

TENNESSEE:

“SEGREGATION FOREVER”?

The Continued Underrepresentation of Black and Latino Undergraduates at Public Colleges and Universities in Tennessee



THE EDUCATION TRUST IN TENNESSEE
#EndCollegeSegregation



The Education Trust

“I didn't feel I should sneak in.
I didn't feel I should go around the back door.
If (Wallace) was standing in the door,
I had **EVERY RIGHT**
in the world to face him
AND TO GO TO SCHOOL.”

– Vivian Malone



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	2
Introduction	4
How Colleges and Universities Were Graded	6
Findings	6
Why it Matters Who Attends Tennessee’s Colleges and Universities	10
Bright Spots.....	13
<i>Austin Peay State University – “Grow Your Own”</i>	
<i>University of Memphis – “Commitment from the Top”</i>	
<i>Nashville State Community College – “Community-Focused Community College”</i>	
<i>Southwest Tennessee Community College – “Student Success Reimagined”</i>	
Recommendations	18
Conclusion	21
Appendix	22

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In July 2020, The Education Trust released “Segregation Forever”? a report that examined Black and Latino access at the nation’s 101 most selective public colleges and universities. The report found that, though colleges and universities have been legally integrated for nearly 60 years, most public institutions are not serving a student body that represents their state’s population. The report assigned each institution two access scores, which were calculated by evaluating how well the number of Black and Latino students at each campus represents the number of college-age Black and Latino residents in the state.

The only Tennessee university included in the “Segregation Forever”? report was the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, Tennessee’s flagship institution. In this report, an extension of the original analysis, we examine Black and Latino access at all public colleges and universities in Tennessee. Tennessee’s population has become more racially and ethnically diverse, making access for Black and Latino students to our public campuses more important than ever. In 2019, Black and Latino Tennesseans respectively made up 21.2% and 5.7% of the state’s 18- to 24-year-old population, though they are largely underrepresented at many of our state’s public higher education institutions.¹

We assign each institution an access score, ranging from 0 to 100, which measures how well their Black and Latino student enrollment represents the college-age Black and Latino population in Tennessee (see “How colleges & universities were graded” on Page 3 for more details). As in the original report, letter grades further reflect each institutions’ access scores. Scores of 90 or higher received A’s. Scores in the 80s, 70s, and 60s received B’s, C’s, and D’s, respectively; and scores below 60 received failing grades, F’s. As part of our analysis, we also interviewed admissions, student success, and diversity staff from the four community colleges and universities that received A’s for Black and Latino access in an effort to identify bright spots and best practices in recruiting and supporting students of color.



INTRODUCTION

2020 fundamentally altered every facet of American life. In March, the coronavirus pandemic forced us to reconsider how to maintain safe, healthy communities while ensuring essential needs are met. Higher education, long known for its sluggish bureaucratic operations, rather nimbly transitioned to an almost fully online student experience. Of course, the transition wasn't the same for all students or institutions. Some campuses will not survive the financial strain from COVID-19-related losses, and the pandemic has deepened the digital divide, which makes it more difficult for low-income, Black, and Latino students to participate in online learning.² Still, seemingly overnight, campuses developed new policies to accommodate students' learning in the middle of a pandemic. Many offered pass/fail grading options³, test-optional admissions policies⁴, online mental health services⁵, laptops⁶, virtual commencement ceremonies⁷, and emergency relief grants⁸. Higher education advocates, who had long championed many of these services, wondered if the pandemic finally provided an opportunity to reimagine a better version of college – one that centers on the needs of our most underresourced students.⁹

A few months into the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd prompted a record number of uprisings across the world, with millions demanding justice for Black lives. Across every sector, organizations and individuals grappled with not only the existence of systemic racism, but also what role they played in upholding white supremacy. Throughout the summer, institutions across the country and throughout Tennessee reckoned with the systemic inequities Black and Latino students face on campus every day. Tennessee college and university leaders released statements acknowledging racial injustice, calling for unity, and committing to do better by students of color. Many campuses have since started anti-racist book clubs, hosted listening sessions, appointed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) task forces, and promised to take action.

Major changes are necessary if Tennessee colleges and universities wish to make real their verbal and written statements supporting students of color. An explicitly stated racial equity lens is also important in helping the state accomplish its lofty higher education goals. In the last decade, Tennessee lawmakers passed a series of legislative reforms, including the Complete College Tennessee Act, TN Promise, FOCUS Act, and TN Reconnect. Each aimed to support the state's Drive to 55 goal, which hopes that, by 2025, 55% of residents will have a postsecondary credential.¹⁰ Notably, none of these reforms have addressed the specific barriers to higher education that exist for Black and Latino students.

