

This report is prepared pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-7-178(g), which instructs the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to:

"...submit an annual report on the outcomes of the [Completion Grants] pilot program to the education committee of the senate and to the education committee of the house of representatives..."

In pursuit of its mission to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential, THEC and the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) have implemented various programs and initiatives to encourage Tennesseans to engage with higher education and support students through completion.

The Tennessee Promise program, signed into law by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2014, provides tuition- and mandatory fee-free community college for Tennessee high school graduates. This report highlights the outcomes of the first two years of a four-year pilot program to award completion grants to Tennessee Promise scholarship students receiving college coaching services delivered by Tennessee Promise partnering organizations.

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Executive Summary

The Completion Grants Report (2023) is the second of four reports analyzing the completion grants pilot program initiated by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2021. Two years of completion grant participation data was available at the time of reporting. This report focuses on the program structure, administration, and results from the pilot program's first and second years and provides initial data on outcomes for recipients of completion grants.

As of this report, nine cohorts of Tennessee Promise students have matriculated into eligible public and private institutions across Tennessee. Completion grants were first made available to Tennessee Promise students participating in college coaching initiatives in fall 2021, which may include Tennessee Promise students from the fall 2019 cohort, fall 2020 cohort, and fall 2021 cohort. Through year two of the completion grants pilots, grants were made available to Tennessee Promise students participating in college coaching from the fall 2020, fall 2021, and fall 2022 cohorts. More detail about these students is available in the annual *Tennessee Promise Report*.

Key findings from the report include:

- In year one (2021-22), the completion grants pilot reached 708 unique students with 1,345 completion grants (totaling \$243,217). Available funds for tnAchieves were expended within ten weeks, resulting in additional funding in year two (2022-23), which allowed the pilot to serve 3,058 individual students, over four times as many students, with 14,758 completion grants, totaling over \$1.8 million (**Table 3** and **Table 4**).
- Individual students may receive multiple grants. *Grants* represent the number of completion grants awarded, whereas *recipients* represent the number of students receiving completion grants. On average, students in year one of the pilot (2021-22) received 1.9 completion grants with an average total amount of \$343. In year two (2022-23), students received an average of 4.8 grants with an average total amount of \$591 (**Table 3** and **Table 4**).
- Transportation and Food remained the categories demonstrating the highest need in year two of the pilot (Table 5 and Table 6). With additional funds, Food and Transportation were requested more frequently and the amount of grant money awarded in these categories expanded (Figure 6 and Figure 7). This may reflect students' ongoing need for Food and Transportation support, as well as limits set on individual grant amounts, while students may not face expenses for Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees as often.
- Compared to coaching students, Black and Hispanic completion grant recipients have greater representation. When compared to Tennessee Promise cohorts overall, women, Black, and Hispanic students are disproportionately represented in the college coaching program (**Table 7**).
- Student persistence after receiving a completion grant is high 85.6% of fall recipients persisted to spring (**Table 8** and **Table 9**) and over 750 students who received a grant have gone on to earn a credential so far (**Table 10**).

Introduction

The 2023 Completion Grants Report comprises three sections:

- 1. The first section provides an overview of the Tennessee Promise program and the completion grants pilot and summarizes the program details and its administration by the Ayers Foundation and tnAchieves.
- 2. The second section summarizes participation data from the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.
- 3. The third section provides information on student persistence and credentials earned after receiving a completion grant, updated through summer 2023.

Data

Data in this report come from the Tennessee Promise Partnering Organizations, <u>tnAchieves</u> and the <u>Ayers Foundation Trust</u>; the THEC Student Information System (THECSIS); and the TSAC Financial Aid System of Tennessee (FAST). Each year, Partnering Organizations submit a template to THEC/TSAC that includes participants in college coaching, applicants for completion grants, and recipients of completion grants.

Privacy Notice

Throughout this report, THEC complies with federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements to protect students' personally identifiable information. When tables are presented, individual cells containing fewer than ten observations are suppressed. Adjacent cells may also be suppressed to prevent unmasking via subtraction (i.e., complementary suppression). The suppressed counts are included in the table totals.

Effects of COVID-19 on Tennessee Promise

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TSAC temporarily suspended rules created for receiving and/or maintaining Tennessee Promise eligibility. For more information about changes to Tennessee Promise eligibility rules during COVID-19, reference this section in the <u>2022 Tennessee Promise Annual Report.</u> Some of these temporary rule suspensions impacted cohorts eligible to receive completion grants.

More details on temporary rule suspensions for the Tennessee Promise scholarship and other programs can be found at <u>TSAC's COVID-19 Campus & Financial Aid</u> webpage. Data presented in future iterations of this report may not be comparable to the current report and to past reports.

Section One: Program Overview

Program Description

The Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that provides recent high school graduates the opportunity to complete an associate degree or certificate program free of tuition and mandatory fees at a public community college, a Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), or a public or private university with an eligible associate degree program.¹

As a last-dollar scholarship, Tennessee Promise funds the remaining balance of tuition and mandatory fees after all other gift aid has been applied.² The amount of the Tennessee Promise award is based on the other gift aid a student receives. First, the federal Pell Grant is applied, followed by state gift aid (e.g., Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship awards and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award).³ After all federal and state gift aid is applied to the student's total tuition and mandatory fees, the remaining balance is paid by Tennessee Promise. **Table 1** displays three different funding scenarios. Individuals who have met all eligibility criteria for Tennessee Promise and who have all tuition and mandatory fee expenses covered by gift aid (i.e., have a balance of \$0) are still considered Tennessee Promise students.

Table 1: Tennessee Promise Award Scenarios

	Example A	Example B	Example C
Tuition/mandatory fees	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Gift aid (HOPE, Pell, TSAA)	\$4,250	\$3,250	\$0
Gap between grant aid and tuition/mandatory fees	\$0	\$750	\$4,000
Tennessee Promise award amount	\$0	\$750	\$4,000
Tuition/Mandatory Fees Balance	\$0	\$0	\$0

Tennessee Promise is among a suite of programs designed to increase educational attainment among Tennesseans. About one-third of Tennessee Promise students do not persist fall to fall, and this rate has remained consistent over time.⁴ Researchers and policy organizations posit several strategies to improve retention and completion for students, including advising, student basic needs support, and open education resources, among others. Emergency grant funds are recognized as a valuable tool to support

¹ Scholarships for students attending eligible four-year institutions are equal to the average cost of tuition and mandatory fees at the public two-year postsecondary institutions less all other gift aid.

