

**Programs and Partnerships
Niswonger Foundation Board Update
Thursday, May 9, 2024**

News Highlights

- Confirmation of \$2,620,000 to be received from Governor's Direct Appropriations. This supports NiswongerCARE, CareerConnect and capacity building opportunities.
- New Partnership with Jim Marggraff, creator of Leapfrog and the Leap Pad. Grant and program will provide an estimated \$500,000 in literacy support for our schools.
- Grant received from TN SCORE to support Comprehensive Educational Resources in the amount of \$150,000.
- Grant award received from Ballard Health's Community Health Improvement Fund - \$200,000 to fund Pre-K screening initiative for 18 school districts.
- *Learning Together Day* is set for Monday, October 14, 2024. Six districts plus the University School are participating this year. We anticipate over 3,000 educators in simultaneous, peer-led professional learning.

Program Updates

AP Access for All (2021 Funded by Tennessee Department of Education Contract)

- Spring 2024 Impact Report - <https://tnapaccessforall.org/apaa-spring-2024-impact-report/>
- Program Sustainability - APAA is still on the supplemental budget, funds to sustain for the 2024-25 school year are designated to come from remaining ESSR funds.
- There are 963 students enrolled for the 2024-25 school year with an additional 184 on a waitlist for their needed course.
- We are actively recruiting more teachers through all outlets in hopes of serving all students who are requesting a course with us.
- We recently received an MOU from Perry County schools. We are now serving 98% of schools in Tennessee. Perry County is also designated rural and a distressed county, bringing those numbers to 96% of all rural districts and 92% of all AR/Dist.
- As we close out this school year, there are over 2100 students enrolled. Teachers are now starting to review for the AP Exams to be administered May 6 - May 17.
- APAA teachers had live (via Zoom) exam review sessions throughout April. They are all recorded so students can attend live or access them at any time to study for their exams. Public information can be found here- <https://tnapaccessforall.org/ap-exam-reviews/>
- The APAA program awarded 173 mini grants this year for a total of \$78,000 going to AP classrooms.

- The APAA program has approved 100 teachers to attend virtual APSI training this summer. This fills all the seats we had available for the scholarship.
- The contract with the College Board has created a new process for schools to identify their APAA students by clicking a box that says Niswonger Subsidy when ordering AP exams. This process should make AP exam payments more efficient for both the APAA program and the schools. So far, the process on the schools' side has been smooth. They have until the end of April to identify all their APAA student exams.
- The **Vanderbilt Implementation study** has been finalized and submitted to the TDOE.
- AP Computer Science is under redevelopment and will not be offered this Fall.
- AP Psychology is in redevelopment but is on track to be offered this upcoming fall.
- Our APAA team will be attending and presenting at the InstructureCon (Canvas) Conference in Las Vegas, in July.

Comprehensive Educational Resources (Funded by the Niswonger Consortium of School Districts)

- Thirty School Districts – 140,000 students are supported by this work.
- Benchmark /Assessment/Data
 - The CER TCAP achievement data files have been forwarded to districts.
 - A data sharing meeting will be held when Benchmark 2 data is returned.
- Curriculum Teams
 - Social Studies revision teams and math revision teams have completed their work. All revised materials are posted on the CER website.
 - The Common Formative Assessment teams are set for this year. They meet on August 22 and 24 to create the CFAs. Their work is complete for this school year.
 - This year, we can provide \$75/day, for each team member who meets in person, to defray the cost of substitute teachers.
 - Pacing Guide teams met in February/March 2024.
- Materials/Pacing Guides/Common Formative Assessments
 - Created common pacing guides for some of the math textbook adoptions.
 - Created collaborative groups by adoption. These will be led by Dr. Sherry Cockerham with the Niswonger Foundation.
 - We have new content teams that were established for K-5 ELA (writing support), AP Human Geography, and Computer Science (K-2, 3-5, and 6-8). A second round of materials have been added this year. We added over 770 standards in early December.
 - Created Common Formative Assessments in grades 3-5 ELA this year. We are also updating all the math CFAs to be single standard. These are ready in Mastery Connect. Twenty-two districts have them loaded into the system.
- Leadership Academy
 - Seven districts participated this year with 19 future leaders.