The "[Segregation Forever](#)"? report by Dr. Andrew Nichols, senior director of Higher Education Research and Data Analytics of The Education Trust, examines Black and Latino access at the 101 most selective public colleges and universities.¹¹ Each institution is graded on whether it is serving a student body that represents the racial diversity of its state's population. Unfortunately, most are not. In this Tennessee-specific extension of "Segregation Forever"? we use the same formula to examine Black and Latino access at public colleges and universities in our state. The findings are mixed and show that institutions have varying amounts of work to do to improve access for Black and Latino students. We interviewed the four institutions with the highest Black and Latino access scores to learn about best practices and lessons learned.



We hope this report serves as another diagnostic tool to support our institution's DEI efforts amid increased conversations on supporting Black and Latino students in higher education. Black and Latino students are not adequately represented on many campuses across Tennessee, and institutions must decide how they will move forward with this reality. The pandemic, along with the renewed focus on racial justice, laid bare what has always been true of higher education – when institutions deem it necessary, new policies can and will be enacted quickly and efficiently. It is now time for Tennessee's public colleges and universities to apply the same force and will to making our campuses more accessible to Black and Latino students.

HOW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WERE GRADED

In keeping with the “Segregation Forever”? report, Tennessee’s colleges and universities received a set of access scores and grades for their commitment to access for Black and Latino students. Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 being the worst score and 100 being the best score an institution can receive. We then used these scores to assign each institution a letter grade using a traditional grading scale.

A = 90-100, B = 80-89, C = 70-79, D = 60-69, F = 59 and below

The access scores and grades represent how well the percentage of Black and Latino institutions reflects the percentage of college-eligible Black and Latino residents in Tennessee. To calculate the scores, we used fall 2019 enrollment numbers from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s [factbook](#), and population estimates from IPEDS and the American Community Survey. We acknowledge that the traditional college student age is drastically different for community colleges and universities. To account for this, we used an 18- to 24-year-old age range to calculate universities’ access scores and a range of 18 to 49 years old to calculate scores for community colleges, a framework described in The Education Trust’s [Broken Mirrors](#) report. For example, in Tennessee, 5.7% of the state’s 18- to 24-year-olds are Latino. If the percentage of Latino undergraduates at the University of Tennessee–Martin were 5.7% or higher, the university would receive a perfect Latino access score of 100. However, only 3.19% of undergraduates are Latino, so the institution receives a Latino access score of 56 and an F grade (see below):

$$\text{2019 LATINO ACCESS FOR UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, MARTIN} \left(\frac{3.19\% \text{ of students are Latino}}{5.7\% \text{ of TN residents are 18 to 49 years old, college-eligible, and Latino}} \right) \times 100 = 56 \text{ (F grade)}$$

$$\text{2019 LATINO ACCESS FOR DYERSBURG STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE} \left(\frac{3.3\% \text{ of students are Latino}}{7.3\% \text{ of TN residents are 18 to 49 years old, college-eligible, and Latino}} \right) \times 100 = 45 \text{ (F grade)}$$



FINDINGS

Black and Latino access scores and grades varied widely across institutions. Most institutions are not accessible to Black students, and over half received failing grades. While the findings below for Latino access may seem high, the bar for Tennessee’s colleges and universities Latino access is low, as they need only 5.7% and 7.3% respectively of their student body to be Latino to meet the state’s demographic. It is important to note that only 18.5% of Latino residents in Tennessee have an associate degree or higher, a gap of over 18 percentage points compared to white adults.¹² There is still much work to be done before Black and Latino students have equitable access to Tennessee’s public colleges and universities. We provide more in-depth information about each institution’s Black and Latino access scores below.

