

**Programs and Partnerships**  
**Niswonger Foundation Board Update**  
**Thursday, November 13, 2025**

**News and Highlights**

- Steve Barnett, Debra Bentley, and Sherry Cockerham visited **Carter County Schools** administration to help them review current practices and consider changes that could improve outcomes for students.
- Steve participated in the **SCORE Foundation** event “Connecting the Dots: The Environment’s Impact on Student Success.”
- Scott Niswonger, Dr. Vicki Kirk, and David Golden participated in a special convening of representatives from the **National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology (NSCEB)** at ETSU as panelists, Scott and Vicki, and moderator, David. Steve and Law Loving also participated in the event.
- Debra and Steve met with **Commissioner Reynolds** and Kristy Brown about options for acquiring funding for the Project On-Track Tutoring Program.
- Steve met with the **Virginia Region VII Superintendents Group** about changes that occurred in Tennessee over the last 15 years with curriculum and assessment.
- **Daytime TriCities** showcased Project On-Track, NiswongerCARE, and Career Pathways from the Foundation on September 25.
  - <https://www.wjhl.com/daytime-tri-cities/daytime-tricities-live-from-the-niswonger-foundation-in-greeneville/>
- Steve met with Paula Bulcoa from **Eastman Chemical Company** on September 26 to discuss options for a partnership with Eastman and Project On-Track Tutoring.
- The Niswonger Foundation was highlighted in the October 2025 **TSBA Journal**.
  - <https://digital.graphcompubs.com/publication/?i=853997&p=2&view=issueViewer>
- Steve participated in the **Niswonger Children’s Hospital Community Advisory Board Meeting** on October 23.
- Steve visited **Johnson County Schools** administration to begin the process of helping them review current practices and consider changes that could improve outcomes for students.
- The Niswonger Foundation hosted two **Knoxville Symphony Orchestra School Concerts** at NPAC on November 5.
- Niswonger Foundation/Northeast Tennessee Consortium of Schools **Legislative Convening** was held on November 7 at the General Morgan Inn.
- Scott and Foundation staff are scheduled to present to over 700 school board members and directors of schools from across the state during the **Tennessee School Board Association’s Leadership Conference** on November 14 and 15 in Nashville.

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**Program Updates**

**AP Access for All (2021, Funded by a TDOE Contract)**

**Quick Info/Stats on APAA**

- APAA currently has 2,197 enrollments for the 25-26 school year.
  - We have enrollments in all 22 subject areas,
  - over 111 different sections,
  - taught by 108 different teachers.
- Currently 87% of enrolled students are working and passing their online APAA course. Student of Concern reports were just emailed out to schools at the beginning of November for students who are not progressing.

**New Policy for Enrollment**

- Enrollment for APAA opens on Nov 17th, 8 am EST
  - This enrollment for the spring 2026 semester will be the first time we use a tiered enrollment group system.
    - Enrollment Group 1- Nov 17th- 8am EST- vast majority of schools
    - Enrollment Group 2- Nov 24th- 8am EST- 6 high schools
    - Enrollment Group 3- Dec 1st- 8am EST- 0 high schools
  - **Info sent to schools:** The enrollment group system was created to ensure that every Tennessee student who wants to take an AP course has a fair opportunity to do so. By opening enrollment in phases, we can better manage limited teacher capacity and prioritize access for students who are ready to fully engage and complete their courses.
  - **Why we had to create an enrollment group system:** The enrollment group system was put in place because several schools were enrolling high numbers of students who weren't engaging in the coursework. By opening enrollment in phases, we can make sure available seats go to the schools who are enrolling and supporting their students who are ready to learn and complete their classes. As you can see from above, this does not affect the enrollment for the vast majority of our high schools, only those with very high drop rates and failure rates.
  - These enrollment groups are ONLY for APAA schools. They do not pertain to Niswonger Online enrollment.

