

Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Spring 2017 | Quarterly Update



From the Executive Director

Over the past decade, Tennessee has made a seismic shift in our approach to postsecondary access and completion. From the move to the outcomes-based funding formula to the launch of the Drive to 55 and passage of the FOCUS Act, the last ten years have been a decade of emphasis on higher education in our state.

Perhaps no higher education initiative in our state has received more coverage than the ground-breaking Tennessee Promise scholarship program.

In just two years, over 33,000 Tennessee students have enrolled in higher education using the scholarship. Early successes point to long-term benefits: more students going to college and staying enrolled.

This spring marks a milestone for Tennessee Promise and the forward momentum of higher education our state: the first cohort of Promise students are now college graduates. They are the first class to graduate with two-years, tuition-free. They are the first class to walk across the graduation stage with significantly lower amounts of debt. They are the first class to tell the story that Tennessee kept its Promise to them.

-Mike Krause
Executive Director

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First Round of Tennessee Promise Students Graduate

When Governor Haslam announced Tennessee Promise in early 2014, the program created national buzz for being the first statewide program to cover two-years of tuition for graduating high school seniors in the state. As the first class enrolled in Fall 2015, intense focus was on what the next two years would look like for these students. How many would enroll? How many would stay enrolled? Would they fare better or worse in college than the classes before them?

Two years into the Tennessee Promise program, answers to those questions are beginning to emerge. More students than ever have enrolled in college directly after high school, a trend likely attributable to Promise. Even as a higher volume of students are entering higher education, retention rates have stayed steady. Tennessee Promise students are also persisting at rates higher than their non-Promise peers enrolled at community colleges.

This fall, data will be available on how many Tennessee Promise students graduated this spring and are continuing their education at four-year institutions. As students begin to graduate and either transfer or enter the workforce, Tennessee Promise's impact on educational attainment in Tennessee is just beginning.



Tennessee Promise Graduate Haley McGee, Motlow State '17, and her mom, Karen Harnden

"The community service has given her so much. Through Tennessee Promise, she volunteered at a nursing home. It gave her an opportunity to get out of her comfort zone. Just through the service, she met people with whom she'll have a lifetime connection." - Karen, mother of a Tennessee Promise graduate Haley

Tennessee Promise: Two Years of Students

February 2014	Governor Bill Haslam announces his Tennessee Promise proposal in the annual State of the State address.
April 2014	General Assembly passes legislation creating the Tennessee Promise scholarship.
May 2014	Governor Haslam signs Tennessee Promise into law.
August 2014	Tennessee Promise application opens for high school seniors.
August 2015	First cohort of Tennessee Promise students enroll in college.
August 2016	Second cohort of Tennessee Promise students enroll in college.
May 2017	First cohort of Tennessee Promise students begin to graduate with associate degrees.

33,081 students have enrolled using Tennessee Promise since Fall 2015	
16,291 Cohort 1 H.S. Class of 2015	16,790 Cohort 2 H.S. Class of 2016

63% of Tennessee Promise Cohort 1 students re-enrolled in Fall 2016	58% retention for Tennessee Promise students at community colleges
	83% retention for Tennessee Promise students at TCATs

Veteran Reconnect Creates Campus Change

The conversation on non-traditional learners in Tennessee includes one very important population of adult learners: veterans. Student veterans bring different perspectives and experiences to their education. Statewide initiatives and institutional resources are evolving to meet the needs of the ever-growing population of adult learners in Tennessee higher education.

Veteran Reconnect is just one of the ways that Tennessee is working to support student veterans. For the past two years, THEC has issued a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) to fund veteran support efforts at institutions of higher education. The Veteran Reconnect grants have led to increased services for student veterans at public and private institutions across the state. Initiatives have ranged from the founding and improvement of veteran centers to training of faculty and staff to new supports or veterans transitioning from service to postsecondary education to employment.