13 OF 21 CAMPUSES

have Black access scores lower than 60% (F’s)

ONLY HALF OF CAMPUSES

received A’s and B’s for Latino student access

4 CAMPUSES RECEIVED D’S AND F’S

for both Black and Latino access

70.4% AVERAGE BLACK ACCESS SCORE AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

If Southwest Community College is removed, the average drops down to 50.5%

66.21% AVERAGE BLACK ACCESS SCORE AT UNIVERSITIES

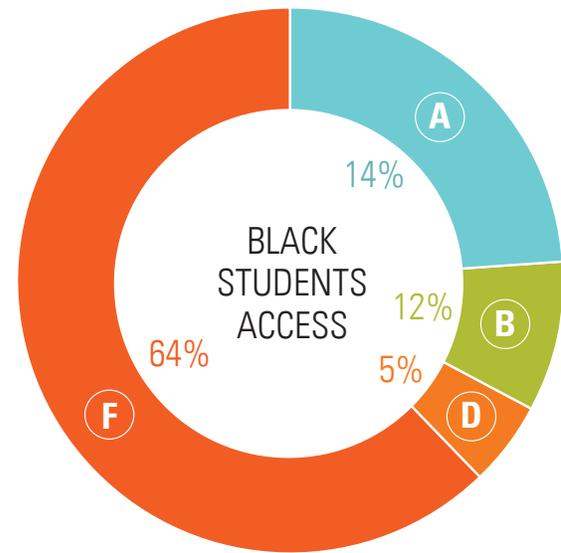
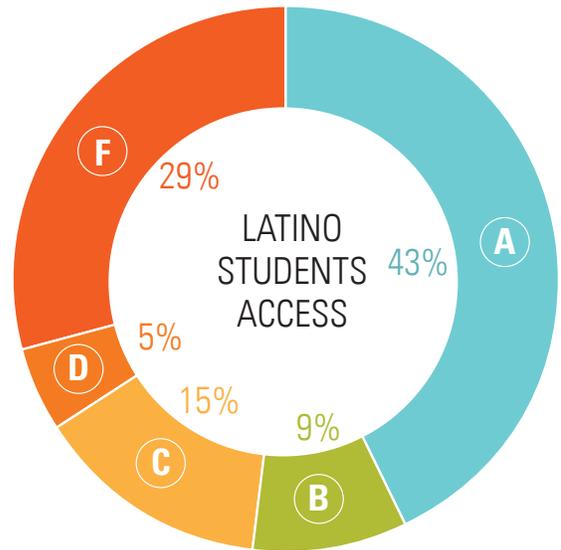
Drops to 52.5% without the University of Memphis

80% AVERAGE LATINO ACCESS SCORE AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

90% AVERAGE LATINO ACCESS SCORE AT UNIVERSITIES

Drops to 83% without Austin Peay State University

GRAPH 1: Percent Distribution of Access Scores and Grades at Public Universities in Tennessee



- % of TN Public Institutions with A's (Scores of 90 and above)
- % of TN Public Institutions with B's (Scores of 80 to 89)
- % of TN Public Institutions with C's (Scores of 70 to 79)
- % of TN Public Institutions with D's (Scores of 60 to 69)
- % of TN Public Institutions with F's (Scores of 59 and below)

Note: Calculations may not be exact due to rounding. Source: The Education Trust in Tennessee analysis of data from Tennessee Higher Education Commission's 2019-20 Factbook and the United States Census Bureau 2019. See "How colleges and universities were graded" and Appendix Table A for more details.

TABLE 1: Access Scores and Grades for Public Universities and Colleges in Tennessee

*Highlight indicates an institution highlighted in the “Bright Spots” section of this report

COMMUNITY COLLEGE	CITY	BLACK STUDENT ACCESS GRADE	LATINO STUDENT ACCESS GRADE
Chattanooga State Community College	Chattanooga	D	B
Cleveland State Community College	Cleveland	F	C
Columbia State Community College	Columbia	F	A
Dyersburg State Community College	Dyersburg	B	F
Jackson State Community College	Jackson	A	F
Motlow State Community College	Lynchburg	F	A
Nashville State Community College	Nashville	A	A
Northeast State Community College	Blountville	F	F
Pellissippi State Community College	Knoxville	F	C
Roane State Community College	Harriman	F	F
Southwest Tennessee Community College	Memphis	A	A
Volunteer State Community College	Gallatin	F	A
Walters State Community College	Morristown	F	C

UNIVERSITY	CITY	BLACK STUDENT ACCESS GRADE	LATINO STUDENT ACCESS GRADE
Austin Peay State University	Clarksville	A	A
East Tennessee State University	Johnson City	F	F
Middle Tennessee State University	Murfreesboro	B	A
Tennessee Technological University	Cookeville	F	D
University of Memphis	Memphis	A	A
University of Tennessee	Knoxville	F	B
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	Chattanooga	F	A
University of Tennessee, Martin	Martin	F	F

