

# NISWONGER FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

As a Scholar Alumni, Scott Niswonger's philosophy, "Learn, Earn, Return" has begun to mean more to me. Twice now, I've had the honor of selecting new Niswonger Scholars while sitting in the same board room where I interviewed years ago. When I had the privilege of extending a job offer to a recent Niswonger graduate, it came full circle.

It occurred to me in that moment that the Niswonger Foundation has reached the maturity that Scott envisioned.

Jason Light Eastman Engineer Niswonger Scholar Class of 2013



# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN & FOUNDER

Milestones Created Step-by-Step

Milestones, those markers that give meaning to our time on Earth, can occur through both careful planning and pleasant surprises. This year, our Annual Report is called – Milestones – because we have enjoyed our share of accomplishments this year. In this report you will read more about these efforts...

Selection of our One-Hundredth Niswonger Scholar

Five more Niswonger Scholar Alumni returning to the region to join other Alumni as they live their commitment to our vision – Learn, Earn, Return

Opening state-of-the-art professional development centers, The Niswonger Foundation Learning Center and JOYful Literacy Land

The beginning of work on a third U.S. Department of Education grant, while showing success with the current eight-million-dollar Rural LIFE grant

Receipt of the first financial support from the State of Tennessee two Direct Appropriations Grants totaling \$600,000

11.4 percent increase in college-going rate in our service region since the inception of the NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising Program

34.8 percent increase in enrollment in Niswonger Online, with Advanced Placement course enrollment growing by 253 percent

These and other milestones mark the importance of the Foundation's history of working in partnership. These partnerships succeed because of an understanding that the difference in where we are now and where we need to find ourselves in the future will be greatly influenced by the quality of the educational experiences we provide to children.

Our most symbolic milestone, this year, was the move to the permanent home of the Niswonger Foundation – 223 North Main Street, Greeneville, Tennessee. Moving my office to this location has allowed me the blessing of being more directly involved in the day-to-day activities. It is exciting to hear the voices of our

Niswonger Scholars involved in their Leadership Institute, or to be able to greet our Superintendents and Directors of Schools as they arrive for their monthly meeting in our Learning Center. Hearing our staff members planning the next grant project, seeing educators gathered for a professional learning experience, or welcoming visitors from state and national educational agencies, demonstrates the power of creating a collaborative space for the right people to gather to fulfill our important mission "to create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other sustainable projects.".

As an historic residence was transformed into the "home" for the Foundation, the process of unpacking boxes was both emotional and renewing. Photographs, paintings, furnishings and other memorabilia now share my forty-year journey

that has led to the eighteenyear history of the Niswonger Foundation.

The story of the Niswonger Foundation is what I believe to be a great recipe for life – a healthy mix of careful planning, calculated risktaking and a willingness to take the next step. This was well stated by an American professor and philosopher Joseph Campbell:



"If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path."

The adage "there is no place like home" could not ring truer for those of us who have been involved in the Niswonger Foundation's journey. Step-by-step and milestone-by-milestone, we will create that path – staying true to our vision…

Learn, Earn, Return

Scott M. Niswonger Chairman and Founder



# NISWONGER PARTNERSHIPS

Milestone Moment...

The new home of the Niswonger Foundation proudly serves the region's school systems with a state-of-the-art Learning Center and Literacy Library (JOYful Literacy Land).







KinderCamps prepare for School Success

CareerConnect Explorers - Class of 2019

#### Mission and Vision

The Niswonger Foundation functions with the belief that success comes by working in partnership. This belief is fundamental to achieving the mission to "create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other sustainable projects." The Niswonger Foundation's guiding principle is that all children should be provided an educational environment that supports and encourages a productive future. To best ensure success with this mission, the Foundation focuses on rigorous, cost effective, innovative and sustainable practices. The vision is based on the long-held philosophy of the Foundation's Chairman and Founder, Scott M. Niswonger, "Learn, Earn, Return."