When the grants were originally awarded in 2015 to eleven colleges and universities, the program represented the state's first focused efforts to encourage new and expanded campus supports of student veterans. In the second round, six colleges and universities received funding for veterans initiatives with a defined focus area of using employer partnerships to support veterans transitioning into the workforce.

In late April 2017, the five campuses selected to receive funding through the second round of Veteran Reconnect, also known as Veteran Reconnect 2.0, submitted reports highlighting their progress in just the first year of implementation of the grant. Early data and programs show the positive traction the grant is creating on each campus.



During the first year of Veteran Reconnect 2.0:

570

student veterans have received services and an additional 240 students have been in contact

60

events have been held focused on student veterans

8

full-time staff have been hired to focus entirely on student veterans

Veteran Reconnect 2.0 Grants

Chattanooga State Community College: Chattanooga State used Veteran Reconnect grant funds to increase activities focused on outreach to student veterans, including celebrations in recognition of veterans during the academic year and luncheons with faculty and staff to increase dialogue and interaction directly related to student services.

Lipscomb University: Lipscomb University produced new outreach materials on their work with student veterans; the materials emphasize Lipscomb's veterans program, university specifics for veterans, and resources, facts, and information relevant to the transitioning veteran.

Maryville College: Maryville College established and enhanced partnerships with employers Local Motors, Clayton Homes, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory, to provide student veterans with internship opportunities.

Middle Tennessee State University: Middle Tennessee State University opened a 600 square foot addition to the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Military Family Center. The addition houses a "Transition Manager" staffer, funded through the grant to assist student veterans with finding the right fit in the workforce after graduation.

University of Tennessee at Martin: UTM hired a veteran services specialist who interacts directly with student veterans to provide assistance and resources. UTM also designated space in the University Center to serve as a lounge and study area for veterans.

Tusculum College: Tusculum College is developing the position of Director of Veterans Affairs. The college is also focused on providing veterans employment paths for post-graduation by building employer partnerships across Northeast Tennessee.

What's next for Veteran Reconnect?

THEC's Division of Veteran Education will continue to track the success of student veterans at all institutions across the state and provide support to campuses. Additionally, legislation was passed earlier this year to create a more standardized system for prior learning assessment (PLA) for military experience; THEC will coordinate implementing the new law with campuses. A third round of Veteran Reconnect grants is planned for 2017-18. This round will provide individual grants of up to eighty-thousand (\$80,000) to institutions of higher education to facilitate development and implementation of interventions focused on improving PLA for student veterans.

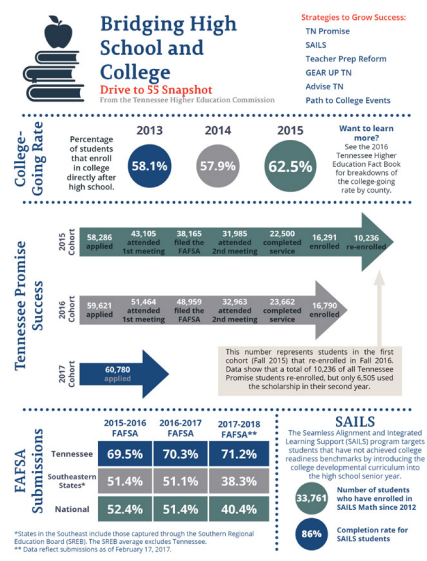
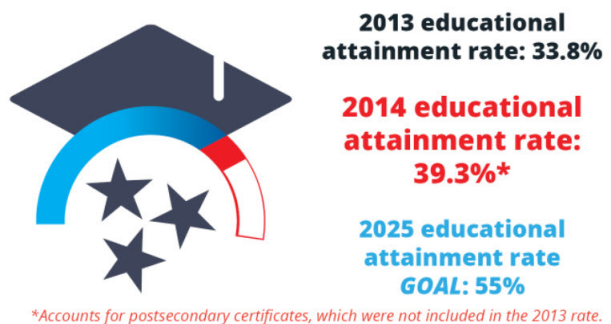
Drive to 55 Snapshot