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- We will continue to monitor how this new enrollment process goes and make changes as needed. Schools that are in Group 2 have been told we will review student enrollment, course completion, etc. each semester and they can move to Group 1 for upcoming enrollment periods.

**Onboarded New School System**

- We are excited to recently partner with Robertson Co Schools. They have submitted the MOU and the team is working to get AP Liaisons at each of their 5 high schools so they can enroll as early as this spring if they need.
- The following systems are still **not** on-board. Our RRS continue to contact them and share info/flyers:
  - Scott Co
  - Hardin Co
  - Bartlett Municipal

**APAA Mini Grants**

- Mini Grant applications are open and over half of the funds have already been awarded. We expect applications to close early again this year as all funds will be awarded.
- We are excited to see that funds are going across the state:

	Awarded
Region 1	9
Region 2	10
Region 3	8
Region 4	6

**APSI Scholarships**

- APSI scholarship applications will open Nov 20th.
- We are excited to partner with the College Board to be able to offer scholarships for new courses such as AP Business and Personal Finance
- This year we will be able to award up to 45 scholarships.

**Course Development and Updates**

- Work has begun to start the development of AP World History and AP Business and Personal Finance

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- AP World could have its first offering in Fall of 2026
- AP Bus and Finance cannot be offered until Spring 2027 (at the earliest)
- We chose these two courses after receiving feedback from over 300 high schools that we serve. Both of these courses will be in high demand.

**Partnership/Outreach**

- Gina Pavlovich is excited to speak at the TSBA alongside Jillian Davis to discuss both Niswonger Foundation Supplemental Online programs. We will also have a table in the exhibit hall for directors and school board members to come speak to us.
- In September, a team attended the VLLA conference in Charlotte, NC. It was exceptional with a lot of learning and peer collaboration from people across the US.
- Members of the APAA team are planning to attend FETC in January. This conference focuses on technology in education and is always a great place for learning and growth.
- Plans have come into place for APAA Lead teachers to have a Lead Teacher meeting at the Niswonger Foundation June 22nd and 24th. They will all be attending the Niswonger Symposium on June 23rd.

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

- Sherry and Mia will be presenting at the **East TN Federal Programs Conference** in Gatlinburg in December.
- The **Algebra Readiness Working Group** is
  - conducting a root cause analysis on the decline in student proficiency and
  - collaborating on an assessment to help districts/teachers know how ready students are for algebra concepts.
- **Science textbook collaboratives** are going well and districts are making progress on implementation.
- Curriculum teams have been updating the science materials from the CER website and will work throughout the year to continue the work.
- The **Job Embedded Course** had an "Ask a Teacher" event that was well attended and provided needed support for job embedded teachers.
- The **East TN Principal Study Council Conference** was held on 11/7 in Kingsport and had almost 100 administrators for a day of learning. Melanie Miller from Toss and Jason Horne from Greeneville City Schools delivered the keynotes.

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- Several **professional learning events** for principals are taking place: Leading with Purpose in collaboration with Kid's First and Student Centered IEP Meetings with Partnered Solutions.

## **Career and Workforce Readiness**

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

- **School meetings** are well underway with about 3/4 of all meetings complete.
- The **new curriculum** rollout has been largely a success, with a few minor hurdles that are being worked through, primarily to do with accessing supplemental materials online. Coaches will be training on spring curriculum in January.
- We are moving **summer** away from the 2-day combine model and will have more info to share on that soon. Summer will continue to be focused on career opportunities, but we are still working on the right mix of length and connection to local opportunities

### **Educator Externships**

- In 2024, the STEM.LD Externship program shifted to another Niswonger Foundation program, CareerConnect, to allow it to expand and become more sustainable.
- The 2024 edition featured 69 educators participating across three regional hubs, with each hub focusing on specific industry areas of importance to that region. Two regions focused on local manufacturers while a third split the focus between manufacturing and healthcare. The program engaged 17 industry partners plus chambers of commerce, local government officials, and technical and community colleges. Each educator spent four days in the program, with two days being dedicated solely to immersion in industry settings. All educators also presented on their experiences, focusing on surprising aspects of industry and how the program will change their professional practice.