² Gift aid is money allotted to a student that does not need to be repaid, like scholarships and grants.

³ The federal Pell Grant is a need-based grant offered to students with exceptional financial need who have not earned their bachelor's, graduate, or a professional degree. More on the Pell Grant can be found here: https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell

⁴ See retention and completion details by cohort and term starting on page 29 of the <u>Tennessee Promise Report</u>. Tennessee Promise students in fall 2020 not retained to fall 2021 saw an increase, but future Tennessee Promise reports will track trends for fall 2021 students.

students experiencing acute, real-time financial needs to address transportation, housing, and food insecurity. Completion grant programs have been in place in Tennessee communities to address financial emergencies for some time, but their scope and scale have varied.

In 2021, the Tennessee General Assembly created a statewide completion grant pilot for Tennessee Promise students who are experiencing a financial hardship that may prevent the student from completing their degree. Legislation requires that eligible Tennessee Promise students participate in a proactive, high-impact college coaching model that facilitates several one-on-one communications between students and coaches.

Partnering organizations, the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves, further operationalized completion grant eligibility and financial need using the Pell Grant and expected family contribution (EFC).⁶ Due to differences in number of students served and availability of resources, partnering organizations did not have the same threshold for financial need for the first year of the pilot.⁷ Students served by tnAchieves were eligible for a completion grant in year one (2021-22 academic year) with a \$0 EFC. Students served by the Ayers Foundation Trust needed to be Pell Grant recipients (any dollar amount) to be eligible for a completion grant. The scope of this program changed, with additional state funds allocated to tnAchieves to expand completion grants. In year two of the pilot (2022-23 academic year), both partnering organizations were able to use the same threshold for financial need: Pell Grant receipt of any dollar amount.

Figure 1 illustrates the current requirements a student must meet to be eligible for the completion grants pilot. An eligible student must be a Tennessee Promise eligible student, they must participate in college coaching, and they must be a Pell Grant recipient⁸.

Figure 1: Eligibility for Completion Grants



⁵ Sage Education Advisors, Increasing College Persistence through Emergency Grant Programs, 2022, https://www.heckscherfoundation.org/increasing-college-persistence-through-emergency-grant-programs/

⁶ Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is an index number used to determine eligibility for federal student aid. More information can be found here: https://studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/article/what-is-efc

⁷ In the 2022-23 academic year, both partnering organizations had the same threshold for financial need, which is any Pell Grant receipt.

⁸ The federal Pell Grant is a need-based grant offered to students with exceptional financial need who have not earned their bachelor's, graduate, or a professional degree. More on the Pell Grant can be found here: https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell

The completion grants pilot began in fall 2021 for the 2021-22 academic year and continued for year two in the 2022-23 academic year. Students meeting eligibility criteria, as determined by their partnering organization, receive notice of the availability of funds and are advised to apply if they experience financial hardship.

There are five categories of financial hardship identified in the completion grant pilot:

- 1. **Food** eligible students may receive up to one hundred fifty dollars (\$150) per request. Funds given via grocery cards.¹⁰
- 2. **Housing** eligible students may receive up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per semester or six hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$625) per trimester. The partnering organization pays the entity (e.g., landlord) directly.
- 3. **Transportation** eligible students may receive one hundred dollars (\$100) per request. Funds given via gas cards.
- 4. **Books/Supplies** eligible students may receive up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per semester or six hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$625) per trimester. The partnering organization pays the bookstore, merchant, or provider directly.
- 5. **Class-Specific Fees** eligible students may receive up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per semester or six hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$625) per trimester. The partnering organization pays the higher education institution directly.

For this year's report, Books/Supplies and Class-Specific Fees are combined. This combined category represents Books, Supplies, Computers, and Fees specific to programs.

Program Funding

The completion grant pilot established in T.C.A. § 49-7-178 is funded using repurposed funds from T.C.A. § 49-11-903, a work-based learning grant fund. Statute requires that THEC/TSAC not expend more than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) of these funds in the first year of the pilot or any year thereafter. Completion grant funds are distributed to partnering organizations based on the number of counties served, translating to \$33,000 and \$217,000 annually for the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves, respectively. For year two of the program, the Ayers Foundation Trust carried forward \$17,500 from year one for a total of \$50,500 available for completion grants in fiscal year 2023.

In year two, the General Assembly appropriated an additional one-time \$14,500,000 to tnAchieves to expand coaching and completion grants over five years. In year two, tnAchieves allocated \$1,300,000 to expand coaching services and \$1,600,000 for completion grants.

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⁹ In 2021-22, students who matriculated as Tennessee Promise students in fall 2019, fall 2020, or fall 2021 may still be eligible for Tennessee Promise, since students can maintain eligibility for up to five semesters (or eight trimesters at a TCAT). In 2022-23, Tennessee Promise students who first matriculated in fall 2020, fall 2021, or fall 2022 may be still eligible for Tennessee Promise.

¹⁰ While the contract for the pilot allows for up to \$150 grants in the Food category, tnAchieves set a maximum award amount of \$100 to encourage more connections between coaches and students and to allow the dollars to extend to more students. The Ayers Foundation Trust also used a \$100 maximum award amount in year two to extend dollars further.

The completion grant pilot is embedded within the Tennessee Promise college coaching initiative, which provides proactive advising support to low-income Tennessee Promise students through the partnering organizations. In fiscal year 2023, \$1.1M was given to the partnering organizations to support coaching, with \$145,258 to the Ayers Foundation Trust and \$945,742 to tnAchieves. Importantly, the <u>Knox Promise</u>, a community-based program serving Knox County high school graduates specifically with advising and additional financial supports is a separate endeavor and students participating in coaching and completion grants in Knox County are not a part of this report. ¹¹

Program Implementation

THEC/TSAC collaborates with partnering organizations, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust, to administer Tennessee Promise. These partnering organizations support high school seniors and college enrollees, through volunteer mentors and in-house advising staff, in the college-going process and through to college completion.

