



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Tennessee Celebrates College Application and Exploration Month; New Schools Selected for Regional College Access Initiative

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – September is Tennessee’s College Application and Exploration Month and to help celebrate the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is highlighting the importance of helping students take the next step toward college by announcing 34 new schools for their Regional College Access Support Initiative.

The initiative will provide selected schools with an experienced college access coordinator to work alongside staff during the 2026-27 academic year, building on THEC’s statewide strategy to expand outreach and strengthen Tennessee’s college-going culture.

“College access is not a one-size-fits-all effort, and schools know their students and communities best,” said Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director of THEC. “Our goal is to meet schools where they are, providing support that helps students and families navigate the path to college and access essential resources.

Each participating school will receive one year of support from a college access coordinator who will visit twice monthly, working alongside staff to support students and families with college applications, FAFSA, financial aid, TN Promise, [TN Direct Admissions](#) and college planning. During the 2025-26 academic year, the team conducted hundreds of visits across Tennessee and reached more than 15,000 students, families and educators.

2026-27 Regional College Access Support Schools

The following 34 schools have been selected to participate in THEC’s Regional College Access Support initiative:

West Tennessee

- McKenzie High School
- Dyersburg High School
- Fayette-Ware Comprehensive High School
- Peabody High School
- Cordova High School

- Fairley High School
- Trezevant High School
- Wooddale High School
- Westwood High School
- Covington High School
- Dresden High School
- Greenfield High School

Middle Tennessee

- Cheatham County Central High School
- Sycamore High School
- DeKalb County High School
- Franklin County High School
- Red Boiling Springs High School
- Northwest High School
- East Robertson High School
- Jo Byrns High School
- White House Heritage High School
- Portland High School
- Lebanon High School

East Tennessee

- William Blount High School
- Clarkrange High School
- Grundy County High School
- Brainerd High School
- Loudon High School
- Richard Hardy Memorial School
- South Pittsburg High School
- Coalfield High School
- Oakdale High School
- Sunbright High School
- Wartburg Central High School

Results Show College Access Outreach Impact

THEC's Regional College Access Outreach efforts are helping more students take the next step toward college. Among last year's participating schools:

- **95% of eligible seniors submitted a TN Promise application** by the November 1 deadline.
- The Class of 2026 **FAFSA completion rate reached 77.0%, an 8.8 percentage-point increase** over the Class of 2025.
- **26 of 31 schools increased FAFSA completion** compared with the previous year.

- Five high schools saw FAFSA completion **gains of more than 20 percentage points**.

Celebrate College Application & Exploration Month with TN Direct Admissions

College Application & Exploration Month encourages Tennesseans to explore college and career options and take the next steps toward higher education. Through CollegeforTN.org, students can explore colleges, learn about financial aid and access resources for TN Promise, TN Reconnect and TN Direct Admissions.

THEC encourages students to use the month to explore their options and complete the [TN Promise application](#) by **November 2**. Completing the TN Promise application also makes high school seniors eligible for [TN Direct Admissions](#), simplifying the college application process by allowing students to be considered for admission at participating Tennessee colleges and universities **without paying application fees**.

Learn more at CollegeforTN.org.

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About the Tennessee Higher Education Commission

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. As the state's higher education coordinating body, its mission is to build a strong higher education landscape that provides opportunities for all individuals to pursue high-quality education and high-value credentials.