THEC has launched a series of “Drive to 55 Snapshots” to track the state’s progress toward the goal of 55 percent of Tennesseans with a degree or credential by the year 2025. The new snapshots detail various metrics used to indicate where the state is seeing success and where there is room for growth. Beyond Tennessee’s overall educational attainment rate, the Drive to 55 snapshot focuses on four areas as Tennessee progresses toward the Drive to 55, each with individual metrics to determine success:

- 1. Bridging High School and College:** College-Going Rate, Tennessee Promise Success, FAFSA Submission, SAILS Completion
- 2. Student Progress:** Student Progression, Transfer Success, Remediation
- 3. Graduate Outcomes:** Completers, Time to Degree, Loan Default
- 4. Workforce Development:** Post-Graduation Earnings, Job Placement, Post-Graduation Migration

THEC will update the snapshots periodically as data become available and will use the data to determine where additional resources and policies should be focused.

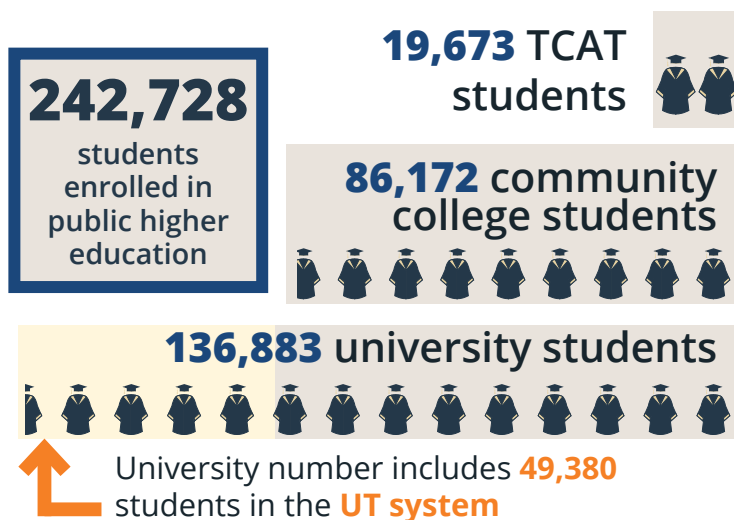
The Drive to 55 Snapshot is now available on THEC’s website, linked directly from the homepage.



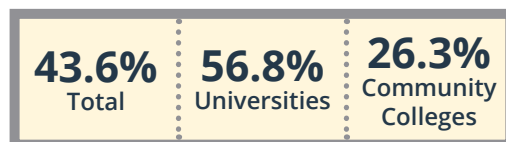
Bridging High School and College Snapshot

2017 Tennessee Higher Education Fact Book

THEC released the 2017 Higher Education Fact Book in April, highlighting trends and data in enrollment and completion. This year’s report revealed that more students than ever in Tennessee are enrolling in college after high school, they require fewer learning supports once they get there, and those that do enroll in co-requisite learning support are seeing higher levels of success. The report is available on THEC’s website under the “Research” menu.



Six-year graduation rate for community colleges and universities:



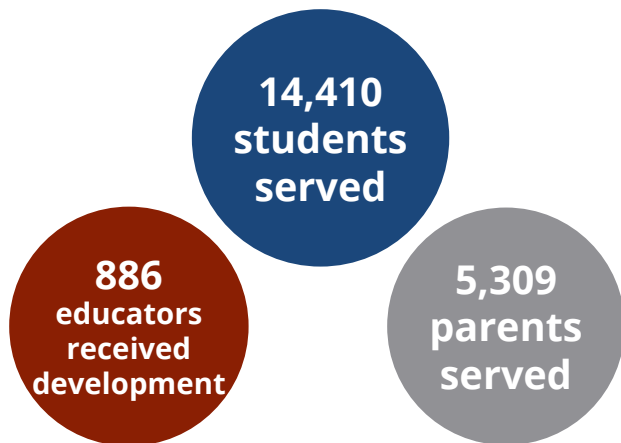
Graduation rates for the cohort entering college in Fall 2010.