Note: Source: The Education Trust in Tennessee analysis of data from Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s 2019-20 Factbook and the United State Census Bureau 2019. See Appendix Table A for more detailed information on the percentage of Black and Latino students at each institution and the percentage of college-aged Black and Latino residents used to calculate access scores and grades.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Since its inception, people have argued about whether higher education exists as a public good or exists only as a private good to further individual gain. A wide body of evidence notes benefits for degree earners, including higher earning potential, expanded career opportunities, and improved health outcomes.¹³ Increased educational attainment is also associated with larger societal benefits, such as less crime and incarceration, higher levels of political engagement, and increased tax revenue.¹⁴ Consequently, some policymakers and higher education thought leaders now argue that recommitting to higher education as a public good will be crucial as we work to collectively recover from the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁵

At the very least, Tennessee's public institutions have a duty to educate all of the state's residents and prepare a workforce ready to meet industry needs. The primary reason Gov. Bill Haslam launched Drive to 55 was in response to data that, by 2025, 55% of jobs in Tennessee would require some postsecondary credential.¹⁶ Nationally, studies show that workers without college degrees have already been disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related job loss.¹⁷ Experts predict that many of these low-wage, low-paying jobs may disappear permanently.¹⁸ And of course, the economic crisis has had disproportionately negative effects on Black and brown communities. Black Tennesseans had the highest unemployment rates in the state during the first half of the year.¹⁹

So, what does all of this mean for Black and Latino students' access to Tennessee's public colleges and universities? In short, prioritizing these students' progression to and through college is more important than ever. There have been [alarming declines](#) in enrollment at Tennessee's community colleges this fall, with overall enrollment down 11%. Even more concerning is the decline in enrollment for first-time, full-time first-year students, which decreased 31% and 18% for Black and Latino students, respectively.²⁰

As they are tax-exempt, taxpayer-supported institutions, it is especially alarming that Black and Latino students are underrepresented at so many of the state's public campuses. As Ed Trust has previously argued, the student body at these institutions should represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the taxpaying residents of Tennessee. Increasing Black and Latino access on college campuses could also have positive effects for the entire campus. Research shows that increased racial diversity on campus has academic and social benefits for all students, including higher levels of academic achievement and improved intergroup relational skills.²¹

Tennessee's public colleges and universities must focus on increasing access for Black and Latino students as they work to create more racially just campuses. A [recent report](#) on this topic noted that racial equity in higher education starts in the admissions office, but we know Black and Latino students experience educational inequity starting in

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pre-kindergarten. These disparities persist through their K-12 experience. In Tennessee, white students are far more likely to be enrolled in AP courses and gifted and talented programs, while Black and Latino students are far more likely to be suspended or receive corporal punishment.²²

Our campuses cannot continue offering empty promises to better serve Black and Latino students without articulating specific, concerted goals and actions. Thankfully, there is a clear path forward to increase access for Black and Latino students. At the end of this report, we uplift five recommendations from the “Segregation Forever”? report for our state’s institution leaders and state lawmakers. If the last decade focused on increasing postsecondary access for all Tennesseans, then this next decade must include specific policies and reforms to address barriers for Black and Latino Tennesseans. It is a racial justice issue, it is an economic issue, and it is an issue that may determine how well our state fares in a post-pandemic America.



BRIGHT SPOTS

After evaluating Tennessee’s colleges and universities, we wanted to explore what access and student success supports existed for Black and Latino students at the institutions that received A’s. Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to increasing access for Black and Latino students at our state’s public institutions. Enrollment, location, administration, and student needs not only are different between campuses, but often shift from year to year at each institution. We also recognize that none of the institutions highlighted as a “bright spot” for this report offer a completely equitable student experience for Black and Latino students. Like most other campuses, they are struggling with significantly lower retention, graduation, and job placement rates for Black and Latino students compared to their white peers.^[i]

However, knowledge sharing is a cornerstone of higher education. In this section, we interviewed staff engaged in the day-to-day, tactical-level efforts of recruiting, admitting, and supporting Black and Latino students on their campuses. We hope the best practices and lessons learned from each of these institutions will spark ideas and, more importantly, actions on the “how” of increasing access for Black and Latino students. The bright spots offer insight into only a fraction of the much larger effort. Of course, each of these institutions shared unique, specific approaches, but there were threads throughout each conversation: institutional buy-in, coordinated efforts between academic and student affairs, and explicit supports for Black and Latino students, all of which led to their success in enrolling Black and Latino students.