Prior to the statewide availability of tuition- and mandatory fee-free community and technical college in 2015, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust served local communities in college-going endeavors. tnAchieves began as Knox Achieves, a free community college program in Knox County that connected local high school graduates to volunteer mentors to assist and encourage students in the college-going process. The program expanded to 27 additional counties in 2014. The Ayers Foundation Scholar's Program is a college coaching program supporting students beginning in 8th grade and assisting them through college by bringing college counselor positions to local high schools. These organizations and their infrastructure helped support the rollout of statewide free college.¹²

For the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years, the Ayers Foundation Trust served the following counties as the Tennessee Promise partnering organization: Benton, Claiborne, Decatur, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Lawrence, Lewis, Perry, Unicoi, Union, and Wayne. tnAchieves served the remaining 83 counties in Tennessee. For the 2023-24 academic year (year three of the completion grants pilot), Ayers expanded to serve nine additional counties: Bledsoe, Campbell, Cocke, Houston, Lauderdale, McNairy, Meigs, Scott, and Warren. The Ayers Foundation Trust will begin serving students in the high school senior class of 2024 in these counties, while tnAchieves will continue to serve current Tennessee Promise students in these counties through the end of their Promise eligibility. This means that in years four and five of the completion grants pilot, Tennessee Promise students from the same county will participate in completion grants and in college coaching through different partnering organizations, depending upon when the student graduated high school.

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¹¹ The additional financial supports include completion grants and textbook stipends.

¹² The Tennessee Promise program initially had three partnering organizations affiliated with each of the 95 counties across Tennessee. The Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI) served seven counties in West Tennessee but ceased their role as a partnering organization in June 2019. Over time, the counties served by the partnering organizations have changed.

Figure 2 displays the service areas for tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust in the 2022-23 academic year. **Figure 3** displays the service areas for tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust in the 2023-24 academic year, following the expansion of Ayers Foundation Trust counties.

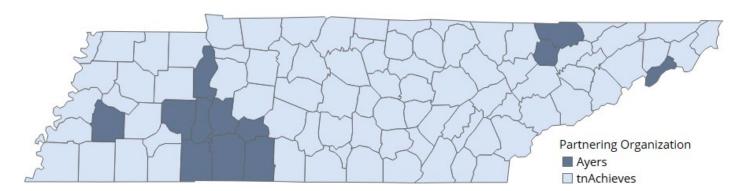
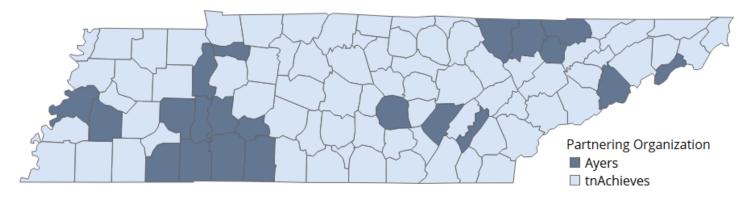


Figure 2: Tennessee Promise Partnering Organization by County, 2022-23





Ayers Foundation Trust

The Ayers Foundation Trust served 12 counties in Tennessee in years one and two of this pilot using a high school counselor to deliver college counseling to students beginning in the 8th grade. The Ayers program has been in operation since 2000, evolved with the placement of staff in local community colleges, and in 2021-22 expanded to seven of the twelve counties served. The Ayers model connects high school counselors with students across 18 high schools to develop plans for college and support students to and through college. Additionally, the Ayers Foundation Trust employs staff at Columbia State Community College's Lawrence Campus and Jackson State Community College's Lexington Center.

The program is structured to build a relationship between the student and local high school counselor who remains a point of contact for the student throughout their college experience. The program aims for monthly connections between counselors and students.

All Tennessee Promise-eligible high school graduates who matriculate to Columbia and Jackson State community colleges, as well as at-risk students are considered *college coaching participants* in Ayers-served

counties. ¹³ In addition to students' high school counselor, students at Columbia State and Jackson State have a local community college representative who communicates regularly with students, personalizing outreach to college resources. The monthly interactions between students and counselors connect students to resources (e.g., academic supports, information about local bus schedules, financial resources, etc.). Often students may receive multiple communications each month from the central office Ayers staff, their high school counselor, and Ayers-employed staff at the community college.

College coaching students who receive a Pell Grant are eligible for the completion grants pilot. The Ayers Foundation Trust employed multiple strategies to notify students of the grants. Tailored email communications, such as the one found in **Appendix B** (pg. 28) were sent to eligible students beginning in August 2021. Notification about completion grant availability is included in all emails sent by Ayers to eligible students.

In addition to email notifications, counselors and coaches use monthly check-ins as an opportunity to identify student needs and connect them with resources. Students in need fill out the Ayers Foundation Trust completion grants application, which notifies the counselor and initiates a contact between the student and Ayers Foundation Trust staff. 14 In determining the award amount, counselors take into consideration the amount requested, the amount allowable per grant category, and, in the case of supplies, fees, or housing, the bill. Then, grants are awarded, and the counselor and student discuss strategies to support the student in their immediate and long-term needs. The Ayers Foundation Trust was able to serve all eligible students who requested funds in 2021-22, providing grants in both fall 2021 and spring 2022. In 2022-23, Ayers utilized all funds each semester, providing grants in fall 2022 and spring 2023, expending funds in May 2023.

tnAchieves

tnAchieves served 83 counties in Tennessee in years one and two of this pilot using a network of volunteers from the community and regional staff to administer the Tennessee Promise. Each year, tnAchieves pairs volunteers with Tennessee Promise applicants in their community to assist students in applying to college and completing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and to be a resource answering students' questions and encouraging their enrollment.