GEAR UP TN Annual Performance Report

Each April, THEC's Division of College Access and Success submits an Annual Performance Report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education for the federally-funded GEAR UP program. Every GEAR UP program across the country is required to submit data showing how programs are progressing and identifying the college access interventions that have proven to be most successful. The 2016 APR gathered data from the 15 counties that Tennessee's GEAR UP program serves and showed that students in the service areas continue to move toward being college-ready.



GEAR UP TN Outcomes for 2016



GEAR UP TN provides services to students and families that include college advising, financial aid nights, college visits and much more, as well as professional development on college access for educators.

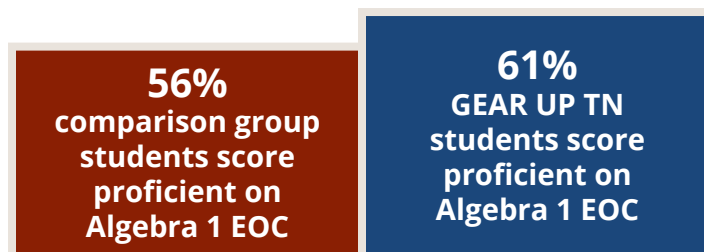
College-Going Rate for GEAR UP TN Seniors

Graduating Class	College-Going Rate
2013	53.2%
2014	56.7%
2015	60.7%

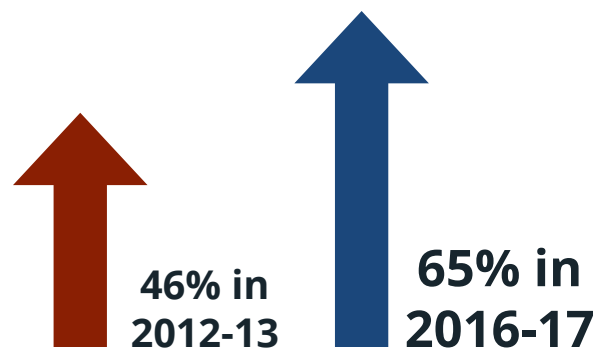
Prior to grant implementation, the baseline college-going rate for GEAR UP TN schools was 51%.

Academic Readiness

GEAR UP TN students are outperforming comparison group students in math, reading, and science. One example of this is performance in Algebra I courses and End of Course tests, a key indicator of college readiness.



FAFSA Filing Rate for GEAR UP TN Seniors



GEAR UP TN School District Honored by Tennessee Department of Education

In late January, the Tennessee Department of Education honored Grainger County Schools at an event to release its report on pathways between high school and postsecondary education. The *Seamless Pathways* report recognized the work in Grainger High School to increase the school's college-going rate from 50% to 75% in just two years. GEAR UP TN Site Coordinator Vicki Farrar was among the counselors recognized at the event.



Grainger High School's annual College Signing Day event

2017 Legislative Update

The 2017 legislative session continued to emphasize higher education issues in Tennessee. Legislation filed this year ranged from the development of new programs to remove barriers to higher education, such as the Tennessee Reconnect Act, to bills that rounded out last year's FOCUS Act legislation. As legislative session winds down, an update on some of the bills that made their way through the General Assembly this year:

House Bill 531: Tennessee Reconnect

House Floor Vote: 87-6-1

Senate Floor Vote: 32-0

- Similar to Tennessee Promise, the Act establishes a last-dollar tuition scholarship at any of the state's 13 community colleges. The funds are available to residents qualifying as independent adult students.
- An important extension of the Drive to 55, TN Reconnect comes at no additional cost to taxpayers.
- The Act is a part of Governor Haslam's "Next Tennessee" legislative package, and means every Tennessean will now have the opportunity to enter or reenter public higher education tuition-free.



