The 2023-2024 year has brought much growth to our organization, through both the expansion of our own program offerings as well as staff. We are excited for the opportunity to increase our ability to remove barriers to higher education for all Tennessee students.

NEW PROGRAMS
Though much of our focus as an organization is supporting our partners, this year we expanded our own programming with the inception of MIRA, the Minority, Immigrant, Refugee and new American College Access and Success Program. This pilot program is happening through a partnership with Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Nashville (TCAT).

EXPANDED STAFF
Andrew Hunt, Strategic Initiatives Manager, joined the team. Andrew brings extensive experience in higher education, previously holding positions with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Complete Tennessee.

He holds a master’s degree in human rights from the University of Vienna. His graduate thesis examined Tennessee’s financial aid programs through the lens of international human rights law, with a focus on the human right to education. Andrew also holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in corporate management from Lipscomb University. Prior to joining TCASN, Andrew worked on the Adult Learner Initiatives team at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Additionally, GOAL Collective added Bonnie Matthews to the team as the new Senior Operations Manager. Most recently, Bonnie served as the Director of Programs and Community Engagement at Tennessee Craft.

MISSION: As an independent organization, we advance efforts to improve college success for Tennessee students through research, facilitation, best practices and expertise.
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TAYO ATANDA

Tayo is a highly accomplished legal professional with a diverse background in corporate transactions, regulatory matters, and emerging technologies. Currently, he advises Amazon, Inc.’s finance teams on global business transactions, ensuring compliance with data privacy regulations and navigating cutting-edge areas like Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Property. Prior to Amazon, Tayo was a partner at Holland & Knight (f/k/a Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis) where he provided regulatory guidance and strategic solutions to clients in the hospitality industry and emerging markets.

Tayo is deeply committed to community engagement, with a particular focus on youth development and education equity. He currently serves on the Board of Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN, Past President), and previously served on the Board of the Oasis Center in Nashville, TN. Born and raised in Nigeria, he migrated to the United States as a teenager. He received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Tennessee in 2012, and earned his Bachelors of Arts in Political Science from Tennessee State University in 2008. He currently resides in Seattle, WA.

KATHLEEN BROCK

Kathleen Brock is the associate vice president of strategy advancement in the Office of Business Strategies at the University of Texas at Austin. Katie leads the coordination and advancement of multi-stakeholder, multi-functional university priorities such as life sciences innovation, housing affordability, neighborhood safety, and new campus planning and development opportunities. Katie also serves as the interim associate vice president for discovery to impact, a university-wide portfolio of UT Austin’s entrepreneurship, technology and research commercialization efforts. Previously at UT Austin, Katie led the coordination of cross-institutional partnerships and projects focused on improving postsecondary preparation, pathways, affordability, and productivity.

Katie also served on the leadership team of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission as the Associate Executive Director of the Office of P-16 Initiatives. In this role she designed and coordinated the state’s Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP), College Access Challenge, College Access and Success Network, and Lumina Foundation for Education’s Know How to Go and Latino Student Success grant programs. Katie holds a bachelor’s degree in international relations from Colgate University and a master’s degree in international education policy and management from Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College, and doctorate of education from the University of Tennessee.

SHEILA CALLOWAY

Sheila Calloway is an elected Davidson County Juvenile Court Judge, and was sworn into office for her eight-year term on August 28, 2014. She was re-elected for another eight-year term in August of 2022. Judge Calloway also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Vanderbilt University Law School where she teaches Trial Advocacy, and an Adjunct Professor Belmont College of Law where she teaches Juvenile Law. Judge Calloway uses her unique combination of humor, passion, and judicial wisdom to change the way we look at justice in the United States. A native of Louisville, KY, she came to Nashville, Tennessee in 1987 to attend Vanderbilt University Law School. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications in 1991 and her Doctor of Jurisprudence in 1994. After graduating from law school, she worked at the Metropolitan Defender’s Office in the adult system as well as the juvenile system. In January 2004, she was appointed by Judge Betty Adams Green to the position of Juvenile Court Magistrate and served in that position until November 2013, when she announced her intention to run for the position of Juvenile Court Judge.

ADAM GREEN

Adam Green serves as the chief of staff at East Tennessee State University, and is secretary of the Board of Trustees. He has 15 years of college access and success experience focused on increasing college attainment rates of low-income, underrepresented and first generation students. Prior to his role at ETSU, he spent 12 years working for the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. Green’s tenure with the commission included more than four years as vice chancellor for Student Affairs and an additional four years as senior director of the Division of Student Success and P-20 Initiatives. He earned both his bachelor’s degree in journalism and his master’s degree in educational leadership studies at West Virginia University. Green also holds a post-graduate certificate in education awarded by the Manchester (England) Metropolitan University. He completed his doctoral degree in educational leadership studies at West Virginia University.
JASON HAMILTON

Jason Hamilton currently serves as senior director, higher education engagement at Common App. His professional experience spans over 22 years in education, college admission, recruitment, marketing, non-profit work, and student access and success. During his career, he has worked at various higher education institutions including Sewanee: The University of the South, Oglethorpe University, Hollins University, and Lipscomb University in various director, assistant vice president, and vice president roles. He has also served as executive director with the Arkansas Commitment Program, an educational and leadership development non-profit that works with African American students. Hamilton has served on various regional and national boards and committees, and he has participated in numerous speaking engagements throughout his career.