- Final presentations and reception were hosted at the Niswonger Foundation on April 24th.
 - The next cohort begins in August.
- Principal Study Council
 - We are in the planning process for the coming school year.
 - Will add an in-person option as part of Learning Together Day
 - Three virtual meetings were conducted during this school term.
 - A new Principal Study Council will begin in August.
- Instructional Coach Collaborative
 - The collaborative will have 4 virtual sessions next year. District coaches will present and there will also be coaching strategies and content provided by the Niswonger Foundation.

CareerConnect (Funded by Governor's Direct Appropriations Grant)

- Current efforts are being directed to summer programming. Summer will look a lot different this year as we're taking a deeper dive into careers and presenting programming in what we're calling *Combines*. Think of the NFL combine and the showcase of specialty skills - that is our approach for summer programming. We have great employer partners that are partnering with us on this BIG initiative: Ballard, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, FM Pipeline, Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Northeast State, Walters State, TCAT-Morristown, and many more. Here is a calendar for the Combines: **CAREERCONNECT COMBINE SCHEDULE**
- Recruitment for the next Cohorts at our existing schools is currently underway.
- We have added a new school to our existing roster to help build out a cluster in West Tennessee: McKenzie High School in Carroll County. Their CTE Director had heard about the program through Milan administration and felt that CC would be a valuable resource to their school (they're a very small school).
- This year we implemented CareerSafe for our students to begin earning workforce credentials through their employability skills certifications. We have over 500 students working through the certification and even have some who have completed the certification. There are 11 modules in total, some of the modules take 2-3 hours to complete.
- This is an excerpt from an email I received from Kim Gass, Career Connect Coordinator:

Good afternoon, Nancy, I just wanted to share this quote from Coach Kenner at Volunteer. He said last week during Volunteer Sophomore recruiting, "Kim, this program is so needed. We are very grateful to be part of it." It is finally a "REAL" initiative that engages students whose paths would probably never cross, let alone create an active cohort of students with unique talents and gifts. I loved getting to know the kids on such a

personal level that I was truly able to see them grow in ways that were genuinely positive and reflective of the time they had spent together."

As I personally look back to the beginning of recruitment last year, I will NEVER forget the young man actually from Volunteer High School who pulled me aside to ask, "who would provide this opportunity for kids like us?" As I visited schools throughout the year I reflected upon that young man often. I am thankful to be a part of such an organization serving those "like us." Kim Gass

Developing Academic Coaches (2019 EIR – Funded by the US DOE)

- **Mathematics Collaborative in conjunction with CER**
 - 2023 was adoption year for new mathematics textbooks. Collaboratives were established to assist academic coaches as they help teachers with implementing the new materials in SY 2023-24.
 - Dr. Sherry Cockerham is leading five collaboratives that meet monthly - [iReady](#), [McGraw Hill](#), [Eureka](#), [enVision](#), [Big Ideas](#). [HMH](#) is supported with one-on-one consulting. Twenty-four out of 28 CER Districts are participating.
 - Meetings will consist of finalizing pacing guides for next year, end of the year survey, and districts processing next year's plans for professional development.
- **Professional Development for Academic Coaches and Mentors**
 - Elizabethton Mathematics academic coaches attended the Kentucky Center for Math Conference with Dr. Cockerham in March.
 - Hawkins County's first year coaches attended NCSM Math Coaching Labs with Dr. Cockerham in February.
 - On February 28, 13 school districts participated in a workshop to gain skills in utilizing Information Flow Diagrams (IFD).
 - English Language Arts walkthrough with TDOE and Hancock County was conducted on February 26.
 - March 25 – 6-12th grade ELA coaches analyzed the Tennessee Writing Rubric and its classroom use.
 - May 10th - 6-12 grade ELA writing collaborative is planned.
 - A number of summer professional development activities are being planned.

Kindergarten Readiness (Funded by Bright Start/ Ballard Health's Community Improvement Fund, matched with Governor's Direct Appropriations)

- The working group has prepared and approved the definition and guidelines of early childhood readiness that will guide the work. These have been professionally prepared and printed for each district to distribute.
- Kindergarten screeners were vetted by the group and considered in each district. Brigance Screener was the overall choice.
- Districts have compiled the number of screeners and resources required for implementation. The total cost of the three-year program is \$400,000.