GROW YOUR OWN

Austin Peay State University is Tennessee's fastest-growing university. Alongside the overall growth, the university has maintained a focus on increasing its student of color population as well. The campus, which has the highest Latino access score of any public institution in the state, also enrolls more military students than all other state colleges and universities combined.^[iv] One strategy in achieving the institution's goals to increase diversity is clearly stating, prioritizing, and investing resources to meet that goal. Austin Peay's 2016-2021 strategic plan to increase diversity is accessible to students, faculty, staff, and the general public in an [online format](#). The plan specifically articulates the campus's goal to increase the numbers of underrepresented undergraduate students who are recruited, enrolled, retained, and graduated by 5%.

To date, Austin Peay has reached several benchmarks in their diversity strategic plan. The university added a diversity component to its freshman seminar, which is mandatory for all students. Additionally, Austin Peay has two offices dedicated to building community and providing academic and social supports for Black and Latino students. The [Wilbur N. Daniel African American Cultural Center](#) and [Hispanic Cultural Center](#) provide tutoring, cultural graduation ceremonies, and several organizations' students can join. The Hispanic Cultural Center even has a [section](#) on their website that is

written in Spanish and with information for parents in order to ease their concerns of sending their students away to college. In addition to internal campus efforts to support Black and Latino students, the university has leveraged outside partnerships to create pathways for these students while filling a community need for more diverse teachers.

Austin Peay's Grow Your Own Teacher Residency program began in the fall of 2018 as an innovative partnership between the university's Eriksson College of Education and the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) to combat the state's teacher shortage crisis. Each year, a cohort of 40 residents, a combination of recent high school graduates and school personnel without college degrees, enroll in an accelerated teacher educator program at Austin Peay. Grow Your Own covers the cost of each resident's tuition, fees, and books; in return, each resident commits to three years of service in a CMCSS school. Dr. Sean Impeartrice, chief academic officer at CMCSS, shared that the program also has explicit goals to increase teacher diversity in the school district. Currently, 50% of each Grow Your Own cohort is composed of Black or Latino students. By publicly stating and restating these goals, Austin Peay has held itself accountable to increasing outcomes for Black and Latino students.

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COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP

In August, The University of Memphis announced an ambitious initiative in response to the summer's racial injustice protests to eradicate systemic racism and promote social justice on campus. The initiative includes 14 workgroups, composed of students, faculty, and staff, that will address myriad issues including increasing faculty diversity and closing retention and completion gaps for historically underrepresented and first-generation students. Staff members from the university noted how the initiative underscores the importance of a bold, consistent commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion from President David Rudd. In addition to his public declarations, President Rudd's commitment is evident in financial investments for new programs, many of which focus on access and success for Black, Latino, and first-generation students.

Last year, The University of Memphis launched its [Office of First Generation Student Success](#), which connects first-gen students with peer mentors, leadership opportunities, and resources to support students' progression to and through college. There are numerous other programs targeting historically underrepresented subpopulations. For example, [The Hooks African American Male Initiative](#), a program to increase retention and completion rates for undergraduate African American men, facilitates workshops on student loan debt, mental health, career readiness, and academic success. The Office of Multicultural Affairs also sponsors numerous [student-led organizations](#) that

focus on creating a sense of belonging and academic excellence for women, Black, Latino, and Asian students. Kyle Nixon, director of Recruitment and Orientation, and Dr. Eric Stokes, assistant vice provost of Strategic Enrollment Services, both cite student organizations and leadership development opportunities as an important part of Black and Latino students' transition to the university.

[Opportunity Scholars](#) is another example of the university's commitment to creating highly immersive programs to increase access and student success for students of color. The program provides intensive financial, academic, and social supports for undocumented students who graduated from a Tennessee high school. In Tennessee, undocumented students are not permitted access to in-state tuition rates or state financial aid such as Tennessee Promise. ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ Opportunity Scholars is similar to the university's [First Scholars program](#), another cohort-based program for first-generation students. Jacki Rodriguez, senior program manager for both programs, shared the importance of holistically addressing student needs. With financial support from [Equal Chance for Education](#), Opportunity Scholars offers DACA students access to immigration lawyers, assistance to pay DACA fees, counseling, and scholarships. Rodriguez shared that "[the] goal isn't to just give students the opportunity to go to college, but to thrive within it and exceed even their own expectations as they follow their passions."