The tnAchieves model served as the framework for the statewide rollout of the Tennessee Promise. Upon the recognition that too few low-income students complete college using Promise and too few students transfer when they aspire to a four-year degree, tnAchieves piloted a coaching initiative. In 2017-18, the pilot assigned low-income, academically at-risk students to a coach who helped students through the myriad challenges to remaining enrolled. The model was proactive, with coaches reaching out to students

¹³ The Ayers Foundation Trust classifies a student as at-risk if they are first generation, low-income (receiving Pell Grant), academically underprepared, experiencing transportation challenges, or at the high school counselor's recommendation.

¹⁴ The Ayers Foundation Trust experienced a few instances where ineligible students completed grant applications or supporting material was not provided and the grant application was denied (n=14 in year one, n=29 in year two).

at least twice per semester. In 2018-19, the program expanded statewide with \$1.25M support from the Tennessee General Assembly and Governor.

Each August, tnAchieves identifies all Tennessee Promise, Pell Grant recipients enrolling at community colleges full-time and assigns them to a COMPLETE coach – these students are *college coaching participants*. Students enrolling at another Tennessee Promise eligible institution, like a TCAT or four-year college, are added to the coaching cohort if they apply for a completion grant. tnAchieves employs 27 coaches who manage an approximately 350-student caseload per coach each year. Coaches are placed at various community colleges across the state, and these coaches lead outreach to their caseload with intensive, small group outreach in the first few weeks of classes, then personalized connection upon the establishment of the relationship. tnAchieves has established three benchmarks in defining a connection: talk to the student, learn something new about the student, and rank the student on a 1-5 scale for how they are doing during the semester. A student who participates in coaching has at least two connections per semester. Coaches use the ranking to prioritize student outreach, so that the neediest students receive support. Ultimately, a small number of students (approximately 10% each year) do not respond to multiple outreaches and are eventually removed from the coaching cohort.

Like the Knox Promise program, the statewide completion grant pilot uses student interactions with COMPLETE coaches to connect students to the completion grant and other resources. In year one, tnAchieves sent a pre-notice to eligible students that a completion grant fund had been established, which initiated substantial interest. In both years, tnAchieves used email, text messages, and small group meetings at the outset of the semester to build awareness of the program. Figure 4 (to the illustrates right) an example of this communication.

In the first year, tnAchieves awarded all completion grant funds to needy students within the first 10 weeks of the semester. To receive funds, students completed the <u>tnAchieves completion grant application</u>, which notified coaches and initiated a connection. Coaches use the amount requested, the amount allowable based on the category,

Figure 4: Sample Communication to Eligible Students, tnAchieves



https://tnachieves.org/grants/

allowable funds remaining for the student, and in case of supplies, fees, and housing, the bill, to determine the grant amount. Once all funds were expended, the application closed but discussion between coaches and students persisted to find other resources to alleviate student need (e.g., loaned laptops, etc.).

While the Ayers Foundation and tnAchieves have varied models for coaching, both partnering organizations serve students with financial need. THEC/TSAC, informed by the legislation, established parameters for the disbursement of funds to students who completed an application for and were awarded a completion grant. Because the completion grant pilot is embedded within the coaching initiative, both partnering organizations work closely with students and strategically engage students eligible for grants. To minimize the risk that a student applies for a completion grant and is denied because they are ineligible, funds were depleted, etc., tnAchieves closed their completion grant application, which has implications for measuring student need or demand. Section two of this report details more information about the grants disbursed and the students receiving them.

Estimated Financial Assistance

Institutions of higher education nationwide provide students with an estimated Cost of Attendance (COA), a total cost for the student to attend their institution for one school year. This includes expenses like tuition, fees, books, school supplies, food, and housing. The total amount of financial assistance a student receives cannot exceed the student's estimated COA. Following the proliferation of emergency student grants during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education has clarified that these emergency grants, including completion grants, may be included in a student's total aid package. There may be exceptions to the inclusion of these emergency grants in situations where the expense is documented as unexpected and emergent. While the U.S. Department of Education's guidance regarding emergency grants and other types of cash aid to students continues to evolve, the inclusion of completion grants in a student's Estimated Financial Assistance (EFA) calculation does increase the burden to administer the completion grants pilot to ensure compliance. The inclusion of these completion grants for some students in EFA calculations may limit access for students who are already receiving financial aid that covers their full Cost of Attendance, namely the lowest income students who are eligible to receive the full amount of a federal Pell Grant. tnAchieves noted that, in the 2022-23 academic year, a process was implemented to verify a completion grant applicant's EFA before awarding a completion grant to ensure the student's EFA did not exceed their COA.

Section Two: Completion Grant Recipients

Tennessee Promise Applicants

Applying for Tennessee Promise involves several steps. **Table 2** displays the total number of applicants as well as the proportion completing each pre-enrollment step to be eligible for the Tennessee Promise scholarship. The number of applicants in the 2022-23 cohort increased over the 2021-22 cohort, a promising rebound to pre-pandemic application counts.

The application cycles for the 2020-21 through 2022-23 cohorts span the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020-21 cohort, the high school graduating class of 2020, applied to Tennessee Promise prior to the onset of the pandemic, but experienced disruptions in their senior year of high school. The 2021-22 cohort experienced disruptions in both the spring of their junior year and throughout their senior year of high school (2020-21) which may contribute to the decline in application and subsequent preenrollment requirements. The 2022-23 cohort experienced COVID-19 disruptions earlier in their high school experience, though societal conditions began to improve in 2021-22 when the 2022-23 cohort was applying for Tennessee Promise. This trend generally aligns with Tennessee's college-going rate, which declined in both 2020 and 2021 but rebounded in 2022.¹⁵

Table 2: Tennessee Promise Application Process by Proportion, 2019-20 Through 2022-23 Cohorts¹⁶

	Cohort			
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Applied for Tennessee Promise	64,243	64,062	61,649	62,980
Filed the FAFSA	88.4%	89.7%	86.0%	85.4%
Completed Community Service Requirements	44.6%		44.6%	47.9%
Eligible for Tennessee Promise	29.5%	30.4%	24.9%	24.5%
Enrolled at an Eligible Public Institution	26.4%	26.4%	22.2%	21.6%

Notes: Community service requirements were waived for the 2020-21 cohort due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cohort years refer to the first year a student is enrolled in postsecondary education. For example, the 2019-20 cohort graduated high school in spring 2019 and 2019-20 is the first academic year a student would be able to enroll full-time in postsecondary education. Summer 2023 enrollment data is not available at this time for the 2022-23 cohort, which may impact the *Enrolled at an Eligible Institution* count for the 2022-23 cohort. Historically, roughly 0.3% - 0.6% of Promise students enroll in the summer term, so the anticipated increase with summer 2023 enrollment is small.

