

**Programs and Partnerships
Niswonger Foundation Board Update
Thursday, February 6, 2025**

News Highlights

- Dr. Steve Barnett joined the Niswonger Foundation team as Chief Operating Officer on February 1.
- Niswonger Foundation hosted the 2025 Legislative Education Convening on Friday, November 22, at Northeast State Community College. The event was well attended by legislators from across the state, state officials, and the superintendents/directors from 17 school districts.
- Niswonger Foundation hosted a School Visit Day for legislators on Thursday, November 21.
- Niswonger Foundation hosted a meeting of the Northeast Tennessee higher education institution Presidents on Wednesday, January 8.
- Scott and Nancy hosted the President's of King, Milligan and Tusculum Universities for lunch on January 13.
- Nancy met with Governor Lee, on January 17 for a General Assembly education policy briefing.
- Nancy will be a presenter at the SCORE Future Forward Summit on February 13.
- Niswonger Foundation will host the Annual Superintendents'/Directors' Retreat on February 23-24 in Asheville, NC.
- Planning is underway for the 2025 Niswonger School Success Symposium to be held on Friday, June 13.

Program Updates

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

- APAA currently has 2314 enrollments for the 2024-25 school year which includes 572 new enrollments for the spring semester. 129 students remained on the waitlist. This is a Student-Teacher Ratio of 17.1.
- We are always actively recruiting more teachers. We have discussed with TDOE representatives the possibility of hiring AP teachers in neighboring states. Over the last few years there have been over 500 students we could not serve due to lack of teachers. Our website is where teachers can find an interest form- <https://tnapaccessforall.org/teachers/#Teaching>.
- The APAA team will begin work on the Spring one-page Impact Report next week. It should be ready to share by mid-February.
- 70% of APAA Mini Grant funds have been awarded. The application is still open for a \$500 classroom grant - <https://tnapaccessforall.org/teachers/#mini-grant-sec>
- Half of the spots for AP Summer Institutes are already filled. Interested teachers should apply as soon as possible - <https://tnapaccessforall.org/teachers/#aps-schola-sec>
- We remain partnered with 99% of all school systems.
- The following are the school systems that are not on board:
 - Hardin Co
 - Scott Co
 - McNairy Co
 - Robertson Co
 - Bartlett Municipal
- AP Computer Science A is in redevelopment and was not offered this school year. Redevelopment is going slowly, but plans remain to be implemented in Fall 2025.
- The APAA Team attended the Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) in Orlando FL. We presented at a Leadership Roundtable on the last day of the conference (Leadership Roundtable- Creating Teacher Leaders in the Online Environment)
- Feb 24-25 Gina will be traveling to Atlanta for a Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance board meeting.

- Last week, the APAA program was awarded an additional \$800,000 in ESSR funding to spend by September 30, 2025. We are awaiting the final documentation that the funds are budgeted.
- In anticipation of final approval, we are putting plans in place for the relatively quick expenditure of these funds.

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

- There are currently 30 districts and approximately 156,000 students in CER.
- Benchmark Assessment/Data windows have been selected for the 2024-25 school year.
- Subject Planning Teams for this academic year include:
 - Continue K Social Studies 1-2 Science, K-5 ELA, K-8 Computer Science, AP Human Geo, English 1-4 team to align content
 - Add: 6-8 math, Alg 1, Alg 2, and Geometry to fill gaps with new standards
 - Add ACT Prep Course
 - We are in the process of planning teams/content for next school year. The focus will be on revising science materials.
- New materials will be added to the website in late February
- Math Textbook Collaboratives meets monthly.
- We are in the process of revising the pacing guides for 2025-26. We will revise science pacing guides.
- Monthly meetings with Directors and Steering Committee continues. Additional email updates are sent as needed. Directors receive a progress report monthly.
- Niswonger School Success Symposium (Regional PD Day)
 - It will take place on Friday, June 13 at Ross Robinson Middle School in Kingsport. It will be open to all districts. Theme/Focus: AI and STEM
- Leadership Academy
 - Cohort launched in August.
 - 6 districts participating and 24 members
- Principal Study Council
 - 3 virtual meetings in the spring semester.
 - Hosted a new principal study council led by Cody Sauceman from Hawkins County. We will host an in-person event in West TN on June 5, 2025.
- Instructional Coach Collaborative
 - We will offer 4 virtual meetings this year with district presentations and coaching strategy support.
 - We will offer writing training from Cathy Presnell.
 - We will offer the Math IFD training again as well.
 - We will offer the Summer Summit again in June 2025.
- We are offering a course for job embedded teachers for the 24-25 School Year
 - 5 districts and 18 participants.
- We have negotiated Consortium Pricing for:
 - Mastery View Predictive Assessments (Instructure/Benchmark)
 - Boardworks (now part of Renaissance/Nearpod)
 - Discovery Education
 - School Status
 - Renaissance (Educlimber, MyOn, Nearpod, and Flowcabulary)
 - First Educational Resources
 - Kid's First (added in November 2024)

- At the request of the school districts Credit Exams have been established for the following courses: English, Anatomy and Physiology, Ecology, Economics, Personal Finance, World History and Geography and Spanish.