### **Work Ethic Distinction (WED)**

- We are in the process of adding **Tipton County Schools** to the WED fold. Otherwise there were no changes to current standards this year and the program is running as normal.

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**NF Career Pathways**

Niswonger Career Pathways (NF Career Pathways) - A continuation of work started during the **STEM.LD grant**, Niswonger Career Pathways develops innovative approaches to establishing career pathways in cutting edge fields. Currently the **two supported pathways** are:

- **BioSTEM:** A biotechnology pathway now in its third school year, BioSTEM is a four course pathway that prepares students to pursue higher education and careers in the biotechnology field. There are currently seven participating high schools and over 900 students taking coursework in this pathway. At five of the high schools, every student takes the first two levels of this pathway, meaning most students are gaining relevant career skills and knowledge about opportunities in the field. Niswonger is actively working with industry and higher ed partners to identify relevant opportunities for work-based learning and post-secondary education.
  
- **AI & Data Science:** Built on the lessons learned from the BioSTEM work, the AI & Data Science pilot launched this summer in partnership with high schools in Sullivan County and Kingsport City. This work is being done in partnership with TNTF, Ballad Health, and UTK's College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies (CECS), who are each bringing their unique expertise to the table. Initial training for teachers in these areas has begun and curriculum writing for the four course sequence will commence in the spring. The first students in this pathway will begin in Fall 2026. The program is targeting initial enrollment of 200-300 with rapid growth expected.

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

- All Kindergarten students were screened at the beginning of school.
- School readiness has **increased** from last year by 11%.
- The next meeting is in mid-November and will focus on regional partners who can support the school readiness work.

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

The NiswongerCARE team has had an exceptional start to the 2025–2026 school year, marked by strong engagement, measurable impact, and continued innovation in service delivery.

- **Service Delivery and Advisor Engagement:** Delivery of Service meetings were successfully completed in all 24 partner high schools, setting clear priorities and goals for Advisors for the year ahead. Advisors began reporting to their assigned schools in August and have demonstrated outstanding productivity—conducting 5,230 individual student meetings to date. In addition, Advisors facilitated 370 group sessions reaching 6,992 students and 1,092 parents, ensuring broad access to college and career advising support across the region.
  
- **TN Promise and FAFSA Progress:**
  - The TN Promise application opened on August 1, and by the November 3 deadline, 95.4% of the 5,171 eligible seniors had successfully submitted their applications—an impressive demonstration of Advisor coordination and student follow-through.
  - FAFSA completion efforts are now underway, with Advisors reporting that this year's redesigned form has resulted in a much smoother process for students and families.
  
- **Leadership and Support:**

Members of the leadership team conducted in-person school visits and monthly supervision meetings throughout August, September, and October, investing over 53 hours onsite with Advisors. Additionally, the team provided 803 instances of virtual support, ensuring Advisors received consistent, responsive guidance as they serve students.
  
- **Student Communication and Outreach:** The Modern Campus messaging platform continues to be a powerful communication tool, with 3,809 seniors currently subscribed and over 33,117 outgoing messages sent this fall.
  
- **Path to College Events:** In September, every high school hosted College Application and Appreciation Month activities, resulting in the submission of over 2,500 college applications during school-based events. Advisors also supported students in completing an additional 2,476 applications through individual and group advising sessions.

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- **Communications and Visibility:** We are pleased to announce that Cayla Simerly has been appointed as Social Media Coordinator. Under her leadership, Facebook and Instagram engagement has expanded significantly, with posts reaching more than 44,500 users in the past 90 days—enhancing visibility for both NiswongerCARE and our partner schools.
  