- **Grant funding was approved from Ballad Health’s Community Health Improvement Fund.** This is a \$200,000 dollar for dollar match. For the first year of implementation, the match will come from the Governor’s Direct Appropriations.
- Implementation has begun for the 2024-25 school year!

NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising (Funded by Governor’s Direct Appropriations Grant)

- TN College and Career Planning Night events are planned in all 26 high schools to provide crucial information to parents and students about college search, applications, and financial aid processes.
- TN Signing Day celebrations are planned in all 26 high schools to recognize and commend students who have committed to enroll in some form of postsecondary education or military service.
- So far this year, Advisors have held 8,178 individual student meetings and 760 group meetings serving 15,280 students.
- Advisors have been working hard to resolve the many issues with FAFSA completion due to the new “Simplified FAFSA” roll-out in January compared to the normal roll-out in October for previous years. Calculating completion rates compared to the equivalent number of days from the previous year’s cycle, 38.9% of class of 2024 have completed a FAFSA compared to 35.9% of class of 2023. **NiswongerCARE outperforms the state rate of 37.6% and the national rate of 29.3%.**
- Leadership team, Denise Arnold and Anita Kilbourne-Greer have engaged with the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation and other stakeholders across the state in a weekly FAFSA workgroup call.
- Summer melt program recruitment is underway with over 300 students enrolled and a goal of 850 students by the end of the school year.
- Modern Campus platform (formerly Signal Vine Messaging) has 3,279 seniors enrolled. Advisors have sent students a total of 79,103 messages about important tasks and deadlines and answered 10,316 students’ individual questions.
- Dr. Ramona Williams shared data findings from the National Student Clearinghouse with several district leaders and with the Directors of Schools at their recent Study Council meeting.
- Advisor William Collins was selected to co-present with Vanderbilt admissions and other rural partners at the Southern Association for College Admission Counseling (SACAC) Conference on March 23-24.
- Advisor Hannah Scheurer and Jasmine Martin, along with Denise Arnold were invited to attend the Tennessee Board of Regents Advising Academy on February 24. Hannah was selected to share the work being done by NiswongerCARE with all attendees during this inaugural event that included college access professionals and Tennessee Board of Regents representatives from across the state.

Niswonger Online (Funded by the Niswonger Consortium of School Districts)

- **Enrollment Total for 2023-24 School Year: 2,236.** This includes Summer 2023, Fall 2023, Year Long 23-24, and Spring 2024 terms.
- World Language enrollments account for 51.6% of total enrollments. This is an area where schools have experienced teacher shortages for many years.
 - American Sign Language: 187 enrollments
 - French: 89 enrollments
 - Latin: 165 enrollments
 - Spanish enrollments: 713 enrollments (~32% of total enrollments)
- Enrollment is open for Summer 2024 and Fall 2024 Terms
- Student Success
 - Dr. Catherine Edwards has completed weekly walkthroughs in classes, allowing us to identify ways to better support students and teachers. She spends a great deal of time identifying potential issues and communicating with students.
 - We gathered data from students, teachers, and school lab facilitators to best support students studying Spanish online. Jill & Catherine will analyze these data and share it with our Spanish Lead Teacher to make any necessary changes before the start of the fall semester.
- Course Development Projects
 - Early Childhood Education Careers I, in partnership with STRONG ACC. This course is in the review and edit stage. We hope to launch it in Spring 2025.
 - Cybersecurity II, in partnership with STEM.LD. Course development in progress by two local teachers. Will be available for students in Fall 2024.
 - Algebra II course development scheduled for Summer 2024 by the same teacher who designed Algebra I. Will be available for students in Fall 2024.
 - Chemistry course development scheduled for Summer 2024 by the same local teacher who designed Physics. Will be available for students in Fall 2024. Will include PIVOT labs, an online lab platform used by Physics and AP Physics courses.
- Chemistry and Physics are two courses we have had large enrollments in recent years due to teacher shortages. Our course designer/teacher does an excellent job making a rigorous course that is accessible to students of all abilities.
- Communication - A quarterly newsletter is sent out to all current students and families as well as all our teachers and school contacts. Most recent newsletter: [MARCH 2024 EDITION OF ONLINE NEWSLETTER](#)
- Our website continues to be updated to share important information and student spotlights.
- Students, teachers, and school partners receive announcements and tips for success regularly throughout the year.

