

**Niswonger Foundation Board Update**  
**Thursday, February 9, 2017**  
**Programs and Partnerships**

**Partnership Updates**

**The Greene County Literacy Project (LIFE)**

- The LIFE program has hosted several guests, interested in learning about the early successes of this initiative. Visitors have included Rob Mahaffey and Dr. Doris Terry Williams, representing the Rural School and Community Trust and the Lenore Annenberg Foundation; Tara Scarlett and Tom Parrish, from the Scarlett Family Foundation; and Scott Broyles and Kate Stone, from Leadership Tennessee.
- Visits have been completed to all 5 schools involved in the LIFE project.
- The Foundation received a substantial donation of literacy materials from Dr. Flora Joy. Dr. Joy is investing 40 years of materials, which have been developed through her research, teaching and international consulting activities, into our literacy efforts. The materials will be housed at a Niswonger Foundation literacy center, at the new office location. These resources will be available to teachers throughout the region.
- Niswonger Foundation staff and school representatives participated in a *Place Based Learning* training program on January 17. Place based learning will be incorporated in the literacy initiative. PBL takes into account, community resources, the culture of the region, talent and collective knowledge, and experiences of individuals in the region.
- Kick Up Research is being vetted for possible assistance in structuring the most effective method for data collection and research design for the LIFE program.
- Penguin Press is donating a significant number of new books for the Greene County School mobile bus project, and for inclusion in the Niswonger Foundation literacy center.

**Niswonger Online and NiswongerCARE Online**

- Niswonger Online has served nearly 10,000 students from Northeast Tennessee in the past six years. This is the second year in which schools are paying to sustain the online program. Enrollment is steadily increasing. Online courses are helping students to earn credits that may not be possible within their high schools. They also gain lifelong computer and soft skills.
- In the past year, students have earned over 1,500 credits with social studies, foreign languages, PE/Wellness, or CTE being the most utilized courses. School systems have learned how these online courses not only create more options for their students, but become a money saving option.
- Since receiving NCAA approval, school systems in and outside the State of Tennessee have requested access to the online courses. Niswonger Online has recently expanded to selected rural counties in Tennessee through a grant provided by the Care Foundation of America. This expansion helps students and allows us to bring down the cost for our local school systems. Our goal is to decrease the seat fees for our local consortium schools as early as fall 2017.

- Approximately 400 students are enrolled for the spring 2017 semester. Sixty-two of those students are from two new affiliate school systems - Claiborne County and Lauderdale County. Rural, high need school systems are the target for this program expansion.
- This expansion incurs no additional cost to the Niswonger Foundation thanks to a partnership with the CARE Foundation of America. A proposal has also been submitted to the Scarlett Family Foundation to secure additional funds.

### **Professional Development Activities**

- *Niswonger School Leader Program (NSLP) Cohort 2017* includes 30 first year principals and assistant principals. The first day featured two administrators from the 2016 cohort, Paula Campbell (South Central Elementary) and Sarah Gray (Mosheim Elementary). Paula and Sarah also led professional learning for all Carter County administrators in December. The evaluations were very positive. The second session is February 3, at Greeneville City Professional Learning Center. NSLP has also been approved for TASL credit.
- *Leadership for Blended and Digital Learning (LBDL)*  
We have completed four of five sessions with a cohort of 33 principals. The participants have been approved for TASL Credit. The last session will include class completion in the morning, followed by a lunch celebration. **The Niswonger Foundation Board is encouraged to join the group at Bristol Motor Speedway, 12:00 noon, on Thursday, April 6.**
- *2017 Niswonger School Success Symposium* is set for Thursday, June 15. A “save the date” has been sent to all educators. A “call for presenters” will be sent on Feb 6. Registration opens April 3. Keynote speakers are Jan Burkins and Kim Yaris, experts regarding 21st Century Literacy. Their blog and instructional resources have drawn a national audience and made them “thought leaders” in the field of literacy instruction. Kiran Singh Sirah, President, [International Storytelling Center](#) will tie stories and literacy together through his creative storytelling methods.

### **NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising**

- An important goal of the Advisors was to ensure that seniors completed the TN Promise application process by the deadline. The *tnAchieves*, the TN Promise partnering organization for our region, recently released data confirming that 4,963 (77.3%) of high school seniors met the TN Promise application deadline. These efforts included many outreach strategies (e.g. social media platforms, classroom presentations, assistance to parents, and individual student meetings).
- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) submission deadline for TN Promise applicants was January 17, 2017. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission promoted TN FAFSA Frenzy events. Advisors organized over 65 events in their schools. These events enabled students and parents to receive assistance in completing their FAFSA application from experienced financial aid professionals, including NiswongerCARE staff. As a result, an unprecedented **72.35%** of NE TN seniors submitted FAFSA applications. Notably, ten high schools have already exceeded last year’s twelve month total within only three months of the application opening date of

October 1, 2016. Most all higher education programs require FAFSA applications to be completed in order for a student to be eligible for scholarships and grants within the institution. Research shows approximately 90% of all students who complete a FAFSA application enroll in higher education.