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COMMUNITY-FOCUSED COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Uniquely situated as one of two public institutions in Tennessee's capital, Nashville State Community College (NSCC) is a top destination for Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) graduates.^[iv] Laura Moran, interim chief enrollment officer and director of Admissions, reinforced Nashville State's commitment to collaborating with local government, MNPS, and education nonprofits to ensure students are getting to and through college. [Bridge to Completion](#), a report produced by the [Tennessee College Access and Success Network](#) and the [Nashville Public Education Foundation](#), offers a detailed analysis of college access and success for MNPS students. Now in its third year, the Bridge to Completion report shows college enrollment and achievement gaps for the district's Black and Latino students, which catalyzed the Better Together partnership between MNPS and NSCC to aid in students' transition from high school to college. Many options are being explored and implemented for this joint venture, including a shared student success dashboard, career pathway programs with MNPS high schools, summer immersion programs, unlimited dual enrollment, and increased resources for Nashville GRAD.^[v]

Nashville GRAD, loosely modeled after [CUNY's ASAP](#), was the result of close collaboration between Nashville State and the Mayor's Office under former Nashville Mayor David Briley. The program is available to students who are full-time residents in Davidson County one year prior to completing the FAFSA and who are currently enrolled at Nashville State. Supported by funding from the Mayor's Office, the Metro Council, and local businesses, Nashville GRAD offers financial assistance

for non-tuition costs like transportation, groceries, textbooks, and certification fees. Students in the program also receive a new laptop, intensive advising, and an opportunity to take courses with other Nashville GRAD students. Although the program is not exclusive to Black and Latino students, they make up 43% and 22% of the program's 255 participants, respectively.

Internally, Nashville State's relatively flat organizational structure allows for frequent cross-functional collaboration focused on strategic enrollment management. The college's strategic enrollment team, a result of TBR's Strategic Enrollment Management Institute, meets regularly to discuss challenges and successes in enrolling and supporting students, with a focus on students of color. Moran also cited Nashville State's president, Dr. Shanna Jackson, as a major factor in the institution's work to prioritize access and success for its most vulnerable populations. Shortly after Dr. Jackson joined the college, she brought the campus into [Achieving the Dream](#), a national coaching process that works to address student access, close equity gaps, and improve performance and completion rates. Moran credits Achieving the Dream's racial equity framework for allowing more open and honest conversation among faculty and staff about the college's achievement gaps for Black and Latino students. Nashville State offers an emerging model for strategic, ongoing collaboration between a campus and its community.

STUDENT SUCCESS REIMAGINED

Aside from Tennessee State University, Southwest Tennessee Community College is the only public predominantly Black institution (PBI) in the state. Southwest also enrolls the highest number of adult learners and Pell-eligible students in the state of Tennessee. Dr. Jacqueline Taylor, associate vice president for Retention and Student Success, contends that, although Southwest is a PBI, equity gaps still exist for Black and Latino students. After Southwest received a \$2.1 million grant from the Department of Education, Dr. Taylor led the launch of the [IDEAS project](#), which stands for Inclusive Design for Equity in Academic Success. IDEAS has partnered across the college to increase professional development for faculty and staff around the issues of equity and inclusion in teaching and learning and to increase the college's data capacity to inform the student success equity work of the college. The IDEAS grant has already allowed Southwest to add over 25 equity and inclusion practitioners and to scale up advising support to decrease academic adviser caseloads. It also provided funding to expand the [SMARTS](#) mentoring program and add supplemental instruction leaders for the college's top "gatekeeper courses." To complement these efforts, the establishment of the MOMS Achievement Center, Veterans Support Center, and Center for Access (formerly Student Disability Services) has also served to promote student success for the diverse student body of Southwest.

Dr. LaDonna Young, dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics, defines gatekeeper courses as high-enrolled, high-failure classes that prevent students from persisting to completion. Southwest, after several years of positive gains in student success, was designated as an [ATD leader college](#) last year. The college shifted