Sponsors: Rep. David B. Hawk (R-Greeneville)
and Senator Mark Norris (R-Collierville)

Senate Bill 1232: VETS Act Update

Senate Floor Vote: 33-0

House Floor Vote: 94-0

Public Chapter 31

- Updates the Veterans Education Transition Support ("VETS") Act by empowering THEC to develop a publicly-available online database of course equivalencies for military training.
- This web-based tool will allow veterans and service members to determine the amount of college credit they will receive for their military experience, as well as the degree or credential programs to which that credit will apply, prior to enrolling at a particular institution.
- The legislation also grants in-state tuition to anyone using veteran educational benefits as long as they are currently living in the state, regardless of their official "home of record" or formal state of residence.



Sponsors: Senator Mark Norris (R-Collierville)
and Rep. Ryan Williams (R-Cookeville)

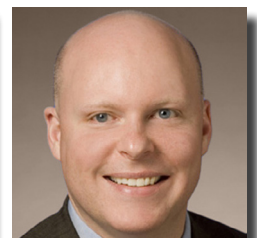
Senate Bill 1216: STRONG Act

Senate Floor Vote: 31-0

House Floor Vote: 97-0

Public Chapter 229

- Another component of Next Tennessee, the STRONG Act establishes a pilot program to provide eligible members of the Tennessee National Guard with last-dollar funding toward a bachelor's degree at Tennessee's public institutions.
- The Act will provide tuition-free educational opportunities for those who protect and serve our state and country and further support Drive to 55 efforts.



Sponsors: Senator Mark Norris (R-Collierville)
and Rep. David B. Hawk (R-Greeneville)

Senate Bill 1231: LEAP Work-Based Learning

Senate Floor Vote: 32-0

House Floor Vote: 94-0

- Amends the Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) Act by defining the term "work-based learning" (WBL) as it is used in LEAP programs.
- As defined, the key components of WBL in LEAP programs:
 - Students earn academic credit for the experience
 - Incorporates the experience into coursework in a specific field of study
 - Integrates classroom learning with the practical application of workplace skills
 - LEAP students may or may not be paid wages or other compensation
- Clarifies expectations for educators, employers, and students involved in LEAP internships and other forms of experiential learning placements.



Sponsors: Senator Mark Norris (R-Collierville)
and Rep. Ron M. Gant (R-Rossville)

House Bill 396: State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement

House Floor Vote: 89-1

Senate Floor Vote: 30-0

- Updates Tennessee's participation in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement ("NC-SARA") related to the handling of complaints by out-of-state students against Tennessee institutions.
- Clarifies that THEC, as the designated portal agency for SARA, has the final authority to resolve such complaints once the student has exhausted the institution's grievance process.
- Consistent with SARA, THEC is not required to address complaints regarding requirements of federal law, state law, or the institution's non-SARA policies, such as student grades or student conduct violations.
- Updates language in the SARA Act to properly include the six locally governed universities under the FOCUS Act.



*Sponsors: Rep. Harry Brooks (R-Knoxville)
and Senator Dolores Gresham (R-Somerville)*

Senate Bill 995: TBR Board Members

Senate Floor Vote: 32-0

House Floor Vote: 95-0

Public Chapter 29

- Makes various technical changes to the FOCUS Act related to the appointment of the student and faculty members to the Tennessee Board of Regents.
- Two faculty members, one each from a TCAT and a community college, will serve on the board. One will have the right to vote on board matters for a one-year term, and one will be nonvoting during that year so that each faculty regent will have a year to "learn the ropes" before serving as a full voting member. The voting and nonvoting faculty regents will rotate annually between the two types of TBR institutions.
- TBR student members must be selected from a community college or TCAT, and not one of the state universities, as was the case prior to the establishment of the six governing boards under the FOCUS Act.