CareerConnect (Funded by Governor's Direct Appropriations Grant)

- All schools were able to complete fall meetings despite the Helene disruptions; snow has disrupted many meetings this semester, but schools are rescheduling them as quickly as possible.
- Each school was visited at least twice in the fall by Niswonger Foundation staff; we expect a similar cadence in the spring.
- Dates for summer "Combines" are set and agendas are falling into place. We will have 14 summer Combines across seven categories (advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction, IT, logistics, hospitality/entrepreneurship, and virtual entrepreneurship). We are particularly excited about our virtual entrepreneurship option as this is in response to student interest.
- The selection process for this year's 9th grade class of Explorers has been revised and is underway. Brittany Long and Kim Gass are leading recruitment sessions at each school. Selection and orientation will follow later in the spring, with April 21 set as our target for completing all orientations.
- We launched the "Future Ready Workforce App" competition with students at the end of January. This is a weekly app-based competition to learn and develop soft skills that we are piloting this semester.
- We are adding a 23rd Chapter at Tennessee High School in partnership with Bristol City Schools. The first cohort will be selected this spring to start in the summer.
- Teacher Externships are on pace for May. With TCAT-Morristown acquiring funding to support their program, our focus will be on the Tri-Cities and Anderson County hubs.
- **Work Ethic Distinction (WED)**
 - We have 1300 students pursuing the WED so far this year. This number should double as many schools focus their WED efforts in the late spring ahead of graduation.

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

- Baseline data from the 2024 kindergarten screening process are available and will be highlighted at the February Niswonger Foundation Board Meeting.
- Developing and implementing a communication plan is the current priority.
 - Presentation to regional superintendents
 - Working with Family Resource Center directors from all 17 school districts
 - Creating a social media campaign
 - Presentations to other interested groups
- Plans for the 2025, second year, summer screening process are in place.

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

- Advisors have served, year to date, a cumulative total of 1266 days in schools, held 2,626 individual student meetings, and 170 group meetings served 3,686 students.
- TN Promise applications submitted by the November 1, 2024 deadline totaled 4,630 which reflects 92% of all eligible seniors. Due to Hurricane Helene, a deadline extension was given for affected counties with final TN Promise applications still to be determined.

- Intensive training and support have been provided to Advisors on the new FAFSA application. The form was made available in mid-November. As of January 10, 2025, 1,307, or 28.4% of seniors served by NiswongerCARE completed a FAFSA compared to 23.5% statewide and 20.4% nationally.
- NiswongerCARE Leadership team completed mid-year written evaluations for each Advisor. Evaluations included cumulative data from their daily activity log, student feedback surveys, stakeholder feedback surveys, and direct supervisor observations.
- Advisors were rated by 97.4% of the 511 student respondents as being helpful or very helpful in assisting them in completing college going tasks. All stakeholders surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that Advisors effectively provide college and career services to students and families. One student commented, “My advisor made an effort to handle my anxieties and how nervous I was with my college applications. He did an amazing job helping me through it all and helped me put my thoughts together on my applications!”
- Dr. Ramona Williams continues to meet with school district officials to present data collected from the National Student Clearinghouse providing their college going rates.

NiswongerSTART Mentoring Program

- NiswongerSTART currently has a total of 151 community college students participating in the program. START mentors have held 1,293 in person and virtual meetings with students to support and assist them through the first semester of college enrollment. Student comments such as this are frequently heard, “You have no idea how much you've helped me. I'm just glad you keep answering my questions!”
- START Mentor Jasmine Martin and Advisor Lydia Howard were selected to attend the joint fly-in event this March with Washington University in St. Louis and Vanderbilt University. Not only will they learn about WashU and Vandy, they will attend workshops focused on assisting students to apply to selective universities and gain a greater knowledge of how to guide students through the highly selective admissions process.

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

- Current Enrollments: 753 (72% Consortium schools; 28% Affiliate schools)
 - 91 enrollments in Year Long 2024-25 classes
 - 662 enrollments in Spring 2025 Classes
 - 38 Adjunct Teachers (37 returning, 1 new)
 - 36 unique courses offered with 51 course sections
 - 30 schools served
- 91% success rate for the Fall 2024 term- 864 completed enrollments
- Goals for Spring 2025:
 - Advertise summer course options when counselors are building schedules for students in February and again when enrollment opens on April 7.
 - Create a flyer for Summer 2025 which can be shared with students and parents.
 - Summer enrollment has been ~200 for the last several years. We are planning for growth.
 - Connect with counselors at middle schools in the Consortium to share course options available to high achieving 8th grade students and invite them to participate in the 2025-26 school year. Successful partnership at North Greene Middle School over the past several years is an example of how well this can work.
 - Continue to refine processes and procedures to provide the best support for students, teachers, and school partners.
- New Partnership for Spring 2025: Robinson Middle School (Kingsport City Schools)