its focus from student affairs to academic affairs and analyzed data on its academic programs. In particular, it examined student failure rates for the gatekeeper courses, many of which are remediation courses, which over 70% of Southwest's students need in their first year. Though the data showed achievement gaps for students of color in these gatekeeper courses, Dr. Young reinforced the importance of transparent data sharing disaggregated by race and gender. Dr. Young leveraged division resources to develop a brand-new model for these courses focused on evidence-based instructional practices and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Consequently, last year, Dr. Young launched the Gatekeeper Faculty Fellowship, an immersive fellowship for faculty to redesign the 12 courses with the highest failure rates. During fall 2019, the cohort did a deep dive into Memphis' history and culture through readings and site visits to many of the city's predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. This spring, the fellows redesigned their courses with a culturally responsive and equity-minded lens. For example, one fellow developed a module to teach faculty how to adapt their classes when serving English Language Learners. Another developed an Introduction to Latino Literature class. The Introduction to Music class is now centered around Memphis' rich musical history. Though the fellowship's timeline has been extended because of COVID-19, fellows will implement and test their redesign strategies in these new courses during the fall 2020 and spring 2021 terms and review achievement data to determine which curricula will be scaled collegewide. Dr. Young hopes this model will inspire other campuses to redesign curriculum in a way that centers students, race, and community context, without sacrificing academic achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tennessee will not reach its postsecondary goals if Black and Latino students do not have equitable access to the state’s public colleges and universities. These institutions must specifically target Black and Latino students in recruitment, admissions, and retention efforts. Each campus will have its own unique challenges in increasing access for Black and Latino students; but moving forward, all must make a conscious commitment to enrolling and graduating a student body representative of Tennessee. The “Segregation Forever” report offered 10 actions institutions and policymakers can take to improve access for Black and Latino students, and below we propose five of them as key levers for making meaningful change in Tennessee.

1 ADOPT GOALS IN STRATEGIC PLANS TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS.

Budgets and strategic plans are an institution’s most irrefutable public value statements. Developing specific goals to increase access for Black and Latino students requires institution leaders to make a conscious commitment to recruiting and admitting a student body that reflects Tennessee’s demographics. Most decisions to adopt, change, or end campus policies and programs depend on how well the choice aligns with the current strategic plan. On many campuses, each division and department must create sub-goals to align with the institution’s overall mission and plan. Institutionwide access and student success goals will require that enrollment services, student life, and academic affairs all consider their roles in increasing access and success for Black and Latino students.

2 REDUCE THE ROLE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN ADMISSIONS DECISIONS.

According to a policy from the Board of Regents, Tennessee community colleges cannot use ACT or SAT scores to determine an applicant’s admission; scores can only be used to determine if a student should be placed in college prep courses.²³ Due to COVID-19, all public Tennessee universities adopted a test-optional admissions policy and used a holistic application review process. Emerging research shows that high school grades are a better predictor of college success than standardized test scores.²⁴ Additionally, Black and Latino students generally do not score as highly on these exams as their white and Asian peers.²⁵ Tennessee’s public colleges and universities should permanently adopt a test-optional policy and remove any language that requires ACT or SAT scores for full consideration in scholarships or honors programs.

3 INCREASE FINANCIAL AID FOR BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS.

College affordability remains a top barrier for Black and Latino students, who are more likely to come from families with less income and wealth.²⁶ In Tennessee, the median household income for Black and Latino families is \$41,000 and \$46,000, respectively, compared to \$60,000 for white families.²⁷ Institution leaders and state lawmakers should increase appropriations that support need-based financial aid. Though Tennessee does not report student loan debt figures disaggregated by race, numerous national studies show Black students graduate with significantly more debt than their peers. Black and Latino students would benefit from an increase in need-based financial aid and aid to cover non-tuition expenses such as a transportation, food, housing, and childcare costs. Tennessee students must work approximately 28 hours each week to afford to attend a public university and 16 hours to attend a community college – both of which exceed The Education Trust’s recommended 10-hour maximum.²⁸ Need-based financial aid is a crucial component in ensuring Black and Latino students can access the state’s public higher education options without sacrificing the quality of their education.

4 INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND ALTER RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES.

Across the state, Tennessee’s public schools are suffering from teacher and staff shortages. An analysis from the Education Law Center found 12 districts in the state have a student-counselor ratio above 600.²⁹ Meeting with high school counselors improves a student’s likelihood of completing the FAFSA and attending college.³⁰ State lawmakers need to ensure that students have access to high-quality, well-resourced guidance counselors. On the other hand, institutions must alter their recruitment strategies and increase focus on high schools with higher populations of Black and Latino students. Admissions offices must invest in developing relationships and creating pipelines at these schools.

5 ADD AN EQUITY METRIC TO TENNESSEE’S OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING FORMULA.

Tennessee was the first state to adopt a performance-based funding formula.³¹ The current formula, adopted in 2015, is a complex model that awards institutions a share of the state’s overall available appropriations based on various outcomes related to enrollment and completion. All outcomes are weighted to align with each institution’s specific priorities and mission, and the formula offers additional premiums for various focus populations.³² The community college focus populations are adult, low-income, and academically underprepared students; for universities, they are adult and low-income students. THEC’s Formula Review Committee should add Black and Latino students as focus populations for both community colleges and universities. Institutions may place a higher emphasis on recruiting, enrolling, and retaining Black and Latino students if the state incentivizes those efforts in the funding formula.