Project On-Track (Funded by the Tennessee Department of Education Contract)

- For the spring semester, the project has served 3,411 students at 108 sites in eighteen school districts and five community agencies.

- On Friday, April 5, twenty-five Niswonger Foundation employees assembled 3,450 bags of books and math manipulatives at the old Jonesborough Elementary gym. The bags were filled with materials for students to take home and use with family members. During the week of April 8, all bags were delivered to Project On-Track sites.
- Summer 2024 planning is underway. Currently, there are 34 summer tutoring locations with a projection of over 1300 students to be served in literacy and math.
- Larry Berger, CEO of Amplify Education visited Hawkins County's Church Hill Elementary School on April 24. Project On-Track uses Amplify's early literacy instructional materials with students in grades 1-3. It was Mr. Berger's first opportunity to see the materials used with high-dosage tutoring. His team was very impressed with the project's implementation plan and the results tutors are seeing with the platform. Director of Schools Mat Hixon shared with Mr. Berger that without Project On-Track, many Hawkins County students would not have access to small-group tutoring.
- In March, site coordinators were asked to provide quotes from students, tutors, and parents regarding the impact of Project On-Track. Below is a small sampling of the quotes provided.
- From Tutors
 - "I was shocked at how quickly our students improved with this program."
 - "I say it all the time, but this job has literally been the biggest blessing. I didn't want to teach anymore, but I had to do something. Over the past two years, I've built relationships with students that I know will last a lifetime. I had an 8th grader tell me that they actually felt confident in math for the first time because of the work that goes on in our little corner of the school."
 - "Seeing my students grow in Project On-Track has been an amazing experience. It feels like I learn from them just as much as they learn from me!"
- From Parents
 - "I can't believe how much of a difference tutoring has made in my child. His confidence is growing every day."
 - **"I have witnessed a change in her attitude about school.** She loves her tutoring group. Thank you all so much!"
 - **"We could never afford private tutoring. This program is a Godsend."**
- From Students
 - "I love tutoring and my tutor. I feel successful and **I'm not afraid to read anymore.** I now raise my hand in class."
 - **"I feel like I am getting smarter and it's the best feeling."**
 - "I am a better writer because of tutoring."

Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Appalachia (Funding from SRI International through a contract with REL Appalachia)

- Niswonger Foundation continues to partner with SRI International in their 5-year contract to operate the Regional Education Laboratory for four Appalachian-area states (REL Appalachia).
- There are currently two active projects in this partnership.
 - Niswonger Foundation and 10 area school districts are in the early stages of the “Strengthening Students' Preparation for Careers and College” project.
 - The second project, “Accelerating Early Literacy Success,” we are focusing on an evaluation of our tutoring efforts with Project On-Track.
- REL assists with data analysis and support for Project On-Track, CareerConnect and NiswongerCARE.

STEM.LD (2021 EIR – Funded by the US DOE)

- Cohort 4 schools have selected their choice of partnerships and orientation has begun.
- STEM.LD is in the process of setting up sustainability meetings with schools highly engaged with STREAMWORKS.
- Communications have been sent to all STEM.LD schools to notify them that deep-dive partnerships will conclude in Summer 2024.
- Beta testing of the STEM.LD platform, "Flex," was performed on May 7th and 8th. Participating schools included Greeneville High School, Bulls Gap, Jefferson Middle School, Volunteer High School, and Sulphur Springs Elementary. Beta testing will also extend to our partners.
- We have adjusted the timeline for Flex and are expected to launch in early September. We are continuing to have ongoing meetings with our marketing team and website developers.
- Ten BioSTEM teachers visited the University of Tennessee's Agriculture Campus on May 6th. We intend to organize another regional field trip aimed at linking teachers with real-world job opportunities.
- The BioSTEM curriculum writing is underway and is expected to be finished by the end of summer.
- The BioSTEM teacher training will be held **July 8th-July 11th**.
- OpenSciEd 4-day Curriculum Launch in Knoxville - **July 8th - 12th**.
- TNTP Math - Deep-Dive orientation will be held in Fall. Date TBD
- The 2024 Summer Institute will be held on June 18th at Northeast State Community College. The institute will be open to K-12 teachers, administrators, and counselors. We currently have 91 educators registered and 9 presenters.
- STEM.LD will begin to ramp up marketing efforts for the Summer Institute on our current website and Twitter.