- **Data and Partnerships:**
  - Dr. Ramona Williams continues to collaborate with the National Student Clearinghouse to compile and verify college-going data, which will soon be shared with Directors and Principals to inform ongoing planning.
  - NiswongerCARE is honored to serve as the partnering institution with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) for the new Direct Admissions Pilot sponsored by Governor Bill Lee.
  - Caroline Baird with Ballard Academy provided specialized training to Advisors this fall, highlighting new opportunities for students by expanding awareness of healthcare career pathways and exploration resources. Advisors were also given access to the new Labor Market Analyzer tool developed specifically for exploring career options in our region.
  
- **Commitment to Future Impact:** As NiswongerCARE looks ahead to the remainder of the 2025–2026 school year, the team remains deeply committed to advancing college and career readiness for all students across our partner schools. We will continue to strengthen relationships with educators, families, and community partners, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality advising and postsecondary opportunities.

**Big\*Bright\*Future**

- **Enrollment:** Our final enrollment for the summer melt program was 1,347. These students received weekly texts from June 1 through September 15. Forty-eight percent of the students participating identified as first-generation students.
- **Student Survey:** Seventy students completed a satisfaction survey. Of those, 95.7% of survey participants found the texts they received over the summer to be helpful (25.7%) to very helpful (70%). When asked if the texts they received provided information that supported and encouraged their transition to college or TCAT, 84.2% responded “yes” or “very much so”. In addition, 94.3% of students said they would recommend the program to a friend. One student commented: “I had a great experience with the program. The team did an excellent job - they were always supportive, knowledgeable, and ready to help whenever I needed it.

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I really appreciated how approachable and responsive they were throughout. I would definitely recommend this program to other students!”

- **Anticipated Success:** Building on the 72% success rate from 2024, where participants successfully attended college classes in the fall, we anticipate another highly successful summer. We are awaiting enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse and TCAT.
- **Commitment:** This continued success highlights our commitment to helping students navigate the transition to higher education.

**NiswongerSTART Mentoring Program**

- **Pilot Details:** The NiswongerSTART Program began year two of supporting students at Northeast State and Walters State Community Colleges this fall with an enrollment push in August through the NiswongerCARE Summer Melt Program.
- **Enrollment:** A total of 209 students opted into Cohort 2 of NiswongerSTART, an increase from Cohort 1 enrollment. Enrollment data is as follows:
  - Cohort 1 (Fall 2024) Summary
    - Total Enrolled: 160 Students
      - 95 at NeSCC
      - 65 at WSCC
    - 62% First Generation
  - Cohort 2 (Fall 2025) Summary
    - Total Enrolled: 209 Students
      - 131 at NeSCC
      - 78 at WSCC
    - 49% First Generation
- **Persistence Data:** The program shows promising retention trends with **65.6%** of Cohort 1 students persisting from Fall 2024 to Fall 2025 (105 out of 160 students). This compares favorably to the **58%** partnering institution average for Fall 2023 to Fall 2024 retention.
- **Forward Commitment:** START program staff are committed to using data analysis to refine the START mentoring program's best practices and ensure ongoing effectiveness. Our strategic partnerships with NeSCC and WSCC will continue, focusing on mutual data and resource exchange to maximize benefit for all students.

**Niswonger School Success Symposium**

- Leadership met with the **Advisory Panel** on 11/5 and received positive feedback.
- The **keynote speaker** has been selected.

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- The next symposium will be held **June 23, 2026** at NPAC and Greeneville HS.
- We are hoping for 1,000 participants and 50-55 sessions.

