

**Programs and Partnerships  
Niswonger Foundation Board Update  
Thursday, November 14, 2024**

**News Highlights**

- The Niswonger Foundation team actively responded to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Each of our program directors identified the specific challenges and responded accordingly. Examples include modifications to assignments and deadlines for Niswonger Online and APAA students; making a special request to TDOE to allow for redirecting unused tutoring funds to provide books and learning games for children in the affected areas; and distribution of food, water and other materials as needed. The team will keep close watch for other needed assistance.
- As Chair of the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation, Nancy enjoyed the opportunity to host the Foundation's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration at the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum, in Nashville, on October 21. Attending the event were Governor Phil Bredesen, Governor Bill Haslam and Governor Bill Lee.
- Nancy was invited to attend the Governor's Rural Opportunity Summit, hosted at the Tennessee Residence. Niswonger Scholar Alumni and Governor's Intern, Derek Driskill, was also in attendance.
- Nancy was the emcee for the STRONG ACC Regional Symposium held on Wednesday, September 4 at Meadowview Convention Center.
- Nancy attended the LAUNCH National Pathways Academy with representatives from TDOE, TBR, and SCORE in Atlanta on September 23-25.
- The Niswonger Foundation will host State Legislators for school visits on Thursday, November 21.
- The Niswonger Foundation will host the Annual Legislative Educational Convening on Friday, November 22.

**Program Updates**

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

- APAA currently has 2140 enrollments for the 24-25 school year.
  - 20% increase from fall 2023
  - We could have served more students but were short AP teachers to serve them.
  - 51% of eligible high schools in TN have at least one student enrolled.
  - 47% of all partnered rural high schools have at least one enrollment.
- APAA has two students who are behind in their course due to Hurricane Helene. The teachers are working with these students to support them and help them get caught up.
- Enrollments are in 21 subject areas, over 124 sections, taught by 108 teachers. The student to teacher Ratio = 20/1.
- We are actively recruiting teachers to serve more students this upcoming spring semester. Enrollment for the spring semester opens November 18th.
- The APAA team is currently working on the Fall 2024 Impact Report. Copies will be shared as soon as it is completed.
- We remain partnered with 99% of all school systems.
- Our website redo is now complete. Please take a look and follow us on social media:
  - <https://tnapaccessforall.org/>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/apaccessforall>
  - <https://x.com/apaccessforall>
  - <https://www.instagram.com/apaccessforall/>
- We have a new program manager at the TDOE, Michelle McMillian. It has been a pleasure working with her so far. She is a Kingsport native, taught Math (including AP) at Dobyns-Bennett before moving into

her first role with the TDOE. Chelsea Rose is now the Senior Director of College and Career Readiness at TDOE.

- We are pursuing a base budget request to the Tennessee Legislature for recurring funding of \$3.2 million annually.
- There is a possibility of unspent federal funds. If there are remaining funds, we will prepare a plan to secure a budget amendment to use the funds during this fiscal year. All federal funds must be spent by October 1, 2025.
- The APAA administrative team will be presenting at the *Future of Education Technology Conference* (FETC) in Orlando in January.

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

- Twenty-nine districts and 151,000 students are being served through CER.
- The Leadership Academy Cohort launched in August. We have six districts participating and 24 members.
- The Principal Study Council has a full slate of planned meetings – virtual and in person throughout the school year.
- The Instructional Coach Collaborative will have 4 meetings this year with district presentations and coaching strategy support. Meetings include in-person writing, math and new coaches’ workshops.
- A new “Job Embedded” program has been implemented this year. There are 5 districts and 18 participants.
- In collaboration with ETSU’s Center of Excellence, we are conducting an engagement survey to be used with Steering Committee members.
- New teams of teachers are creating credit exams in compliance with the newly established high school policy. Exams will include English 4, Anatomy and Physiology, Ecology, Economics, Personal Finance, World History, Geography, and Spanish 1.