Completion Grant Recipients

Not all Tennessee Promise students are eligible for the completion grant pilot. Tennessee Promise students must participate in college coaching and be a Pell Grant recipient (see **Figure 5**).

¹⁵ To read more about Tennessee's college-going rate, see the *College Going and the Class of 2022* report.

¹⁶ Appendix C.2 of the <u>Tennessee Promise Report</u> captures this table with all eight Tennessee Promise cohorts included.

Figure 5: Eligibility for Completion Grants



Over 1,300 grants were awarded in 2021-22 totaling over \$240,000 (see **Table 3**). The average grant was approximately \$180. In 2022-23, increased funding allowed over ten times as many grants to support students. Additionally, the average grant amount decreased in year two to just over \$120. **Table 4** shows the distinct number of recipients in each year. More students were served by grants in 2022-23, and the total amount each student received in grants increased compared to the first year of the pilot. The average number of grants per student was 1.9 in 2021-22 and increased to 4.8 grants per student on average in 2022-23. Data on completion grant recipients for 2022-23 by institution are available in **Appendix C (pg. 29)**.

Table 3: Completion Grants by Term

Term	Grants	Total Amount Awarded	Average Grant Amount
Fall 2021	1,272	\$ 235,192.83	\$ 184.90
Spring 2022	73	\$ 8,024.00	\$ 109.92
Fall 2022	12,594	\$1,536,021.25	\$ 121.96
Spring 2023	2,164	\$ 270,688.79	\$ 125.09
Total Year One	1,345	\$ 243,216.83	\$ 180.83
Total Year Two	14,758	\$1,806,710.04	\$ 122.42
Total Overall	16,103	\$2,049,926.87	\$ 127.30

Table 4: Completion Grant Recipients

Academic Year	Unique Recipients	Total Amount Awarded	Average Recipient Grant
2021-22	708	\$ 243,216.83	\$ 343.53
2022-23	3,058	\$1,806,710.04	\$ 590.81

Note: The 2021-22 academic year reflects fall 2021 and spring 2022. The 2022-23 academic year reflects fall 2022 and spring 2023. Students receiving grants are counted once per year but may receive a grant in one or both terms. Students may also have received a grant in both 2021-22 and 2022-23 and are counted in each year.

The completion grants pilot identifies five categories for need, including Food, Housing, Transportation, Books and Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees. More information about these categories can be found on page 12. For this year's report, Books/Supplies and Class-Specific Fees are combined. This combined category represents Books, Supplies, Computers, and Fees specific to programs.

Of the 1,345 grants awarded in 2021-22, the majority were in the Transportation category, which includes funds for gas or ride-share assistance to get students to and from school. Food was the second highest category awarded in terms of grants and provides students with grocery gift cards to purchase food. Importantly, limits were set on total transportation or grocery awards, which may impact the frequency of these awards. A total of 329 Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fee grants were awarded, which totaled over \$116,000. This category reflected the largest expenditures in the first year of the pilot. **Table 5** shows the count of grants awarded and count of unique students in each category for the first year of the pilot. **Table 6** shows the same data for the second year of the pilot. Transportation remained the most frequent grant category, with Food just behind by count of grants, count of recipients, and total awarded. The average grant amount awarded in the Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees fell by nearly \$100 compared to the first year of the pilot. Data show that some students received more than one grant in the same category, and some students received multiple grants across different categories.

Table 5: Completion Grants by Category, 2021-22

Category	Grants	Recipients	Total Awarded	Average Grant
Transportation	524	405	\$52,576.78	\$100.34
Food	437	340	\$45,475.00	\$104.06
Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees	329	297	\$116,390.84	\$353.77
Housing	55	48	\$28,774.21	\$523.17
Total	1,345	1,090	\$243,216.83	\$180.83

Table 6: Completion Grants by Category, 2022-23

Category	Grants	Recipients	Total Awarded	Average Grant
Transportation	6,591	2,511	\$657,544.13	\$99.76
Food	6,377	2,390	\$644,967.07	\$101.14
Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees	1,570	1,280	\$400,999.44	\$255.41
Housing	220	141	\$103,199.40	\$469.09
Total	14,758	6,250	\$1,806,710.04	\$122.42

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of grants across the four categories, comparing year one to year two. Compared to 2021-22, Transportation and Food were much more frequently requested categories in 2022-23. In the second year of the pilot, Housing and Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees made up a smaller portion of total grants than in year one. In 2021-22, each category makes up a similar proportion when counting grants or counting recipients. However, in 2022-23, the distribution of grants is similar, but differs when counting recipients across categories. While Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees made up nearly 11% of grants in 2022-23, this category represented 19% of recipients, reflecting a lower average number of grants per student in that category. This likely reflects the potential recurring need for support in other

categories, like Food or Transportation, while Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees may represent a one-time need for students.