#### Service Area

The Niswonger Foundation serves seventeen school systems in the First Congressional District of Tennessee. Additionally, there are rural school systems across the state that are "affiliate members" of the Niswonger Foundation with access to selected services. A 2019 direct appropriations grant from the State of Tennessee opened the Foundation's efforts with the *Work Ethic Diploma* to all school systems in Tennessee. Locally, classroom teachers, school leaders,

counselors, parents and communities are essential elements in the success of this work. Additionally, the Niswonger Foundation has drawn an impressive array of state and national partners.

### 2019 Grant Highlights

- The New Teacher Center selected the Niswonger Foundation as one of four district partners in a 2019 *United States Department of Education EIR* grant. The purpose of this \$14 million grant is to implement a high-quality, standards-aligned instructional coaching (IC) program to improve the effectiveness of teachers via job-embedded coaching and advance the learning of K-12 students in high-need rural and urban school districts.
- United States Department of Education Completed year-two of an 8-million-dollar five-year Education, Research and Innovation (EIR) grant to improve middle grades literacy development. Rural LIFE is serving 18 school systems/72 middle schools using personalized learning strategies with the goal of focusing on literacy to improve academic achievement for students in grades six through eight. Early success has been achieved with the development of individualized school and student plans.

- Walmart Foundation and Rural Schools and Community Trust Completed the second year of a \$450,000 three-year grant focused on kindergarten through second grade literacy development in Hancock County. This initiative incorporates the concept of "place-based learning." Early findings support the importance of professional development, provision of resources, modifications to class scheduling and following a data-driven approach.
- Care Foundation of America Completed year-two of a \$562,500 three-year grant for NiswongerCARE Online, supporting "affiliate memberships" with the Niswonger Foundation for rural school systems across the State of Tennessee. Affiliates grew to ten school systems in 2019.
- Plus Mark, Tweed Enterprises, First Tennessee Bank, Ballad Health and Scott M. Niswonger contributed a total of \$74,000 in support of the CareerConnect program with a focus on ensuring that students are prepared to select the most appropriate career paths, and have the job skills needed for success in those chosen fields.
- Care Foundation of America, Brotherton Foundation, First Tennessee Bank, John Tweed and Scott M. Niswonger provided a total of \$472,000 in support of the NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising Program.

### Partnership Highlights

- College and Career Advising Students in thirty Northeast Tennessee high schools receive the assistance of college and career advisors through the NiswongerCARE program. Students receive direction regarding financial aid applications (FAFSA), college applications, career exploration/college planning, ACT test registration, scholarship searches, Tennessee Promise and Hope Scholarship eligibility, and informational meetings for families. A nine-year milestone for this program reflects that the college-going rate in the Foundation's service region has risen from 50.6% to 62%. This 11.4% overall increase compares to a 6% increase across the rest of the state over the same timeframe.
- Niswonger Online Experienced a 34.8% growth in enrollment. Affiliate school systems across the state grew by 17.4%. Enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses grew by 253%. Niswonger Online currently serves 26 school systems/50 high schools and 41,000 high school students.
- Literacy Development In addition to the US Department of Education Rural LIFE grant and the Walmart Foundation/Rural School and Community Trust funded initiative in Hancock County, the Niswonger Foundation supports other literacy initiatives. Literacy Initiative Focused on Effectiveness (LIFE), a three-year grant in Greene County, concluded in 2019. Combining best practices in early grades literacy instruction, the focus was having students reading on grade

level by third grade. Successful findings support the Foundation's belief in the importance of professional development, provision of resources, modifications to class scheduling and following a data-driven approach.

