

**Programs and Partnerships
Niswonger Foundation Board Update
Thursday, February 18, 2021**

Rural LIFE (2018 EIR Grant)

- \$8 million/five-year
- Continuing to support Phase I schools through sustainability grants and corresponding coaching.
- Delivering many regularly scheduled grant activities virtually, including weekly coaching support and professional learning for teachers and leaders.
- Offering the following key professional learning support:
 - *Lead Teacher Collaborative* (LTC): Professional learning for Phase 2 lead teachers, including affinity group learning communities created and designed based on teacher input of greatest areas of need
 - *Principal Learning Series* (PLS): Professional learning for Phase 2 leaders, focused on change management, support for teachers and staff during these unprecedented times, and key areas of the grant (literacy and personalized learning)
 - *Strong Start Network* (SSN): Offering select teams a community of support focused on learning and implementing newly adopted ELA materials while establishing a regional community of lead learners made up of individuals who will champion the challenging and rewarding work of improving student outcomes in the middle school literacy classroom (in partnership with TNTP); Support includes guided cycles of learning and reflection on key components of effective instructional practice in the middle school literacy classroom.

New Teacher Center Instructional Coaching project (2019 EIR Partnership Grant)

STEM.LD (2020 EIR Grant)

- \$8.8 million/five-year
- Program for STEM teachers and students in grades 6-12.
- Three major components:
 - strengthening the teaching/learning classroom experiences with engaging materials for students and professional development for teachers.
 - experiential out-of-school time (OST) opportunities to explore STEM content; and
 - expanding participation in rigorous STEM and dual enrollment (DE) courses.
- Partnered with TNTP, BioBuilder, University of Alabama in Huntsville, East Tennessee State University, If I Had A Hammer, STREAMWORKS, Purdue University, and a consortium of 20 LEAs.
- Started on 1/1/21.
- Hired Dr. Vicki Kirk as Curriculum Specialist.
- Met with EIR Program Officer Yvonne Crockett on 1/27/21.

- Hosting a webinar about the grant on 2/16 at 3:30 p.m. Webinar link (Zoom): <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89244134022>

“Project On-Track” (Care Foundation of America Grant)

- Project On-Track is a literacy initiative funded primarily by the Care Foundation of America (\$2.3 million).
- The project is designed to address learning loss by implementing "high dosage/high impact" tutoring in grades K-3 at school sites across the First Congressional District.
- The Care Foundation has committed \$1,148,438 for the first year of the three-year project (and 50% funding for the remaining two years).
- The project is under the leadership of Dr. Debra Bentley, recently retired instructional supervisor and former elementary principal in Johnson City Schools.
- The initiative will consist of the following:
 - Include both a summer program and a school year initiative.
 - A "one to one" instructional literacy approach targeting K-3 students with the greatest academic needs.
 - Selected students will be tutored by qualified individuals such as teachers, school staff members, preservice teachers, and volunteers.
 - Amplify, a K-5 digital literacy platform, will provide personalized instruction and mCLASS, an assessment of reading skills, will be used to measure student progress toward proficiency.
 - Site directors will work with Dr. Bentley in the selection and training of tutors.

Professional Development for Online Instruction (REL Appalachia Grant Partnership)

- Provides the development costs and personnel to prepare and present a train-the-trainer program to improve remote learning.
- The goal of this training is to develop capacity in educators to be able to create and deliver quality online and hybrid instruction to students.
- This is a year-long effort for 2020-21.
- Two (of three scheduled) workshops have been completed; approximately 60 LEA trainers are using the project materials for PD sessions within their districts.

NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising (Tennessee Department of Education Grant)

- Advisors have been assisting seniors in completing the FAFSA since the application opened on October 1, 2020. Current submission rate is 54% and completion rate is 49% with many additional FAFSA Frenzy events being planned as more students transition back to in person learning.
- TN Promise- Applications totaled 5,448 (89%) of the senior class submitted by the December 1, 2020 deadline.