#### **CareerConnect (Funded by Governor’s Direct Appropriations Grant)**

- School meetings for fall are underway; due to Helene we are working with each school to assess the situation of CC students; with meetings being rescheduled as needed.
- School visits to meetings have been productive, including training and support for six new coaches who joined the program this year.
- Dates and locations for summer are being confirmed. The plan is for 12 Summer Combines across six categories (advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction, IT, logistics, entrepreneurship). Summer will also feature two kickoff gatherings and two rising sophomore orientation gatherings
- We are refining and enhancing our meeting curriculum, and the recruitment and selection procedures, based on feedback we have received from students and coaches. The revised modules will roll out in the spring, as well as an updated process for recruitment and selection that will provide earlier engagement with newly selected Explorers.
- Chief among program updates will be the inclusion of the DeBruce Foundation's Agilities Profiler to inform Summer Combine placements; and “Ringorang,” an app designed to keep students continually engaged in essential skill development.
- Research project to evaluate CC's effectiveness with SRI International continues. Data are being “cleaned” and sent to SRI for analysis.
- Early planning for our 2025 Teacher Externship Program is underway.

### **Kindergarten Readiness (Funded by Bright Start/ Ballard Health Foundation)**

- Seventeen school districts are part of the two-year collaboration and planning initiative.
- 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 Ballard Health's Community Health Improvement Fund. This is a \$200,000 dollar for dollar match. For the first year of implementation, the match came from the Niswonger Foundation through the Governor's Direct Appropriations.
- Donor advise funding was sought from the East Tennessee Foundation. We have received approval for \$16,000 that can be used for the dollar-for-dollar match. This adds an additional \$32,000 to the effort.
- Implementation began Summer 2024 with more than 6500 students being screened across the region.
- Analysis of the data is in process, with the program continuing for the next two academic years.

### **NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising (Funded by Governor's Direct Appropriations Grant)**

- Delivery of Service meetings were held in all 26 high schools to guide the work of the Advisors for the 2024-2025 school year.
- Advisors reported to their assigned schools during August and year to date have held 3,282 individual meetings compared to 2,678 this time last year. Advisors also held 363 group meetings with 6,145 students participating.
- TN Promise application opened on August 1, with 88.3% of all eligible seniors having applied as of October 27, compared to 97.9% who had applied at the same time last year. Advisors have faced many challenges in completion of applications due to the time missed during the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Thanks to the advocacy of Dr. Dishner, TN Promise extended the deadline until January 15 for students in the impacted counties which include all districts served.
- Leadership Team conducted school visits and monthly supervision meetings with Advisors in September and October logging over 23 hours spent in schools, and additionally providing virtual assistance to Advisors 393 times.
- Modern Campus messaging platform for communicating with students currently has 2,965 seniors subscribed, and 22,884 outgoing messages have been sent to students.
- College Application and Appreciation Month activities were held in each high school during September resulting in over 1,976 college applications submitted during those events. Additionally, Advisors assisted students in completing 1,326 college applications during individual and group meetings.
- Lauren Garrison, Advisor, was appointed as Social Media Coordinator. Facebook and Instagram analytics reflect a reach of posts to over 472,000 users. (*Reach is defined as the number of unique users who have seen your content at least once on the page, news feed, or story.*)
- Dr. Ramona Williams continues to coordinate with the National Student Clearinghouse and is in the process of compiling college-going data to share with Directors and Principals.
- NiswongerCARE leadership has partnered with ETSU's Department of Mathematics & Statistics to work with interns enrolled in the master's in applied data science to complete a research project analyzing program data.
- FAFSA Outreach grant activities through ECMC were completed on September 30, 2024. This work resulted in an additional 1,051 students in the class of 2024 completing a FAFSA application.
- NiswongerCARE hosted a luncheon with the STARS Network including college admissions representatives from Vanderbilt, Yale, Duke, and Colby. Advisors learned about each institution and how to better assist students in completing applications for highly selective institutions.

- Dr. Jeff Moorhouse and colleagues with Ballad Academy provided training to Advisors about the opportunities for students to participate in the new initiative, as well as helpful information about health career opportunities.

### **NiswongerSTART Mentoring Program**

- NiswongerSTART pilot program was implemented at the beginning of Fall term serving both Walters State and Northeast State Community Colleges. The program strives to empower community college students by Supporting Transition, Achievement, and Readiness for Transfer through one-on-one mentoring. NiswongerSTART is geared towards expanding on relationships that are established in the student's senior year of high school.
- Hannah Scheuer who previously served as an Advisor was promoted to Program Coordinator and Mentor for Northeast State. Jasmine Martin was promoted to Mentor for Walters State.
- A total of 153 community college students opted into NiswongerSTART before the first day of fall classes with 97% of these students matriculated to their institution.
- Mentors have referred students on 60 separate occasions to campus resources such as financial aid, advising, and other student support services.
- Mentors have held 76 in-person meetings on campus and 445 virtual contacts with the students through texts, phone calls, or Zoom meetings.