- Social media/website outreach to students, parents, and the community, continues to increase in followers. We provide relevant and timely updates to stakeholders through our communications via NiswongerCARE website, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.
- Advisors continue to work with a caseload of students who are receiving ongoing support with college planning, completing college applications, financial aid/ scholarship applications, and transition to postsecondary education.
- The program director and associate directors completed mid-term evaluations for all Advisors using feedback from on-site observations, school surveys, review of best practices as documented in portfolios, and review of individual data. As a result of our ongoing and perpetual reviews of the Advisors, the decision was made to replace one college intern Advisor, who was performing below expectations.
- Staff meetings were held in November, December, and January to share information, professional and personal development, and provide collaborative work sessions to share best practices. A highlight included a focus group with Nikki Niswonger and Dr. Nancy Dishner. The group shared experiences and perceptions of being a “College Access Advisor.”
- Advisors and Program Directors participated in various professional training activities:
  - ACT Readiness Workshop at Pellissippi State Community College
  - Tennessee School Counselors and Administrators, in Murfreesboro
  - College for TN Training, at Northeast State Community College
  - National College Access and Success Network (TCASN) Conference
  - FAFSA “Line by Line” Webinar, provided by TSAC
  - “Stakeholder Call for Back to School” - White House Reach Higher
  - i3 Community Chat Webinar-Texting
  - Place-based Learning Training
  - Work-based Learning Professional Learning Community
  - Conducting Virtual Meetings using Zoom- Webinar

### **CareerConnect**

- A successful media event, announcing the implementation for the CareerConnect program, was held on Wednesday, January 11 at West Greene High School. A special thanks to Scott Niswonger and John Tweed for participating in this event.
- All student-parent orientation meetings have been completed for the Class of 2019.
- The first monthly meetings have been held at all schools. At these meetings, the Explorers began thinking about career paths and setting personal goals for the future. Explorers also learned their Myers-Briggs type and discussed how different personalities can impact job and team performance.
- The second round of monthly meetings begins on February 6. Curriculum for that meeting will focus on communication skills.
- Planning has begun for the Summer Experience. Law will be working with Jerry Ayers and Brad Gentry at Greene Technology Center to plan the two weeks. Staffing will be a

mix of GTC teachers, high-school teachers, and Niswonger Care Advisors. Guest presenters will round out the agenda.

- The plans for the selection process for Class of 2020 (to be selected in April 2017) are being formalized.

### **Grant Activity**

- A grant in the amount of \$450,000 has been **approved** by the **Walmart Foundation**. This will be used, over three years, for the *LIFE* Literacy program in Hancock County, and expanding community engagement efforts in Greene County.
- A grant request for \$100,000 has been submitted to the **Lenore Annenberg Foundation**. If approved, these funds will be used to purchase technology and literacy materials for Hancock County Elementary and Carter's Valley Elementary (Hawkins County).
- A proposal has been presented to the **Scarlett Family Foundation** to expand the NiswongerCARE Online affiliate effort to other rural counties in Tennessee.

### **Boards, Committees and Activities**

- On Friday, November 18, Stephanie Baird, Interim President, Great Schools Partnership; and Scott Broyles of Leadership Tennessee visited with members of the Niswonger Foundation to learn about the literacy efforts.
- On November 29, Nancy served on the selection committee for the U.S. Military Academies nominations from the office of U.S. Congressman Phil Roe.
- On Thursday, December 1- Scarlett Family Foundation representatives Tara Scarlett, President and CEO; and Tom Parrish, Chief Operating Officer, visited with staff of the Niswonger Foundation to learn about best practices in improving rural education.
- On December 5, the Niswonger Foundation closed on the new office location at 223 N. Main Street in Greeneville.
- From Tuesday, December 13 – Thursday, December 15, the Lenore Annenberg Foundation and Rural Schools and Community Trust conducted a site visit of the Greene County LIFE project, Hancock County Elementary School, and Carter's Valley Elementary School (Hawkins County).
- Niswonger Foundation Staff, and representatives from Greene County, Hancock County and Hawkins County participated in a Place Based Learning Workshop on January 17.
- Nancy attended a Governor's Books from Birth Board meeting, in Nashville, on Monday, January 23.
- Nancy participated in the Tennessee Higher Education Commission meeting on Thursday, January 26, in Nashville.
- Nancy attended a Rural School and Community Trust meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina on February 1-3.

### **Publicity and Publications**

- News clippings and press releases are available for review.
- The Annual Report has been printed and mailed.