#### **Professional Learning:**

- Advanced Placement (AP) Providing the opportunity for all high school students in Northeast Tennessee to have access to Advanced Placement (AP) coursework, has been a ten-year goal of the Niswonger Foundation. Annually, an investment is made in sending teachers to AP institutes. This opportunity has been provided to over 550 teachers to date. While 45 percent of Tennessee students have access to AP courses in their high schools, 100 percent of students in Niswonger Consortium Schools have access to at least nine AP courses.
- School Success Symposium united nearly 1000 educators to share the region's best educational practices. The keynote speaker for the 2019 Symposium was Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Dr. Penny Schwinn. Special Guest Speaker was Perry Wilson, Founder of "If I Had a Hammer."
- *Counselor Convening* provided kindergarten university counselors with professional learning and best practices opportunities. The Featured Speaker was Dr. Amanda Propst Cuevas, Director of Appreciative Education, Florida Atlantic University.
- CareerConnect completed the program's third year for students in Greene County and Greeneville City Schools. This career and technology focused program is currently introducing 300 students to soft skills development, career choices and employment opportunities available in their communities. The WE Track (work ethic track) program was expanded to a statewide program in 2019.
- For the seventeenth year, the Niswonger Foundation provided curriculum based *Young People's Symphony Concerts* to over 2000 students in partnership with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.
- *Story Arts* is the focus of a partnership with the National Storytelling Center to provide live streaming of the International Storytelling Festival throughout the region and to countries around the world. Additionally, this partnership provides for teacher workshops to enhance classroom skills and provides access to storytelling events for underserved children.
- The magic of words is never more apparent than with the Foundation's *Dictionary Project*. Working in partnership with the Youth Builders of Greene County, over 15,000 dictionaries have been provided to students in Greeneville and Greene County third grade classrooms.



# SCHOLARSHIP & LEADERSHIP

### Milestone Moment...

With the selection of the **Class of 2024**, the number of individuals with the distinguished title of **Niswonger Scholar** surpassed **One Hundred**.







Scholars meet in Niswonger Learning Center

Freshmen enjoy the Bahamas

Cott M. Niswonger's vision to "Learn, Earn and Return" is the inspiration for the Scholarship and Leadership program, which is believed to be unique to any other in the nation. Selected from among the region's best and brightest high school seniors, Niswonger Scholars engage in a four-year, innovative, leadership development program that prepares them for their commitment to return to Northeast Tennessee as future leaders for the region. The Scholars are provided a scholarship to attend the college or university that can best prepare them for their chosen careers, extensive leadership development opportunities, and guidance to reach their personal best as future community leaders.

### Scholar Milestones...

- Eighteen Scholars are in 15 fields of study in eleven colleges and universities.
- Five new Scholars, the Class of 2024, brings the current Niswonger Scholars to twenty-three.
- Currently, thirty-five Scholars have returned to the region and are serving in fifteen different career paths.

- Fifteen Alumni are currently pursuing graduate programs of study.
- Thirty-two Alumni have completed graduate degrees.
- The Niswonger Foundation has invested approximately \$9,000,000 in scholarships, internships, study abroad, service abroad, leadership development and international cultural opportunities to ensure that Northeast Tennessee has leadership to support the future development of our region.

The vision has become reality with the impact of the Niswonger Scholar Alumni who are meeting their commitment to return to Northeast Tennessee. The experiences and skills gained through Scholar Institutes, travel and personal development is now enriching their work as college professors, teachers, engineers, healthcare workers, business and non-profit professionals and counselors, to name a few. In addition to their professional roles, Scholar Alumni serve the Foundation in many ways including assisting as mentors to the younger Scholars, assisting with Scholar Leadership Institutes and as majority members in the Scholar selection



Meredith Wachs Stevens, Class of 2010, holds degrees from the College of William and Mary, and from American University. She honors the Niswonger Foundation's educational mission as a mathematics teacher at Greeneville High School. Commenting on her experience as a Scholar, Meredith stated: "Returning to Northeast Tennessee was not only a commitment to the Foundation but a goal that structured my early career: how will the skills I'm developing and the knowledge I'm gaining as I teach in Washington, DC help me better educate the youth of East Tennessee? I am so proud that I have the chance to impact our region by supporting students as they pursue their passions and fulfill their potential, just as my teachers supported me. This year, one of my former students was selected as a Scholar, and I couldn't help but feel that my "Learn, Earn, Return" promise has started to come to fruition 14 years later."



A Milestone Moment came as the first Niswonger Scholar medical doctor returned, this year, to serve the region. Dr. Cole Seaton, Class of 2009, attended Vanderbilt University and East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine. "The Niswonger Scholarship program's vision is equally ambitious and unique. Years ago, when applying for the program, I saw an opportunity to be a part of something special with the potential to have an indefinite impact on our region. I believe in the program's vision now more than ever, but its success requires a collective effort from Scholars to return and serve. I am excited to come home and do my part. I look forward to many others doing the same."