*Sponsors: Senator Jim Tracy (R-Shelbyville)
and Rep. Ryan Williams (R-Cookeville)*

Senate Bill 994: FOCUS Act Update

Senate Floor Vote: 33-0

House Floor Vote: 94-0

Public Chapter 28

- Updates the FOCUS Act by giving specific statutory authority, identical to that of TBR and UT, to each of the six newly-established state university governing boards in several policy and procedural areas including campus police/public safety, state-owned aircraft, expenditures by chief executives, and the purchase and sale of alcoholic beverages on campus.
- Specifies that whistleblower protections applicable to TBR and UT employees under present law also apply to employees of the locally governed state universities.
- Requires each state university board to establish an audit committee and mandates that each audit committee hire a chief internal auditor that does not answer to the president of the institution.



*Sponsors: Senator Jim Tracy (R-Shelbyville)
and Rep. Ryan Williams (R-Cookeville)*

House Bill 1013: FOCUS Board Members

House Floor Vote 95-0

Senate Vote: 25-3

- Modification to a provision of the FOCUS Act prohibiting a state university governing board member from serving on the governing board of any other institution of higher education.
- A member of one of the newly-created boards of the six locally governed institutions would be able to also serve on the governing board of a private institution of higher education, but not another public one.

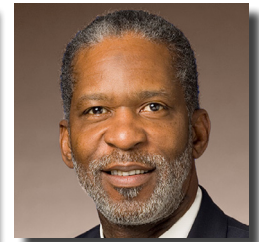


*Sponsors: Rep. David B. Hawk (R-Greeneville)
and Senator Dolores Gresham (R-Somerville)*

House Bill 553: Initiative on Historically Black Colleges & Universities

Senate Floor Vote: 32-0

House Floor Vote: 94-0



Sponsors: Rep. Harold M. Love, Jr. (D-Nashville)
and Senator Reginald Tate (D-Memphis)

- Creates the Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities ("HBCUs") as an organizational unit of THEC.
 - Purpose is to focus on ways to strengthen the capacity of HBCUs to provide the highest quality education, increase opportunities for HBCUs to benefit from state programs, and ensure that Tennessee has the highest proportion of college graduates from HBCUs in the country.
 - Initiative would be authorized to establish a 25-member Board of Advisors, appointed by THEC.
 - Requires the Initiative to consult with Consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities to ensure meeting of its goals.
-

House Bill 64: Public Records Exception

House Floor Vote: 83-11

Senate Floor Vote: 31-0



Sponsors: Rep. Harry Brooks (R-Knoxville)
and Senator Dolores Gresham (R-Somerville)

- Establishes an exception to the Tennessee Public Records Act for certain investment records of private endowment funds donated to public higher education institutions. The exception will expire July 1, 2021.
 - Records relating to proprietary investment analysis and practices in regard to these funds are not open for public inspection.
 - The purpose is to preserve the competitive advantage and continued viability of private firms with which the state contracts for investment services and advice.
 - Similar exceptions already exist in the law for the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System and other state programs.
 - Records relating to the name of an investment, the name of an investment manager, the amount invested, or the most recent fiscal year-end value of an investment would remain open to public inspection.
-

Student Voices

Stories from students relentlessly pursuing their education and becoming part of the Drive to 55

"You hit a point where you want to be more than 'okay' and you want to jump over the walls you keep running into.

I'm a better student now than I have ever been in my entire life. People always said it would be really hard to go back when I was older. It's not so much harder going back as it is thinking, 'Wow, there's so much time that I've had and I've added more time to doing this than I should have.' But now I know why I'm doing it."

-India Hunter, Motlow State Community College Graduate (2017) and future transfer student to Middle Tennessee State University or Tennessee State University



Joan Hunter and daughter India Hunter
at India's graduation from Motlow State
Community College in May 2017.

"I'm very proud of her; so proud of her. She said, 'I'm going to do this, Mom, and I promise you I'm going to get this degree.' And she's doing that. We appreciate Motlow and the support that has been there.

[When she walked across the stage at graduation], you could hear me yelping across the room. Someone asked, 'Is that your daughter?', and I said, 'Ya think?' It really all sank in after she left to drive down here today. That's when it hit me. All I can say is how proud I am. She knows it."

-Joan Hunter, India's mother