- Advisors seamlessly transitioned to virtual contact with students, with a total of 94,730 messages sent virtually to assist with college applications, Tennessee Promise, and other financial aid such as FAFSA and scholarships.
- Signal Vine text messaging platform was fully implemented on October 27, 2020 under the leadership of Associate Director, Anita Kilbourne-Greer, and currently has 3,454 students signed up to receive messages and two-way communication with Advisors. Engagement analytics show 27,829 text messages have been sent.
- Website redeveloped (niswongercare.org) by Associate Director Shawn Stewart. The new platform provides a more user-friendly experience for students and families seeking information.
- Website chat feature was enabled and is being monitored by members of the Leadership Team for students and families to get immediate assistance and answers to questions.
- Big*Bright*Future (summer melt) program leader, Nellie Frye collected data on students served during the summer of 2020, and compiled the findings. Data reflects that 66% of the students enrolled in the program matriculated to a college campus in Fall 2020.
- Surveys were sent to key stakeholders mid-January to obtain feedback on Advisor impact and performance in each school. Overwhelmingly, participants answered “Strongly Agree” to all measures. Open responses included below.
- Advisor mid-year written evaluations were completed, and meetings were held by each supervising director to review performance feedback.
- Denise Arnold, Director of NiswongerCARE, was selected as a National College Attainment (NCAN) member fellow along with 33 other attainment practitioners across the nation to inform lawmakers of the great impact policy decisions can have on college access, affordability, and attainment. Selected as student fellows are two Niswonger Scholars, Jasmine Martin and Gustavo Castillo, who will work alongside Denise.
- NiswongerCARE staff and student fellows engaged in NCAN’s 2020 #Thankful4Pell #DoublePell Advocacy Week Campaign (Nov. 16-20). This campaign centered on expressing to Congress how important the Pell Grant is to student success, and how doubling the maximum award would help restore the purchasing power of this crucial federal aid.
- Director, Denise Arnold, was invited by SCORE to engage in conversations for a “data playbook” that plans to capture some of the best practices around using data to support students as they transition from high school to postsecondary.
- Director, Denise Arnold, and Lead Advisor, Nellie Frye, were invited by SCORE to present data and insights from summer melt programming in preparation of the group’s launch of a qualitative research study of students who are college-intending but do not enroll in college.

Niswonger Online (Funded by our Consortium School Systems)

- The Niswonger Online team responded to the challenges of students who were experiencing drastic changes in support systems and difficulty with broadband access. This included access to courses with mobile devices, the additions of a parent help section of the website, a “Tips for Success” webinar for students and parents, a regular newsletter and an enhanced social media presence.
- The Niswonger Foundation received a TN Community CARES Grant to support enhancements. These funds provided free access to online courses for students whose schedules were affected by the pandemic. More than 350 seats of instruction were awarded.
- TN Community CARES Grant funds provided for the development of 25 new courses to enhance the curricular offerings. These included fine arts, world languages, mathematics and three career/technical education programs of study – coding, networking and health sciences.
- 2020-2021 school year is seeing record enrollments. There are over 1000 students enrolled in Niswonger Online this term.

Comprehensive Educational Resources (Funded by our Consortium School Systems)

- The newest of our Consortium’s joint efforts, CER, is a collaboration among 25 school districts and the Niswonger Foundation. The mission is to improve student achievement by providing common benchmark assessments, reporting, and pacing guides; data analysis; teacher created resources; and collaboration across the region.
- This program is a ready-response to the challenges of instructional delivery during the pandemic with the majority of the resources already formatted for virtual learning or adaptations for use in a virtual setting.
- Content is available in mathematics, science, and social studies in a total of 29 content areas. These resources are growing at a pace of 50-60 materials each month.
- This program is lead by Dr. Mia Hyde, former literacy specialist in Northeast Tennessee and Director of the TDOE First CORE office.

CareerConnect

- This workforce readiness initiative introduces students to postsecondary and career opportunities, while building strong work ethic skills. Due to the pandemic, the program’s focus turned to allowing students flexibility to receive the benefits of the program in a way that works for their individual learning schedules and their personal safety.

- The Class of 2021 received one-on-one assistance with college and career planning, FAFSA completion and financial planning; or with their goal of entering the workforce directly from high school.
- The Classes of 2022 and 2023 saw their activities and lessons adapted to fit an online format. Through this means, a more personalized approach was possible.
- Due to the effects of the pandemic, social and emotional support for the Explorers became a necessary and important addition to the work of the CareerConnect staff.

WE Track and Work Ethic Diploma

- This statewide initiative was updated (workethicdiploma.com) with new features to make the point tracking process entirely virtual for both students and staff.
- High school staff members were assisted with the guidance for implementing COVID-altered standards for the program.
- Video tutorials were created utilizing the new site features for students and staff.
- The user experience for employers supporting WE Track was improved, allowing for virtual interaction with students.
- A coordinated effort for the distribution of Work Ethic Distinction diploma seals, pins, and folders to schools across the state was implemented.
- A statewide working group was formalized to revise the program.

Grant Activity

- New Grants Received
 - 2020 EIR STEM LD Grant (US DOE) - \$8.8 Million
 - Project On Track (Care Foundation of America) – \$2.3 Million
- Grants Pending
 - State of Tennessee Governor’s Direct Appropriations to support College and Career Advising - \$700,000.
 - State of Tennessee Governor’s Direct Appropriations to assist with matching funds for STEM LD - \$200,000.
- Grants Being Prepared
 - AP for All – A proposal to the Tennessee Department of Education - \$5 million
 - Gear Up Partnership Grant with East Tennessee State University

Publicity and Publications

- Scholar Directory was mailed in January.
- Annual Report is in final stages of publication.