience through advising: Nashville State has shifted student advising from faculty members to newly hired student success advisers who provide personalized one-on-one support from enrollment to matriculation.

### **Nashville State Community College Clarksville — Student Panel**

The student panel included three traditional and two nontraditional students. Highlights from the student panel included the following:

- The two nontraditional students were drawn to the college as their interests developed in adulthood and they were encouraged by employers and mentors to pursue degree programs to further their careers.
- Two of the students graduated high school in 2020, missing out on the "normal" routines and senior year experiences due to the pandemic (one graduated in 2019). Each felt some anxiety over what "normal" should look like, but reported that the atmosphere at Nashville State felt inclusive and welcoming, which eased the transition.
- All students described how they appreciated career connections and caring faculty.

### **Nashville State Community College Clarksville — Campus Tour**

The site visit concluded with a brief tour of campus, including visits to several classrooms, common spaces, and computer labs. The tour included an overview of the college's plans to expand campus to serve a growing number of students.