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

- Current Enrollments: 1,093 (~60% consortium schools; ~40% affiliate member schools)
  - 824 Enrollments Fall 2024 Term: August 14-December 13, 2024.
  - 269 Enrollments Year Long 24-25 Term: August 14, 2024-May 2, 2025
- Response to Hurricane Helene - Most enrollments in fall semester classes are students in East TN whose school schedules were impacted by Hurricane Helene. We waived penalties on late assignments for the remainder of the fall term. We are working with students on a case-by-case basis if modifications are needed to their workload in order to catch up.
- Enrollment for Spring 2025 opens Monday, November 18.
  - We will offer our full course catalog, enrollment numbers permitting. Course catalog and syllabi can be viewed at [www.niswongeronline.com/courses](http://www.niswongeronline.com/courses)
  - Based on averages from the last 2 years, we expect to have approximately 850 enrollments in the Spring 2025 term.
- Student Success - Dr. Catherine Edwards
  - Catherine completes weekly virtual "walk-throughs" in fall & year-long classes.
  - We have established a system for monitoring progress of students with accommodations (~60 students currently). Catherine does a walk-through for all of these students at least once a month. We have a monthly meeting to discuss the progress of these students and follow up on any issues.
- Teacher Support
  - Teachers receive newsletters at regular intervals throughout the semester with announcements and links to help resources.
  - Jillian Davis & Catherine provide support for teachers on an "as needed" basis throughout the semester.
- Course Development
  - Introduction to Teaching as a Profession (the first course in the K-12 Teaching as a Profession pathway) will be updated for 2025.

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

- Project On-Track is excited to maintain the same level of tutoring for the 2024-2025 school year as in the previous two school years with a Tennessee Department of Education award of \$3.7M from remaining ESSER dollars.
- Project On-Track is serving 3,668 students in grades 1-8 in literacy or mathematics during this fall semester. Seventeen school districts and four agencies are Project On-Track partners.

<b>District Served</b>	<b>Sites</b>	<b>Number Served</b>
Cannon County	3	211
Carter County	8	488
Cocke County	4	177
Elizabethton City	4	200
Greene County	3	211
Hamblen County	9	156
Hancock County	1	105
Hawkins County	12	514
Johnson City	9	264
Johnson County (Begin in Jan. 2025)	4	TBD
Kingsport City	5	215
Newport City	1	66
Oneida Special School District	1	53
Rogersville City	1	82
Sullivan County	9	338
Unicoi County	5	226
Washington County	9	246

#### **After School Agencies Served**

Coalition For Kids, Johnson City Boys and Girls Club, Rise Up, and Memorial Park  
Sites – 9 and Number of children served – 116.

<b>Totals Sites</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>3,668</b>
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- Project Director, Dr. Debra Bentley met with all districts and agencies to review their needs assessment plans and to, collaboratively, develop the Memorandum of Understanding regarding program implementation.
- The project currently has 261 tutors serving students. There are 93 sites providing literacy tutoring support and 18 sites providing math tutoring support.
- The project anticipates adding another 200 students and eight tutors before the end of the semester.

