

Student Supports Will Help Tennessee Train the Workforce it Needs.

For over a decade, Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect have successfully helped over 172,000 Tennesseans attain life-changing job skills by providing tuition and fee support for people pursuing their associate degree or technical certificates.¹ Improvements to these programs would mean more Tennessee residents would benefit from the new skills, better job opportunities, and higher wages obtained through these programs, helping address our state's critical worker shortage.

Improvements to TN Promise and Reconnect could increase the number of students who benefit from the program and successfully achieve their credentials.

- ✓ **Allow Promise and Reconnect to be “first dollar” supports.**
Both Promise and Reconnect programs are “last dollar” scholarships, meaning that all other grant aid is applied before funds can be used. A shift to first dollar support would better leverage federal funds and help meet student expenses like supplies and transportation.
- ✓ **Close the age gap between Promise and Reconnect.**
TN Promise is only available to students directly after high school, while Reconnect is not available to students until they are 23 or older. Reducing the age eligibility for Reconnect would allow the program to support students during a critical stage of early adulthood.
- ✓ **Expand Promise to part-time students.**
Promise funding is only available to students enrolled for 12 credit hours or more. Supporting part-time students with Promise funding would allow students who need to work to utilize the program.

Total cost of attendance per year can be over \$23,000 for students living independently.

“I need to work to afford school, but maintaining a full-time courseload is exhausting – I know I could do better with fewer classes.”



Kyra, 20, is studying early childhood education at Southwest Community College with TN Promise.*

“Tennessee Promise helps cover my tuition, but affording the books and tools for my program is tough.”



Michael, 19, has TN Promise funding and is studying mechatronics multicraft at TCAT Dickson.*

“I had to leave school when my son was born. I know getting my certificate will help me give him a better life.”



Ashley, 24, is studying medical assisting at TCAT Elizabethton with the support of TN Reconnect.*

**Southwest TN Community College
LIVING AT SCHOOL**

**TCAT Dickson
LIVING WITH PARENTS**

**TCAT Elizabethton
LIVING INDEPENDENTLY**

Tuition & Fees	\$5,041	\$4,119	\$4,119
Books & Supplies	\$1,600	\$2,114	\$2,088
Living Expenses	\$11,000	\$8,059	\$14,878
Transportation	\$2,200	\$2,646	\$2,646
Total	\$19,841	\$16,938	\$23,731

*Based on focus group participants; names and identifying details have been changed. Total cost of attendance is calculated annually and provided by TBR.

Tennessee needs more middle-skill workers, but attaining these credentials is challenging for many Tennesseans.



Tennessee has a shortage of 58,000 workers and needs more middle-skilled workers.

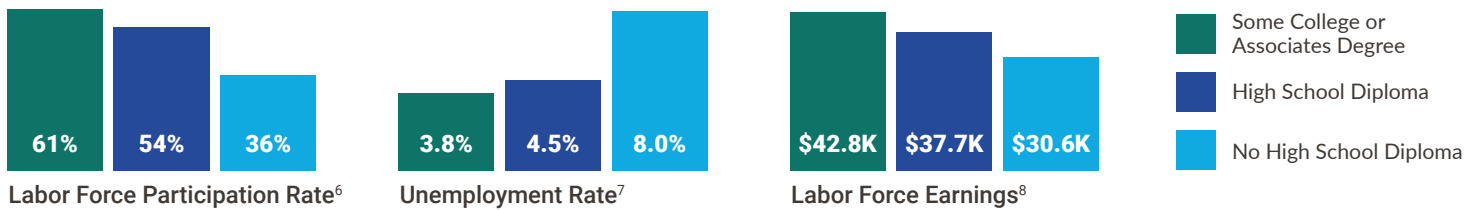
The state's job openings have been above pre-pandemic levels for three years—averaging 166,000 per month in late 2024. Even if every unemployed person found a job, there would still be 58,000 jobs to be filled.² Almost a quarter of Tennessee's "in-demand jobs"—over 14,000 new jobs each year—are for middle-skill workers who have some college education or credentials.³



The cost to attain middle-skill credentials has increased and is out of reach for many Tennesseans.

Tuition and fees represent only 20% to 25% of the total costs of attendance for most students.⁴ The average Promise (\$2,122) and Reconnect (\$3,268) grants fall well short of total cost of attendance, which can be over \$23,000 per year.⁵

Students who earn their post-secondary credentials are more likely to join the workforce, be employed, and earn more money.



Pilot programs across the state have shown that providing students with additional financial support results in higher student retention and program completion.



Nashville State Community College recently launched the **Flex** and **GRAD** pilot programs to provide additional financial and mentoring support for students. With additional funding for textbooks, supplies, gas, and groceries, GRAD students' **two-year graduation rate was almost double** that of their peers.⁹ Flex, which supports part-time students, had **100% retention** in the Fall of 2023.¹⁰



Knox Promise provides coaching and additional need-based financial support to cover unexpected costs like transportation and housing for TN Promise students from Knox County. It **increased the likelihood** that an economically disadvantaged student stayed in college by **156%**.¹¹



TN Achieves COMPLETE Grants, a statewide five-year pilot program based on Knox Promise and launched in 2021, has already **resulted in a 106% increase in retention** and a **533% increase in graduation rates** compared to students without these supports.¹²

References

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Tennessee Skills Coalition includes more than 65 chambers, employers, community-based organizations, training providers, and public sector resource partners working to address policy barriers that keep employers from filling middle skills jobs, jobs that require some education beyond high school.

ThinkTennessee is a nonpartisan, results-oriented think tank that uses research and advocacy to build a state where all Tennesseans are civically engaged and economically secure.

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