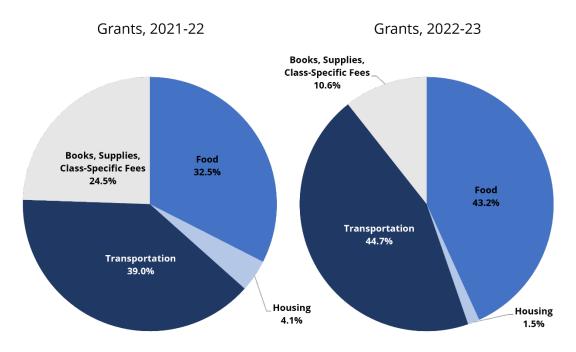


Figure 6: Completion Grants by Category

Food Insecurity in Tennessee Higher Education

In December 2023, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission published the <u>Food Insecurity in Tennessee Higher Education Report.</u> This report summarized existing research on food insecurity in postsecondary education, including impacts on student success. Research from a variety of sources estimates that up to 30% of Tennessee's postsecondary students may experience some level of food insecurity. The report recommended four options to address hunger on Tennessee campuses: improving communication on existing resources, dedicating resources to support student basic needs security, exploring the adoption of a Hunger Free Campus bill, and supporting research and evaluation. For more details, find the report, a literature review, and lists of food assistance resources and campus food pantries at https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/thec/learn-about/task-forces/food-insecurity.html.

Figure 7 depicts the share of overall funding by category, illustrating that Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees made up nearly 48% of completion grant funds expended but only 24.5% of grants allocated in 2021-22, as evidenced by the average grant approximating \$354. In 2022-23, Books, Supplies, and Class-Specific Fees remained a higher proportion of grant funding awarded, but the average grant did decrease to about \$255. As Food and Transportation increased in terms of grants awarded in year two of the program, so too did expenditures in those categories, though the average grant amount stayed similar.

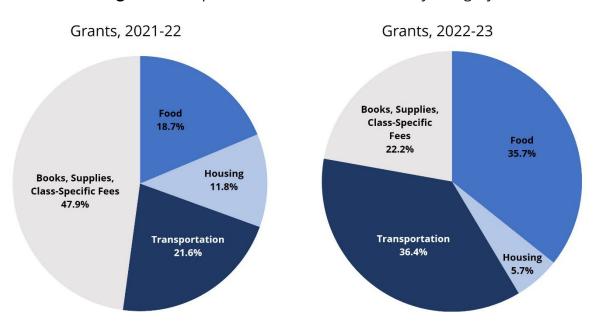


Figure 7: Completion Grant Dollars Awarded by Category

Completion grants are available to a subset of Tennessee Promise students who participate in college coaching and meet financial requirements by being Pell eligible. Approximately 3,000 students participated in college coaching with thachieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust in 2021-22 and 6,780 students participated in 2022-23. The conditions to be considered a coaching student vary by partnering organization. The Ayers Foundation Trust recognizes all high school graduates who enroll at Jackson State or Columbia State community college or who are identified as at-risk and on Tennessee Promise as coaching students. ¹⁷ thachieves recognizes a student as a coaching student if they are low-income, enrolled full-time at a community college, and have a minimum of two connections with their coach. ¹⁸ Students matriculating to an eligible Tennessee Promise institution (e.g., four-year college or TCAT) and who apply for the grant are added to thachieves' coaching roster. More information about these distinctions can be found starting on page 13. ¹⁹

¹⁷ The Ayers Foundation Trust classifies a student as at-risk if they are first generation, low-income (receiving Pell grant), academically underprepared, experiencing transportation challenges, or at the high school counselor's recommendation.

¹⁸ In the first year this was operationalized as a \$0 EFC. In year two, this is operationalized as Pell eligible.

¹⁹ Due to timing and the depletion of completion grant funds there are some grant recipients (n= 533) who are not considered coaching participants. Importantly, these grant recipients were participating in coaching at the time of grant receipt but did not stay on to fulfill all requirements to be considered a coaching participant for the semester.

Table 7 shows completion grant recipients in year two (2022-23), year two coaching participants (2022-23), and Tennessee Promise students in the 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 cohorts. When comparing grant recipients to coaching students, Black and Hispanic students make up a greater share of completion grant recipients than coaching students. Additionally, grant recipients are disproportionately female compared to coaching participants. When compared to Tennessee Promise cohorts overall, women, Black, and Hispanic students are disproportionately represented in the college coaching program. Grant recipients are more likely than coaching participants to be first-generation students, and first-generation students are also disproportionately represented in coaching participants compared to the Tennessee Promise cohorts overall.

Table 7: Grant Recipients, Coaching Participants, and Promise Eligible Cohorts, Year Two (2022-23)

Recipient Characteristics	Grant Recipient	Coaching Participant	Promise Eligible (Cohort 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23)
Gender			
Male	32.8%	37.6%	46.7%
Female	67.2%	62.4%	53.3%
Total	3,058	6,757	44,705
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.8%	2.0%	1.6%
Black	18.4%	14.0%	12.2%
Hispanic	13.2%	11.2%	7.5%
White	57.9%	64.9%	71.5%
Other*	3.9%	3.5%	2.5%
Unknown/No Response	4.3%	4.5%	4.7%
Total	3,058	6,757	44,705
First-Generation			
No	47.4%	55.3%	61.4%
Yes	47.7%	40.4%	35.6%
Unknown	4.9%	4.3%	3.0%
Total	3,058	6,757	44,705

Notes: Grant Recipient represents the unduplicated count of students receiving funds from completion grants in year two (2022-23). Coaching Participants are identified by Partnering Organizations and represent students who participated in coaching in year two (2022-23). Promise Eligible represents all students from the 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 cohorts who ever participated in Tennessee Promise. These groups are not mutually exclusive. A small number of students in the "Grant Recipient" and "Coaching Participants" groups are not able to be matched to demographic details. *"Other" is an option within FAST for student selection and is grouped with Alaskan Native in this table.

Section Three: Completion Grant Recipient Outcomes

Recipients of completion grants remained enrolled at high rates following the semester they received a completion grant. **Table 8** shows the persistence rates from fall semester to spring semester of students receiving completion grants at public institutions by sector. Importantly, these counts only include students who received a completion grant in either the fall 2021 or fall 2022 semester and persisted in Tennessee public higher education in spring 2022 or spring 2023. Additional students may have persisted in private or out-of-state higher education, but data is not available to track those outcomes. Some of these students (3.4% or n=119) earned an award in this time and remained enrolled and are counted here as persisting students. Enrollment data for fall 2023 was not available at the time of report publication, but future reports will include spring-to-fall persistence for spring completion grant recipients.

