Tennessee Reconnect: (Re)Engaging Adults in Higher Education

THEC TSAC
What is educational attainment?

The percent of adults in a state who hold a college credential.
Low Attainment

TN: 36.7%

41st
...in Tennessee and other SLC states
High Stakes

- Economic well-being tied to educational attainment.
- Employers concerned about workforce, not just site and incentives.
First Step: Free College
What happened?

We did the math.

“What about adults?”
Next Policy Step:

TENNESSEE Reconnect

Tuition-free community and technical college for adults.
Reconnect Eligibility Requirements

- Do not have an Associate or Bachelor’s degree
- File as an independent student on the FAFSA
- Be a Tennessee resident (at least 1 year)
- Complete a Reconnect Success Plan
- Enroll at least half time (6+ credits each semester)
The Initial Challenge:

How do we find these adults?
A Tailored Approach

Your career goals are just a few steps away

- Apply to TN Reconnect
- Apply to your local community college or eligible Reconnect institution
- File your FAFSA

TNReconnect.gov
Targeted Social Media
Community Stakeholders

- Churches
- Rotary clubs
- Chambers of Commerce
- Other state agencies
- Local workforce boards
Structured Supports

Community members
Other state agencies
Advocates and information sources

Community-based
Institution-neutral
Optional hands-on assistance
Expectations

• Tennessee economy is strong.
  – ~3% unemployment

• Assume 12,000 will apply; 8,000 will enroll.
  – This was met with skepticism.
All Projections Exceeded

41,600 applications
17,200 enrolled
Cohort 1

- 71% female
- 56% have children
- 34 is the average age
- 35% have never enrolled before
- 35% attended college previously
- 75% household income < $50,000
- 86% plan to work while enrolled
Reconnect Student Success

• **Average enrollment – 9+ credits**
  – Increase in number of adults enrolled in community colleges.

• **75% Fall – Spring retention**
  – Far exceeds non-Reconnect adults and non-Promise students enrolling right out of high school.
“You can be a spouse, parent, child, sibling, employee, and student at the same time.”

- Amy
#TNReconnect

Making myself go back to school at 32 with a family was hard, but family encouraged me and I found a way to do it. Now I am graduating!

- Jennifer, Henry County

“Tо better myself...to make ME proud.” - Lori
Sumner County Reconnector
“It was not only me beginning this higher education journey. My husband is also on this journey with me. My firstborn is also now a Reconnect student.” – Mrs. Gooch
Because of Tennessee Reconnect, I can now pursue a career that will allow me to give back to others. Without it, I probably would not have been able to pursue my dream.

#TNReconnect
Who didn’t enroll? Why?

• Delayed entry
  – Couldn’t make “life changes” quickly enough

• Limited class options, scheduling issues
  – Working with institutions

• Concerns about non-tuition costs
  – i.e., housing, food, transportation

• Maintaining outreach
  – We are not giving up on these students
Where Education Meets Prosperity

• Retaining and attracting employers
  – Expansion
  – Relocation

• Changing the college-going conversation

• Breaking the cycle of poverty for adults and their families
Thank you!

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