**Dustin Howser**, Class of 2017, recently returned to fulfill his commitment to the Niswonger Foundation after beginning his career as an aerospace engineer at Lockheed Martin, in Dallas, Texas. "Being a part of the Niswonger family, and I feel wholeheartedly that family is the best description for a scholar's relationship with the foundation, has meant more to me than I can ever accurately describe. Beyond the amazing opportunity to pursue our educational goals, being a part of the scholar program allows us to reinvest in the talented youth of our region and create a positive cycle of new opportunity. With every individual that commits to returning to our region and building a career, we strengthen a network that is dedicated to this community, improving access to education, business, healthcare, and the overall well-being of Northeast Tennessee." Dustin is now investing his engineering skills and experiences at Nuclear Fuel Services, Erwin, Tennessee.



The spirit and desire to "Learn, Earn, Return" is evident in the following comments from Ivory Shelton, Class of 2016, soon to complete the M.D. program at Wake Forest School of Medicine. "There is no feeling better than walking into a patient's room and hearing the names of those familiar "hollers" - Johnson City, Bristol, Church Hill, Flag Pond. No feeling, perhaps, except to then be met with a look of unspoken understanding by my patients and their families, when my "pediatrician's voice "reveals those long vowels and notes of an Appalachian home. As a student clinician in my final year at Wake Forest, I am never prouder of my Appalachian Identity than when it is "medicine" for my patients in these moments. For this reason, I look forward to the day I can return to care for, mentor, and educate the intelligent, unique, and resilient children of our beautiful region!"

### Class of 2023

Makayla Davis (East Tennessee State University) *Trent Dickerson (University of Tennessee – Knoxville) Aisling Hagan (University of Tennessee – Knoxville)* Erica Seal (East Tennessee State University) *John Turner (University of Tennessee – Knoxville)* 

### Class of 2022

Sarah Douthat (University of Tennessee – Martin) Alexis Harvey (Tennessee Technological University) *Jasmine Martin (University of Tennessee – Knoxville)* Aubrie Strange (Samford University) Rithvik Vutukuri (Tulane University)

#### Class of 2021

Austin "Levi" Blazer (Belmont University) *Brittany Church (Austin Peay State University)* Emily Ellison (Clemson University) *Lorraine Hayes (Wake Forest University)* 

### Class of 2020

Christian Dalton (University of Tennessee) Elijah "Bo" Pless (Milligan College) Tanner Shivley (Carson-Newman University) *Kori Smith (University of Tennessee)* 

Congratulations Graduates - Class of 2019

Courtney Johnson (Maryville College) Morgan Thomas (Clemson University) *Zachary Ward (University of Tennessee) Matthew Widener (East Tennessee State University) Trenton Yount (University of Tennessee)* 



### DONOR HIGHLIGHT

Contribution from Dr. Flora Joy Leads to "JOYful Literacy Land"

distinguished professor of Reading and Language Arts at East Tennessee State University for forty years, Dr. Flora Joy has made a significant impact on education regionally, nationally and internationally. A member of the Clemmer College of Education Hall of Fame, recipient of both the Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Service, Dr. Joy founded the master's degree program in Storytelling and Story



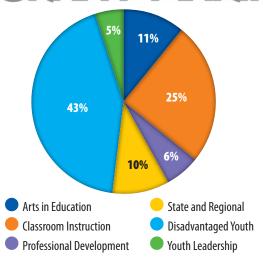


Artwork created and contributed by Jennifer Golden

Arts at ETSU. Dr. Joy holds the distinction of being the youngest graduate of East Tennessee State University.

Upon her retirement, the Niswonger Foundation became the proud recipient of Dr. Joy's "treasure house" of resources for teaching English language arts, including a library of children's literature. This generous contribution has led to the establishment of JOYful Literacy Land, housed at the new home of the Niswonger Foundation. Teachers, literacy specialists and, most importantly, students will be greatly served by Dr. Joy's generosity for many years to come.