Table 8: Fall Completion Grant Recipients' (Fall 2021 and 2022), Student Persistence, Fall-to-Spring

Sector	Students Persisting	Grant Recipient Students	Persistence Rate
Community College	2,635	3,074	85.7%
University	86	97	88.7%
Total	2,721	3,171	85.8%

Notes: Counts of students receiving grants by sector are based on data reported by partnering organizations. Counts of students persisting with enrollments in spring term by sector are based on THECSIS records. These records only include enrollments at in-state public institutions. UT Southern is not represented in the University sector. TCATs operate on different schedules than community colleges and universities and are not typically evaluated on this kind of measure, therefore, TCATs are not included here. We observe spring-to-fall persistence rates for year one (spring 2022) students to be as high or higher than fall-to-spring persistence rates.

Additionally, recipients of completion grants in fall 2021 persisted to fall 2022 at high rates. **Table 9** shows the persistence rates from fall 2021 to fall 2022 of students receiving completion grants at public institutions by sector. Importantly, these counts only include students who persisted in Tennessee public higher education; additional students may have persisted in private or out-of-state higher education. For comparison, the first-to-second fall retention rate of Pell-eligible first-time, full-time freshmen at community colleges for the Fall 2021 cohort was 51.4%; at locally governed universities (including Tennessee Promise-eligible Austin Peay State University and Tennessee State University), the rate was 71.3%. ²⁰

Further, nearly 16% (n=101) of these completion grant recipient students earned an award sometime between fall 2021 and fall 2022 and remained enrolled. Those students are counted here as persisting students. Enrollment data for fall 2023 was not available at the time of report publication, but future reports will include fall-to-fall persistence for fall 2022 completion grant recipients. Notably, the

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²⁰ First-to-second fall retention rates for Pell-eligible students presented here are calculated from THECSIS records and include instate and out-of-state students. Please see Table 2.1 in the <u>Tennessee Higher Education Fact Book 2022-2023</u> for more detail on how retention rates are calculated.

completion grants program was much smaller in year one than in year two, so the fall-to-fall persistence rate in **Table 9** is based on a small sample of all completion grant students.

Table 9: Fall Completion Grant Recipients' (Fall 2021) Student Persistence, Fall-to-Fall

Sector	Students Persisting	Grant Recipient Students	Persistence Rate
Community College	319	552	57.8%
University	14	20	70.0%
Total	333	572	58.2%

Notes: Counts of students receiving grants by sector are based on data reported by partnering organizations. Counts of students persisting with enrollments in fall 2022 by sector are based on THECSIS records. These records only include enrollments at in-state public institutions. UT Southern is not represented in the University sector. TCATs operate on different schedules than community colleges and universities and are not typically evaluated on this kind of measure, therefore, TCATs are not included here.

Finally, despite the completion grants pilot's short existence, many students who received grants have gone on to earn postsecondary awards. **Table 10** shows the number of students who have earned awards from Tennessee public higher education institutions, including TCATs, community colleges, and universities, since the time the student received a completion grant. Additional students may have earned awards at Tennessee private or at out-of-state institutions. Of all students served by the completion grant pilot in the first two years, over 20% (n=759) have already earned some kind of postsecondary credential from a public institution. While students who first received a completion grant in year one of the program (2021-22) have had more time to complete a credential, year two of the program (2022-23) saw far more student participants, so award counts are generally higher for students who entered the completion grants pilot in year two.

Table 10: Awards Received by Grant Recipients

Award	Grant First Received in 2021-22	Grant First Received in 2022-23	Total
Certificate Only	25	59	84
Diploma Only	56	118	174
Associate Only	200	253	453
Bachelor's Only	*	0	*
Certificate & Diploma	*	0	*
Associate & Certificate	27	16	43
Associate & Diploma	*	0	*
TOTAL	313	446	759

Notes: Students earning multiple of the same type of award (i.e., two certificates) are only counted once in that category. These records only include awards earned at in-state public institutions. UT Southern is not represented in awards data. Includes awards through summer 2023 for all sectors.

Conclusion

The completion grants pilot awarded over \$240,000 to more than 700 students in its first year. In the second year of the pilot, the number of students served more than quadrupled, with 3,058 students receiving over \$1.8 million in completion grants. The coaching and completion grant initiatives administered by the partnering organizations seek to address the barriers Tennessee Promise students face in their continued enrollment and completion. Completion grant data indicate that students have needs inside and outside of the classroom, including transportation, food, coursework costs (books, supplies, and class-specific fees), and housing that are barriers to their success. Early indicators suggest successful outcomes for completion grant recipients, with many remaining enrolled in future semesters after receiving a grant, and over 750 grant recipient students earning a postsecondary credential to-date. Additional iterations of this report will continue to track recipient outcomes over time.

Appendix A: Glossary

Locally Governed Institutions (LGI): There are six public universities in Tennessee that have a local governing board. The six institutions are Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and the University of Memphis.

Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR): The Tennessee Board of Regents is one of the two public systems of higher education in Tennessee. The Tennessee Board of Regents governs 13 community colleges and 24 Colleges of Applied Technology across the state.

Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs): There are 24 TCATs across the state, which provide training for workers to obtain technical skills and professional training.

Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS): The Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program is a collection of scholarship and grant programs funded by state education lottery proceeds. These programs are intended to provide financial awards to offset costs associated with pursuing postsecondary education (HOPE, GAMS, Aspire, and Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant, among others).

Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC): The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly to coordinate and foster unity within higher education. The Commission coordinates two systems of public higher education and the six locally governed institutions.

Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA): TICUA is a membership organization for Tennessee's private colleges and universities to work together in areas of public policy, cost containment, and professional development. There are currently 34 member institutions. You can learn more about TICUA and their member institutions by visiting the <u>TICUA website</u>.