- Nine students are currently enrolled in Geometry to prepare for advanced math classes in high school. They will not take the EOC.
- Other courses under consideration for the 2025-26 school year are Personal Finance, Computer Science Foundations, Health Science Education, and Digital Photography.
- Cybersecurity II has been offered for the first time in Spring 2025. This course was developed in partnership with STEM.LD during Summer 2024.
- Please enjoy the [December 2024 Niswonger Online Newsletter](#)

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

- Project On-Track is maintaining the same level of tutoring for the 2024-2025 school year as in the previous two school years with a TN Dept. of Education award of \$3.7M from remaining ESSER dollars.
- The project concluded the first semester of the 2024-2025 school year **serving 3,777 students** in grades 1-8 in literacy and mathematics.
- Due to the impact of Hurricane Helene, over 6,000 books were delivered to all students in grades K-5 at elementary schools in both Johnson County and Unicoi County. Unicoi County schools served were Love Chapel Elementary, Rock Creek Elementary, Temple Hill Elementary, and Unicoi Elementary. Johnson County schools served were Laural Elementary, Mountain City Elementary, Doe Elementary, and Roan Creek Elementary.
- Due to the impact of Hurricane Helene, over 2,000 games were delivered to Unaka Elementary and Hampton Elementary (Carter County), Edgemont Elementary (Cocke County), and Lamar Elementary and South Central Elementary (Washington County).
- Project On-Track was one of the instructional programs featured at the Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (TQEE) conference on November 15 in Nashville. Over 200 educators and child advocates were in attendance.
- Plans are underway to provide a Trauma-Informed Care kit stocked with tools and therapeutic toys to each site by mid-March. The kits will provide tutors with books and toys for students to use during stressful situations.
- Plans are underway to distribute family books and math games to all tutored students in early April.
- As of today, only 50% of tutoring sites have been back in session this semester due to inclement weather. Communication has been disseminated to school districts and agencies that all tutoring sessions should be extended through mid-May to make up missed lessons due to school closings.

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)

- STEM FLEX will be an online portal for students, educators and families to use to identify regional STEM opportunities for students. A soft launch was conducted in December with three schools: Bulls Gap Elementary, Jefferson Middle School, and Sulphur Springs Elementary. The launch was a success and

provided valuable feedback to our website creators, allowing them to make necessary adjustments in preparation for the full launch on Tuesday, February 4.

- The STEM.LD team is focused on recruiting providers for the STEM FLEX portal by conducting in-person visits to organizations. These efforts will continue through the end of the grant period. Additionally, we will meet with school districts to share and promote this information.
- Our marketing efforts will also include direct emails, printed materials, social media campaigns, and press releases to local news stations. Dr. Vicki Kirk is scheduled to represent STEM FLEX on Daytime Tri-Cities on February 6th.
- OpenSciEd - Five districts visited Greeneville Middle School to observe an OpenSciEd unit being taught by Jerry Graham. The districts later convened at the Learning Center to debrief, discuss needed support, and textbook adoption. A new teacher training for OpenSciEd will be held this summer led by TNTP.
- BioSTEM - Schools are on track with their BioSTEM supplies. We have reserved extra funds for them to continue ordering supplies in Year 5.
- BioSTEM meeting is scheduled for February 20th at the Tusculum Meen Center and Greeneville High School.
- This year, the decision was made to combine the STEM.LD Summer Institute with the Niswonger School Success Symposium. We will be contributing funds to help pay the keynote speaker and will work collaboratively on an as-needed basis.
- Robot Drone League Championship was hosted at East Tennessee State University on January 25. Four STEM LD school teams participated: Volunteer High School, Chuckey-Doak High School, Sulphur Springs Elementary and Hancock County Middle/High School
- Upcoming National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) presentations:
 - Presenters: Elizabeth Naegele (TNTP), Dr. Vicki Kirk (Niswonger Foundation) - Session Title: Customizing Curriculum: Collaborating to Align OpenSciEd with State Standards
 - Presenters: Ben Gold (AnLar), Danielle Shackelford Rollins (Greeneville High School), and Amber Comer-Jenson (Greeneville High School) - Session Title: Biotech for All: Incorporating Project-Based Learning and Community Partners to Engage High School Students in STEM Learning and Career Readiness.
- The upcoming 2025 EIR Project Directors Meeting is scheduled for February 12-14 in Washington D.C. Dr. Vicki Kirk and two STEM.LD staff will be in attendance.

Grant and Partnership Update

- *“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. This grant was submitted to the National Science Foundation.

Contributions (November 2024 – January 2025)

Brotherton Foundation	25,000.00
Clarke Family Charities	25,000.00
Sherry Cockerham	500.00
Patrick Creutzinger	1,500.00
Dennis Depew	8000.00
Gary Nave	2000.00
Scott M. Niswonger	2,239,500.00
Ricky and Robin Shepherd	1,500.00

President and CEO's Current Regional and State Board/Committee Representation

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