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

### **Enrollment Updates**

- Current enrollments: ~700
- Enrollment for Spring 2026 opens Monday, November 17
  - Priority enrollment through Monday, December 8
    - We will encourage our partner schools to complete as many enrollments as possible before Winter Break. This helps us to be prepared for all class needs and to avoid delays in students starting due to possible snow days.
  - Spring Term Dates: Monday, January 12-Friday, May 1

### **Course Development & Other Updates**

- Lifetime Wellness updates are in progress to align with new standards effective Fall 2026.
- [Niswonger Online Newsletter Fall 2025](#)
  - Includes two student spotlights and a teacher spotlight
- Our team, and especially Gina, has been working to prepare to welcome students from the **Ballad Health Academy** to take Niswonger Online Personal Finance and Computer Science Foundations courses this spring.
- Jill has been working with Catherine Edwards to refine our process for **teacher evaluations**.
- Gina & Jill have been working with Bethany Fillers in her first semester as Special Populations & Analytics Specialist. One of her tasks is to perform monthly checks on students who receive accommodations as part of a 504 or IEP and follow up with teachers and school staff for any struggling students.

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

Project On-Track is a high-dosage/low-ratio tutoring program funded by the Niswonger Foundation and the Care Foundation of America. The tutoring program is in its fifth year and has served **over 27,000 students since 2021**. For this year, selected students in grades one through five are being served in literacy.

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**East Tennessee State University** is partnering with Project On-Track this school year. The university is providing tutors at no cost to serve in some elementary schools. The “America Reads” tutors are trained by the project’s literacy curriculum specialist and are provided the same instructional materials to use with students as the paid tutors.

Tutors will experience an observation by a Project On-Track staff member each semester. Observations are underway and 57% of the tutors have received feedback this semester. Any flags or concerns are immediately communicated to the site’s director with next steps determined by the project staff, site coordinator, and tutor.

Project On-Track will be one of the Niswonger Foundation’s programs featured at the Tennessee School Boards Association’s annual convening on November 14 -15 in Nashville.

**Service Region For Project On-Track – 2025-26 School Year (13 Districts and 41 School Sites)**

District/Sites	Number of Students	Number of Tutors
<b>“America Reads” – ETSU</b> Mountain View Elem. South Side Elem. Towne Acres Elem. Woodland Elem. Kennedy Elem.	52	5
<b>Carter County</b> Central Elem. Hampton Elem. Happy Valley Elem. Hunter Elem.	204	9
<b>Cocke County</b> Edgemont Elem. Northwest Elem. Parrottsville Elem.	72	3
<b>Greene County</b> Chuckey Elem. Doak Elem.	130	5
<b>Hamblen County</b> Manley Elem. Union Heights Elem. Whitesburg Elem.	59	3

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<b>Hawkins County</b> Bulls Gap School Church Hill Elem. Clinch School Hawkins Elem. Rogers Primary St. Clair Elem. Surgoinsville Elem.	143	11
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District/Sites	Number of Students	Number of Tutors
<b>Hancock County</b> Hancock Elem.	50	2
<b>Johnson City</b> Cherokee Elem. Mountain View Elem. North Side Elem.	88	6
<b>Kingsport City</b> Johnson Elem. Kennedy Elem. Roosevelt Elem.	148	20
<b>Newport City</b> Newport Grammar	54	2
<b>Rogersville City</b> Rogersville City School	46	4
<b>Sullivan County</b> Bluff City Elem. Emmett Elem. Ketron Elem.	182	12
<b>Unicoi County</b> Love Chapel Elem. Rock Creek Elem. Temple Hill Elem. Unicoi Elem.	131	6
<b>Washington County</b> Gray Elem. Jonesborough Elem. Ridgeview Elem.	62	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1421</b>	<b>95</b>

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## **STEM.LD**

The STEM.LD project, which has been funded by an EIR grant from the US Department of Education that will end in December 2025, is in the process of **transitioning its programming** to other Niswonger Foundation programs. Its BioSTEM and AI & Data Science initiatives will be sustained through the **Niswonger Career Pathways program** (see [NF Career Pathways](#)).