Tennessee Promise Endowment: As stated in T.C.A. § 4-51-111(b)(3), an amount equal to \$100 million must remain in a reserve account. These funds can be drawn upon when lottery revenues are insufficient to fund Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships (e.g., HOPE Scholarships). The transfers to the Promise Endowment account took place in 2014-15 (July through Oct 2014) in the following amounts: \$312,542,000 from the lottery reserve, and \$48,839,300 from TSAC's operating fund for a total initial transfer of \$361,381,300.

Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC): The Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) was created in 1974 by the Tennessee General Assembly as a non-profit corporation with the merging of the Tennessee Educational Loan Corporation and the Tennessee Tuition Grant Program. TSAC administers over 20 different state student financial aid programs, including the HOPE scholarship, Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, Tennessee Student Assistance Award, and the Dual Enrollment grant.

The University of Tennessee (UT): The University of Tennessee is one of the two public systems of higher education in Tennessee. The University of Tennessee's Board of Trustees governs 4 universities (Knoxville, Chattanooga, Martin, and Southern), the Health Science Center, the Space Institute, the Institute for Agriculture, and the Institute for Public Service.

Appendix B: Sample Communication, Ayers Foundation



Action Item: Tennessee Promise

Hello,

So far, you have fulfilled the following needs to remain TN Promise eligible.

- · Completed a FAFSA prior to the March, 1st Deadline
- · Submitted Community service for the upcoming semester/trimester
- Attended a mandatory meeting with your Ayers Counselor

Congratulations on meeting these milestones!

If you are experiencing issues meeting any of the following needs:

- Food
- Transportation
- Books and supplies
- Housing
- Class-Specific Fees

Follow this <u>LINK</u> to see if you are eligible to request help through a Completion Grant. A completion grant is intended to help students fulfill unmet needs while relieving stress enabling students to move forward in achieving their academic goals.

If you have questions about The Completion Grant, please contact your Ayers Counselor.

Sincerely, The Ayers Foundation

Appendix C: Completion Grants by Institution, 2022-23

Institution	Grants	Total Awards	% of Grants Overall	% of Grants by Sector					
Community Colleges									
Chattanooga State	1,141	\$135,942.80	7.7%	9.2%					
Cleveland State	661	\$75,563.12	4.5%	5.3%					
Columbia State	677	\$83,735.85	4.6%	5.4%					
Dyersburg State	395	\$49,009.89	2.7%	3.2%					
Jackson State	613	\$73,548.95	4.2%	4.9%					
Motlow State	1,371	\$164,077.49	9.3%	11.0%					
Nashville State	1,118	\$129,916.73	7.6%	9.0%					
Northeast State	885	\$113,424.76	6.0%	7.1%					
Pellissippi State	544	\$62,388.14	3.7%	4.4%					
Roane State	929	\$111,647.61	6.3%	7.5%					
Southwest Tennessee	1,037	\$128,371.56	7.0%	8.3%					
Volunteer State	1,831	\$212,388.04	12.4%	14.7%					
Walters State	1,262	\$151,057.41	8.6%	10.1%					
Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology									
TCAT Athens	*	*	*	*					
TCAT Chattanooga	58	\$7,057.25	0.4%	5.1%					
TCAT Covington	*	*	*	*					
TCAT Crossville	36	\$6,770.86	0.2%	3.2%					
TCAT Crump	14	\$2,036.92	0.1%	1.2%					
TCAT Dickson	65	\$10,057.65	0.4%	5.7%					
TCAT Elizabethton	39	\$5,114.00	0.3%	3.4%					
TCAT Harriman	21	\$3,844.90	0.1%	1.8%					
TCAT Hartsville	31	\$3,662.99	0.2%	2.7%					
TCAT Henry/Carroll	19	\$2,099.99	0.1%	1.7%					
TCAT Hohenwald	86	\$8,332.00	0.6%	7.5%					
TCAT Jacksboro	48	\$8,325.55	0.3%	4.2%					
TCAT Jackson	48	\$7,976.64	0.3%	4.2%					
TCAT Knoxville	18	\$2,330.03	0.1%	1.6%					
TCAT Livingston	23	\$5,187.74	0.2%	2.0%					
TCAT McKenzie	14	\$1,175.00	0.1%	1.2%					
TCAT McMinnville	21	\$3,705.05	0.1%	1.8%					
TCAT Memphis	48	\$7,793.22	0.3%	4.2%					
TCAT Morristown	230	\$29,873.95	1.6%	20.2%					
TCAT Murfreesboro	45	\$7,175.51	0.3%	3.9%					
TCAT Nashville	110	\$17,290.54	0.7%	9.6%					
TCAT Northwest	13	\$1,705.43	0.1%	1.1%					
TCAT Oneida	48	\$5,410.96	0.3%	4.2%					
TCAT Pulaski	36	\$3,630.14	0.2%	3.2%					
TCAT Ripley	*	*	*	*					
TCAT Shelbyville	66	\$13,567.10	0.4%	5.8%					
		,							

Institution	Grants	Total Awards	% of Grants Overall	% of Grants by Sector				
Public Universities								
Austin Peay State University	383	\$46,627.14	2.6%	94.1%				
Tennessee State University	13	\$1,487.90	0.1%	3.2%				
University of TN Southern	11	\$1,265.61	0.1%	2.7%				
Private Institutions								
Bryan College	35	\$4,951.66	0.2%	4.7%				
Carson-Newman University	33	\$4,308.86	0.2%	4.4%				
Fisk University	443	\$55,176.68	3.0%	59.4%				
John A. Gupton College	*	*	*	*				
Johnson University	*	*	*	*				
Lane College	18	\$2,465.50	0.1%	2.4%				
LeMoyne-Owen College	*	*	*	*				
Lincoln Memorial University	*	*	*	*				
South College	11	\$2,109.84	0.1%	1.5%				
Southern Adventist University	*	*	*	*				
Trevecca Nazarene University	113	\$19,061.93	0.8%	15.1%				
Tusculum University	*	*	*	*				
Welch College	12	\$1,399.99	0.1%	1.6%				
WM R Moore College of Technology	25	\$2,714.00	0.2%	3.4%				
Total	14,758	\$1,806,710.04						