- Tiffany Neill will be the Keynote speaker - Tiffany is an experienced leader adept at informing, designing, and overseeing the implementation of education policies and initiatives, managing and supervising a team of employees, and overseeing the allocation and use of financial resources provided by state and federal government sources. Provide expertise in education policy guidance, systems analysis, and development of strategies to improve K-12 education systems. National leader in PK-12 Science and STEM Education frequently serving on state and national committees and presenting at state and national conferences on academic standards, high-quality instructional materials, and STEM education.
- STEM.LD submitted 3 presentations for the NREA conference in October.
 - **Connecting Teachers and Students in Rural Communities with STEM Opportunities: A Digital Solution.**
 - **Rural Resilience: Empowering Students to Solve Problems**
 - **Breaking Barriers: Access for Advanced STEM Pathways Through Biotechnology**
- Upcoming Events
 - The University of Alabama in Huntsville's (UAH) Center for Cybersecurity Research and Education in collaboration with Northeast State Community College hosted a one-day cybersecurity camp for high school students on May 2, and for middle school students on May 3, that covered the basics of cybersecurity, such as hardware, cryptography, and an escape challenge.
 - STREAMWORKS Super Regional, Marine Advanced Technology Education Appalachian Highlands RANGER Class Underwater Robotics Competition - May 11th
 - The MATE ROV Competition is an underwater robotics (aka remotely operated vehicle or ROV) challenge that engages a global community of learners each year.
 - WSCC Hammer Build - Sulphur Springs Elementary

WE Track (Funded by Governor's Direct Appropriations Grant)

- There are 2,457 WE Track participants for the 2024-25 academic year.
- To date, 331 have earned the Work Ethic Distinction.
- Benton County Schools has joined the program. Overton County Schools has inquired about joining.

Grants awarded since February Board Meeting

- The Tennessee Legislature approved \$2,620,000 in Governor's Direct Appropriations for the Niswonger Foundation. The funding will support:

▪ College and Career Advising	\$1,270,000
▪ CareerConnect and Work Ethic Distinction	\$ 900,000
▪ Capacity Building/Matching Funds	\$ 450,000

- Awarded \$150,000 in funding from the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) to support Comprehensive Educational Resources efforts in preparing academic coaches.
- Awarded \$200,000 from Bright Start/Ballad's Community Health Improvement Fund to support P-Kindergarten screening initiative.
- New Partnership with Jim Marggraff, creator of Leapfrog and the LeapPad. Grant and program will support an estimated \$500,000 in literacy support for our schools.

Total New Awards = \$3,470,000

New Grant Initiatives

- Efforts are underway to prepare two US DOE EIR grant proposals for the 2024 grant cycle:
 - Teacher Retention
 - Mathematics Preparedness
- The initial steps have been taken in the submission of a grant to the Appalachian Regional Commission. This grant will be in partnership with Appalachian State University.

Publications/Webpages/Social Media

- The Niswonger Foundation 2023 Annual Report *Putting the Pieces in PLACE* was completed and distributed.

Contributions (February – April 2024)

East TN Foundation/Scott Niswonger	\$ 1,900,000.00
Scott M. Niswonger	\$ 100,000.00
Gary Nave/Norwell	\$ 10,000.00
Oliver Buzz Thomas	\$ 5,000.00
James F. Durham	\$ 2,500.00
Sandy Nave/Norwell	\$ 1,000.00
Michael and Rita Wooten	\$ 100.00
Andrew Johnson Women's Club	\$ 75.00
Holly Czoka	\$ 65.00
Sherry Cockerham	\$ 50.00
Total	\$ 2,018,790.00

Niswonger Foundation is currently represented on the following:

- Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities
- Tennesseans for Quality Early Education
- Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation
- TN State Collaborative on Reforming Education
- Tennessee Arts Commission
- Tennessee Department of Education
 - Philanthropy Engagement Council
 - LAUNCH – National Pathways Project
 - TISA Steering Committee