## **STEM FLEX**

The **mobile app** launched on September 29, 2025. The STEM FLEX app allows students, parents, and teachers to connect to local and online STEM activities—including camps, clubs, and competitions. The app allows students to pursue their interests and explore potential career paths while giving teachers easy access to high-quality professional development opportunities.

The app features:

- **Event Access:** Stay updated on upcoming STEM workshops, programs, and community events.
- **Push Notifications:** Receive timely reminders and announcements directly on your device.
- **Account Creation:** Create a profile, earn badges for participating in events, and receive a personalized feed of activities based on their interests.
- **Career Exploration:** The STEM FLEX app provides a hub for career exploration, allowing users to discover pathways that align with their interests and goals.

## **TNTP Science (OpenSciEd)**

- Since the beginning of the STEM.LD project, TNTP has partnered with **middle schools** across the region to deepen teachers' understanding of key practices of **strong instruction in science**, including three-dimensional teaching using phenomena-based instruction. Teachers have learned about this approach through the use of OpenSciEd, a freely-available high-quality curriculum. Over the course of two years, teachers are trained on the implementation of two units and receive the materials necessary to use it with their students. Teachers are invited to convene virtually each month in a professional learning community (PLC) to collaborate with other teachers across the region to discuss best practices and shared problems of practice. Walkthroughs are also conducted annually to provide feedback to teachers and leaders and inform future training and PLC design.

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**TNTP Math**

- Similar to Science, TNTP has partnered with **middle schools** to improve the use of **high-quality instructional materials** and research-based practices in math classrooms. Coupled with the release of new standards and the adoption of new materials during this same time period, the focus of this work has been on how to leverage curriculum to support students in engaging in productive struggle in math. As in science, each year teachers attend summer training, monthly virtual PLCs, and receive a classroom visit. In the final year of STEM.LD, TNTP math has extended beyond middle school to support HS Algebra I teachers. This work has been well-received by high school teachers and leaders and is a clear need for continuation in the future.

**Grant and Partnership Update**

- **EIR:** This competitive grant opportunity dropped suddenly in September and was submitted Oct. 14. The project was built around Project On-Track and would serve 44 schools with high-dosage tutoring. It features an RCT research study looking at dosage (4x/week for 45 mins vs 2x/wk for 45 mins) as the central research project. The total budget is \$11m and we will be notified in December if awarded.
- **OpenAI** (makers of ChatGPT): This funding opportunity launched a grant for foundations between \$500k and \$10m in size for people-first AI applications. We submitted a project on Oct. 8 that would support the NF Career Pathways work with a regional AI fellowship for educators. We pitched a \$900k grant as a 3 year project. We will be notified of award status in December.
- **ETF** (Embracing the Future - The Tennessee AI and Data Science Pathway): We continue to use this funding and associated resources to support the AI & Data Science work in our schools. We have had a kickoff at UTK and are working to train teachers for curriculum writing.
- We are considering working with **GrantFlow** and their Ulysses software to build out a more proactive and comprehensive funding strategy.

**Contributions (August 2025 to November 2025)**

Gary Nave	2,000.00
Scott M Niswonger	32,800.00
Richard Roberts	12,500.00
John Tweed	15,000.00

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Total	62,300.00

**COO Current Regional and State Board/Committee Representation**

- State Collaborative for Reforming Education
- STRONG ACC and Ballard Health
  - Leadership Council
  - Pathways to Success Steering Committee
- Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation
- Niswonger Children’s Hospital Community Advisory Board
- Washington County Economic Development Council
- East Tennessee State University Foundation

**President and CEO Emeritas Regional and State Board/Committee Representation**

- Tennesseans for Quality Early Education- Chair 2025
- Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation- Immediate Past Board Chair
- Tennessee Arts Commission- Allocations Committee, Audit Committee- Chair, Nominating Committee- Chair
- STRONG ACC Ballard Health
  - Leadership Council
- Jackson Theater Board Member
- Tennessee Education Lottery Corporation Board