CONCLUSION

Tennessee’s state lawmakers and higher education policymakers have been reluctant to adopt programs and policies that support postsecondary access and success specifically for students of color, opting instead for broad programs to increase access for all students. However, our findings show that Black and Latino students are underrepresented at far too many of Tennessee’s public colleges and universities. Policymakers and institution leaders can change this reality though by adopting clear goals to increase access for Black and Latino students and adequately funding these measures.

If we hope to emerge better on the other side of the pandemic and recent reckoning on racial justice, we can no longer continue with business as usual. Black and Latino Tennesseans deserve full access to the state’s public colleges and universities; they deserve to take full advantage of the increased earnings and employment opportunities a college degree provides. Tennessee will only benefit from increasing the number of college-educated Black and Latino residents – in fact, the state needs this to happen to reach its Drive to 55 attainment goal.

State institution leaders and policymakers must answer the question, “Is Segregation Forever” in Tennessee? with the response that Black and Latino student access is a non-negotiable priority. Though increasing access for Black and Latino students certainly does not solve every economic or equity issue, it is a key step to the state’s post-coronavirus economic recovery and an important part of realizing racial justice in higher education.

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APPENDIX

Institution	City	Governing Body	% of Black Students in F19	% of Black TN Residents	Black Student Access %	Black Student Access LG	% of Latino Students in F19	% Latino TN Residents	Latino Student Access %	Latino Student Access LG
Chattanooga State Community College	Chattanooga	TBR	13.30%	20.40%	65.20%	D	6.40%	7.30%	88%	B
Cleveland State Community College	Cleveland	TBR	5.50%	20.40%	26.96%	F	5.80%	7.30%	79%	C
Columbia State Community College	Columbia	TBR	6.60%	20.40%	32.35%	F	7.00%	7.30%	96%	A
Dyersburg State Community College	Dyersburg	TBR	17.30%	20.40%	84.80%	B	3.30%	7.30%	45%	F
Jackson State Community College	Jackson	TBR	20.60%	20.40%	100.98%	A	3.60%	7.30%	49%	F
Motlow State Community College	Lynchburg	TBR	10.60%	20.40%	51.96%	F	9.00%	7.30%	123%	A
Nashville State Community College	Nashville	TBR	27.40%	20.40%	134.31%	A	9.20%	7.30%	126%	A
Northeast State Community College	Blountville	TBR	2.50%	20.40%	12.25%	F	3.20%	7.30%	44%	F
Pellissippi State Community College	Knoxville	TBR	6.30%	20.40%	30.88%	F	5.40%	7.30%	74%	C
Roane State Community College	Harriman	TBR	2.70%	20.40%	13.24%	F	3.80%	7.30%	52%	F
Southwest Tennessee Community College	Memphis	TBR	63.20%	20.40%	309.80%	A	7.20%	7.30%	99%	A
Volunteer State Community College	Gallatin	TBR	8.40%	20.40%	41.18%	F	6.70%	7.30%	92%	A
Walters State Community College	Morristown	TBR	2.30%	20.40%	11.27%	F	5.60%	7.30%	77%	C
Austin Peay State University	Clarksville	THEC	20.47%	21.20%	96.53%	A	7.74%	5.70%	136%	A
East Tennessee State University	Johnson City	THEC	6.33%	21.20%	29.85%	F	2.81%	5.70%	49%	F
Middle Tennessee State University	Murfreesboro	THEC	18.85%	21.20%	88.91%	B	7.19%	5.70%	126%	A
Tennessee Technological University	Cookeville	THEC	4%	21.20%	19.81%	F	4%	5.70%	63%	D
University of Memphis	Memphis	THEC	34.38%	21.20%	162.16%	A	6.31%	5.70%	111%	A
University of Tennessee	Knoxville	UT System / THEC	5.85%	21.20%	27.58%	F	4.65%	5.70%	82%	B
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	Chattanooga	UT System / THEC	9.67%	21.20%	45.63%	F	5.55%	5.70%	97%	A
University of Tennessee, Martin	Martin	UT System / THEC	12.55%	21.20%	59.21%	F	3.19%	5.70%	56%	F

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ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST IN TENNESSEE

The Education Trust in Tennessee advocates for equitable education for historically underserved students across the state. We believe in centering the voices of Tennessee students and families as we work alongside them for the future they deserve.

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