



Tennessee Higher Education Commission

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

New Data Show More Tennesseans Enrolling, Completing, and Advancing Through Tennessee Reconnect

Nashville, TN – Monday, November 17, 2025 – A new report from the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, shows strong and sustained progress for adult learners supported through *Tennessee Reconnect*, the state's free tuition program for adults returning to college powered by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

The findings show more Tennesseans are enrolling, completing credentials, and seeing higher wages as a result of targeted state efforts to help adults return to higher education.

"This new data confirms what Tennessee has long believed: when adult learners are supported with personalized guidance and clear pathways, they don't just enroll, they succeed," said Dr. Steven Gentile, THEC Executive Director. "Tennessee Reconnect continues to prove what's possible when state investment, dedicated Navigators, and hands-on coaching come together to open doors for thousands of adult learners.

Key Findings from the 2025 Navigate Reconnect Report:

More Tennesseans Are Enrolling and Completing Credentials

Enrollment among *Reconnectors*, adult learners who return to college through the program, rose to **45.1%**, while credential completion jumped to **15.2%**, marking a **38% increase in completions over the previous year**.

Reconnectors Outperform Their Peers

Reconnectors continue to outpace other nontraditional students in persistence and credential attainment and the gap is growing. After three years, **33.5% of Reconnectors** earned a credential compared to **26.3% of other adult learners**, a seven-point advantage.

Reconnectors Are Working and Advancing

The data show Reconnectors are more likely to be working when they enroll and they're seeing real economic gains. **Seventy-eight percent** were employed at the time of enrollment, and their average income rose at a higher rate than other adult learners – **21% within three years**. This accelerated earnings growth suggests that the new skills and



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credentials they earn are placing them on a steeper, more promising long-term career trajectory than their peers.

Expanding Opportunity

Tennessee Reconnect is reaching and supporting Tennesseans who may have previously felt out of place in traditional higher education systems. The study shows that Reconnector success is not confined to a specific demographic. They outperform other adult learners regardless of sex, race, prior enrollment history, prior unemployment, first-generation status, or economic background.

A Scalable, Statewide Model

Navigate Reconnect serves as Tennessee's primary model for adult college coaching. More than **11,000 Tennesseans** have been supported through personalized advising and wraparound services, leading to measurable increases in enrollment, completion, and earnings.

"Our navigators are the heart of this work," said Jessica Gibson, THEC Senior Director of Adult Initiatives. "They walk alongside adult learners from the first conversation to the final credential, helping them navigate every barrier in between. This report reinforces just how powerful that one-on-one support can be."

The educational achievements of Navigate Reconnect participants translate into significant economic benefits for Tennessee. By boosting persistence and completion rates, the program contributes to a more skilled, credentialed, and resilient workforce that is better equipped to meet the demands of the state's economy.

About the Report

The *2025 Navigate Reconnect Report* was developed by the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in partnership with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Read [full report](#).

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About the Tennessee Higher Education Commission

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The Commission develops, implements, evaluates postsecondary education policies and programs in Tennessee while coordinating the state's systems of higher education, and is relentlessly focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential.

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