### **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)**

- Grant consultants, TNTP, held OpenSciEd training for first- and second-year participants on September 17th and 18th at Walters State Community College in Morristown. Approximately 20 educators attended and received a science kit tailored to their grade level. Survey feedback indicated strong satisfaction with the curriculum, and educators expressed enthusiasm about teaching the units this fall.
- In-person classroom observations were conducted Tuesday, October 29 and Wednesday October 30 with the following schools: Hancock Middle School, Rutledge Middle School and Maynard Middle School.
- Tennessee Science Teachers' Association (TSTA) - 2024 conference presentations:
  - Presenters: Dr. Vicki Kirk, Matt Krehbiel, and Jerry Graham - Session Title: Improving Middle School Science Achievement through Curriculum based Training and Support
  - Presenters: Amber Comer-Jenson, Dr. Danielle Shackelford - Session Title: Biotech Breakthrough: Launching a High School Program and Engaging students in STEM Careers.
- Teachers at Greeneville High School gathered to discuss the implementation of BioSTEM 1 at their school, sharing their strategies for introducing the course and demonstrating various ways attendees could implement it at their own schools.
- Updates on BioSTEM Pathway Efforts
  - Initial reactions from teaching BioSTEM 1 are positive. Teachers report they are interested in teaching the course and students are actively engaged in the course material.
  - The curriculum writing team is in the process of writing Biology/BioSTEM 2. Elizabeth Naegele from TNTP will begin investigating models for BioSTEM 4.
  - School visits to observe BioSTEM schools were completed on November 12 and 13.
  - We have reserved funds in the supplies category for each school to receive BioSTEM materials. These funds will carry over into Year 5.
- STEM FLEX Platform (online student and teacher platform for STEM programs and activities)
  - Partners are expected to upload their events to the platform by November 11.
  - Soft launch will begin December 12, with 5 schools. The full launch date is scheduled for January 13.
  - We are in the process of finalizing terms and conditions and have been meeting with FableVision each week to implement final touches to the website.
  - Creative Energy Group will be printing marketing materials soon. A social media calendar has been created and will be approved each week before posting.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for Algebra 1 instruction were convened the week of October 21. This included teachers from Jefferson, Cocke, and Hancock County Schools. School visits in these three districts will be conducted in January.
- Three new *Hammer Houses*, used for practical mathematics instruction, were placed at Walters State Community College - Morristown, RCAM, Kingsport, and Northeast State Community College. All Hammer houses include 5-year licenses.

## **Work Ethic Distinction (WED) - WE Track (Funded by Governor's Direct Appropriations Grant)**

- We will be adding a micro credential for WED to the Credly platform, which will provide all earners a free way to store and display their WED electronically.

## **Grant and Partnership Update**

- Partnership with Jim Marggraff and Kibeam continues. This fall more than 500 students are being served in Hamblen and Hawkins Counties. This phase of the pilot is focusing on English Language Learning and Special Education students. Unicoi County and Johnson County will be joining the program Spring Term. The estimated financial impact of this program is approximately \$100.00 per student served. Currently, we have served more than 1000 students, bringing support for the work of the Niswonger Foundation to approximately \$100,000, to date.

- The Niswonger Foundation submitted an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant entitled “*SMARTS: Strengthening Math Alignment, Results, Teachers, and Students*” to the U.S. Department of Education. This is a \$6 million grant proposal.
- The Niswonger Foundation submitted a second Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant entitled “*RETAIN: Retaining Excellent Teachers & Administrators Innovation Network*” to the U.S. Department of Education. This is a \$6 million grant proposal.
  - News on the receipt of these two EIR grants will be received in December.
- “*Expanding BioSTEM Opportunities in Rural East Tennessee*” - potential 4-year grant; ~\$3 million total budget; will enhance existing BioSTEM efforts with new experiences at BioBuilder Lab at Valleybrook while providing a chance to rigorously study the impacts on science scores and student STEM identity; Submission deadline Nov. 13, 2024.
- The Niswonger Foundation received word of a \$16,000 contribution from “donor advise funds” at the East Tennessee Foundation. Nancy sought this funding to meet a dollar-for-dollar match from the Ballard Health Foundation. This brings the total grant to \$32,000 in support of the Foundation’s Kindergarten Readiness effort.

#### **Contributions (July -October 2024)**

Chris Marsh	\$ 80,000.00
Harold and Nancy Dishner	\$ 10,000.00
Daniel Johnson	\$ 10,000.00
Melinda Stewart	\$ 8,000.00
Allison Seeley	\$ 500.00
Chase Aviation	\$ 100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 108,600.00</b>

#### **President and CEO’s Current Regional and State Board/Committee Representation**

- Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities
- Tennesseans for Quality Early Education – Chair Elect, 2025
- Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation – Board Chair
- State Collaborative on Reforming Education – Advisory Council
- Tennessee Arts Commission - Allocations Committee Chair, Audit Committee Chair
- Tennessee Department of Education
  - Philanthropy Engagement Council
  - LAUNCH – National Pathways Academy
- STRONG ACC and Ballard Health
  - Leadership Council
  - Pathways to Success Steering Committee – Chair
  - Families First Advisory Committee – Chair
  - Ballard Academy – Steering Committee and Working Group
  - Bright Start Steering Committee
- Jackson Theater Board Member
- Niswonger Children’s Hospital Advisory Council