### GRANT MAKING



▲ s an operating foundation, the majority of Niswonger Foundation funding is directed to our own programs - School Partnerships and Scholarship and Leadership. The Foundation values the opportunity to direct up to ten percent of the operating budget to other projects that are in keeping with the organization's mission. As noted, a primary focus for this support targets the needs of underserved children. In



Niswonger Scholars provide a Day of Service at Second Harvest

Northeast Tennessee, as across the United States, one-half of public school children live in poverty.

As an example of the grants provided, and in keeping with our theme of "milestones," we are proud to highlight the tenyears of support that the Niswonger Foundation has provided to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee. This year's contribution will provide a full-year of nutritious food for children in Hancock and Hawkins Counties through the weekend Backpack Program.

Other grants support many areas related to education including classroom materials, arts opportunities, leadership development for students and professional development for educators.

The mission of the Niswonger Foundation is firmly placed in the First Congressional District of Northeast Tennessee. However, the leadership of the Niswonger Foundation recognizes the need for engagement in ensuring quality educational opportunities in Tennessee and nationally. As examples, staff members are represented as Board Members, and among the leadership, of the following organizations:

- Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC)
- Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) Board
- State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) Board and **Advisory Committees**
- Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (TQEE) Board
- Governor's Early Literacy Foundation Board
- Communities in Schools Board

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

*June 30, 2019* 

ASSETS —	_
Cash	\$ 393,724
Restricted Cash	371,531
Program Accounts Receivable	54,450
Federal Grants Receivable	56,261
Investments	9,095,539
Prepaid Expenses and Other Assets	600
Student Loans Receivable	484,688
Collections	101,861
Property and Equipment	4,034,031
Total Assets	<u>\$ 14,592,685</u>
LIABILITIES —	_
Accounts Payable and other Accrued Liabilities	\$ 431,709
Line of Credit	399,280
Demand Notes Payable to Primary Benefactor	1,136,826
USDA Loan	832,532
Total Liabilities	\$ 2,800,347
NET ASSETS	
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$ 11,438,713
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	<u>353,625</u>
TOTAL NET ASSETS	11,792,338
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND	
NET ASSETS	\$ 14,592,685*

<sup>\*</sup>The Niswonger Foundation distributed \$ 2,788,055.00 to educational programs and scholarship awards in fiscal year 2019.

## WITH APPRECIATION TO CONTRIBUTORS

(July 1, 2018-June 30, 2019)

**Ballad Health-Alan Levine Jane Pilloni Plus Mark** Allen and Julie Barnett The Brotherton Foundation Camelot Care **CARE Foundation of America** Andy Czaijkowski Nick Darnell **Delta Dental** Dennis and Donna Depew Youth Harold and Dr. Nancy Dishner **East Tennessee State University ETSU Foundation** First Tennessee Bank **Trevor Gentry Charles Koch** Landair **Daniel Moore** Scott M. Niswonger **Anthony Pentz** 

**Bill Purmort-Central Mutual** Insurance **Roberts Family Trust Rural School and Community Trust** Gerald and Melanie Sheppard **State Farm Insurance** TN Commission on Children and **Gary Taylor Tom Turnwald Tweed Enterprises** John Tweed **United Way of Washington County Thomas Wennogle** Thomas L. Woods **Walmart Foundation Your Cause Corporate Giving** 

### AN OPERATING AND CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

The Niswonger Foundation was founded by businessman and philanthropist ■ Scott M. Niswonger. Unlike most private foundations, the Niswonger Foundation was established as an operating foundation with its own programs and projects. The Foundation is also approved as a charitable organization. Although a percentage of its operating funds go towards grant making, most funds go into the Foundation's two primary programs – a scholarship and leadership program for selected college students committed to returning to the region and partnership programs for schools.



### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS**

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NIKKI L. NISWONGER Secretary

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**IOHN TWEED** 

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**JILLIAN DAVIS** 

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Director, College and Career Advising

**SARA HOLT** 

Hancock County Literacy Specialist

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BARBARA BATES

Assistant Director, Scholarship & Leadership

VIVIAN FRANKLIN

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LAW LOVING

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**GINA PAVLOVICH** 

Director of Learning Resources

**GABBY BILLIOT** 

Program Coordinator, CareerConnect

ANITA KILBOURNE-GREER

Associate Director, College and Career Advising

LARRY NEAS

Director, Special Projects

**SHAWN STEWART** 

Associate Director, College and Career Advising

**RURAL LIFE** (U.S. DEPT. OF EDUCATION EIR LITERACY GRANT)

DR. RICHARD KITZMILLER

Project Director

**JOHN PAYNE** 

Director of Technology and Innovation

Director of Instructional Practice

DR. RICHARD BALES

**BRITTANY SEYBERT** 

Literacy and Communications Coordinator

LARRY NEAS Compliance Officer

STELLA HUNTER

Administrative Assistant

LITERACY COACHES

**BROOKE DRINNON CANDACE HERMAN** ALLISON SEELEY CATHERINE EDWARDS SARAH KITZMILLER

KRISTI SNYDER **BETHANY FILLERS** MARY MCINTYRE LINDA STUART

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**IESSY ALVA EMILY EMERICK** DAKODA GOODWIN SAVANNAH MADGETT **ALLISON TURBYFIELD EMILY RAY-COLLINS** ANDREW GRAY

**LUCAS HITECHEW** ADRIA SHANNON **ALLISON EASTRIDGE NELLIE GREER MARY KERNS RACHAEL SUGGS** 

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**DR. MISCHELLE SIMCOX**, Johnson County Schools MR. STEVE STARNES, Greeneville City Schools MR. TOM DAVENPORT, Care Foundation of America DR. STEVE BARNETT, Johnson City Schools DR. JOHN ENGLISH, Unicoi County Schools DR. COREY GARDENHOUR, Elizabethton City Schools MS. REBECCA ISAACS, Rogersville City Schools

MR. DAVID MCLAIN, Greene County Schools DR. JEFF MOORHOUSE, Kingsport City Schools MR. TONY SEAL, Hancock County Schools **DR. TOM SISK,** Bristol City Schools DR. KEVIN WARD, Carter County Schools NISWONGER FOUNDATION LEADERSHIP TEAM

# NISWONGER FOUNDATION PHILOSOPHY

he Niswonger Foundation was established in 2001 to make a positive and ■ sustainable difference in education in Northeast Tennessee. This dream was envisioned by Scott M. Niswonger, who founded Landair Transport, Inc. and Forward Air Corporation. These companies were the first two Greeneville-based companies to be taken public in the history of Greene County, Tennessee. Jointly, the companies have combined annual revenue of over one-billion-dollars and employ more than 5000 people.

With the success of his two companies, the philosophy of "Learn - Earn - Return" was created. Using the innovative model of having a private, for-profit logistics company, Landair Transport, support a not-for-profit educational foundation, the goal of bringing rigorous, relevant, and cost effective programs to public education became a mission.

School Partnerships are designed for the specific challenges of rural education. Fundamental to the success of the Niswonger Foundation has been a clear focus on removing constraints to educational innovation and problem solving, thus allowing local school systems to better provide for student needs. These

efforts have gained national attention resulting in the receipt of two significant grants from the U.S. Department of Education and numerous other national organizations.

We know of no other Scholarship and Leadership program like ours in the United States. Niswonger Scholars are selected through a nomination process that seeks to identify the region's best and brightest future leaders. Scholars are given the opportunity to attend the college or university that will best prepare them for success in their field of study, while participating in our four-year leadership program. What makes our program unique is that these students commit to returning to Northeast Tennessee to work in their chosen career, one year for each year they receive the scholarship

The Niswonger Foundation expands its philosophy of "Learn - Earn - Return" beyond Northeast Tennessee through involvement in numerous state and national educational initiatives. Additionally, the Foundation shares a percentage of the operating funds for grants to other not-for-profit agencies for programs that support the Foundation's mission:



### NISWONGER



### **FOUNDATION**

For More Information Contact:

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