ADRIAN DEXTER SAMUELS

Adrian Dexter Samuels, Ph.D., has served the Nashville community in many capacities throughout his career. He began his service as a program director for the Tennessee Department of Mental Health, Division of Mental Health Services; and later as the Director of the Title VI Office in the Division of Civil Rights for the Tennessee Department of Transportation. At Tennessee State University, Dr. Samuels served as an assistant professor in the Department of Health Administration and Health Sciences, assistant dean of the College of Public Service and Urban Affairs, and vice president for student affairs before taking his final position at the University as associate vice president for student life. In 2014, Dr. Samuels was recruited by Meharry Medical College to serve as the executive director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Center for Health Policy and Senior Vice President for Student Affairs. He successfully transitioned the RWJF Center for Health Policy into the Health Policy Center at Meharry, aligning Meharry and its students with prestigious academic institutions such as University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, Yale University and Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Samuels holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Michigan State University, and a Master of Science in Health Care Administration from Western Kentucky University. He earned his Ph.D. in public administration from Tennessee State University where he studied and published his dissertation, *The Effects of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on Tennessee Disadvantaged Business Enterprise*. He is a Nashville Health Care Council Fellows Program alumni; a graduate of Leadership Middle Tennessee, and the Tennessee Government Executive Institute. He is a recipient of the Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence Award for the division of student affairs at Meharry, and was named in 2018, 2019, and 2020 to *Nashville Medical News* “InCharge” as one of Nashville’s leading healthcare executives.

KENYATTA LOVETT

Kenyatta Lovett currently serves as a Principal at the Education Strategy Group, where he advances ESG’s vision and work focused on ensuring that higher education serves as an engine of economic opportunity and mobility, equipping more students with high-value degrees and credentials that lead to well-paying, in-demand careers. Prior to this role he served as managing director for Higher Education and Workforce at Educate Texas, leading statewide initiatives focused on improving outcomes in college access, work-based learning, and transfer and credit mobility. He has also served in key roles at Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development, advocacy group Complete Tennessee, Tennessee Board of Regents, and Volunteer State Community College. He was recognized by *The Tennessean* as one of five key people responsible for the successful launch of Tennessee Promise, the state’s initiative to cover tuition for high school graduates attending a community college. Today, he serves on national advisory boards to advance the growth of credential-to-career strategies and regional collaboration to improve economic mobility, and is an adjunct professor at Tennessee State University and Lipscomb University. Kenyatta holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Howard University, and both a Master of Business Administration and a Ph.D. in public administration from Tennessee State University.

VANESSA LAZÓN

Vanessa Lazón serves as the EL family & community specialist for the Office of English Learners (EL) at Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). In this role, she works directly with EL families and schools to solidify the pivotal partnership needed for students to be successful. Vanessa spent a big part of her first year with MNPS helping families overcome the challenges that come with virtual learning due to the pandemic, but has since been working to plan and implement initiatives and community partnerships to support EL students and their families. Originally from Lima, Perú, her immigration experience, along with her college and early professional years, inform her approach and passion to help immigrants and refugees get connected to the resources necessary for them to thrive in their new community. 

Vanessa is a graduate of Lipscomb University and a “MyCity Academy” program graduate. She is part of the inaugural cohort of the Mosaic Fellowship, served as co-chair for the Mayor’s New Americans Advisory Council, led the Mayor’s Office of New Americans for four years, and is a board member for The Nashville Food Project.
MARCY SINGER-GABELLA

Marcy Singer-Gabella is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Vanderbilt, and faculty director of the Nashville Partnership for Educational Equity Research (PEER), a research–practice partnership between Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and Vanderbilt University. Over the past 30 years, she has collaborated with school, district and university educators to address barriers to equitable educational opportunity and post-secondary success for students, and to build professional learning cultures for teachers. She has served on the provost’s staff to foster partnerships with K-12 and higher education institutions in Tennessee, and led degree programs in curriculum and teacher education. In 2018-19 she served as chief of staff of MNPS while on leave from the university. Her scholarship centers on designing inclusive contexts that bring together stakeholders — from families to non-profits to government agencies — to investigate and address pressing problems of inequity. Singer-Gabella teaches courses in the Learning, Diversity and Urban Studies program (M.Ed.), Learning, Teaching and Diversity program (Ph.D.), and undergraduate teacher education programs. She also directs “Tutor Nashville”, a partnership between Vanderbilt and MNPS’ Accelerating Scholars program.

MAGGIE SNYDER

Maggie Snyder is an education consultant working to improve economic mobility for underserved and underrepresented Americans. Formerly she was a program officer with ECMC Foundation, where she supported the career readiness portfolio. Maggie earned her master’s in public policy with a focus on K-16 education from Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College of Education and Human Development. While at Vanderbilt, Maggie assisted with the implementation of a longitudinal literacy research study sponsored by the National Center for Special Education Research. As a graduate assistant at the Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN), she produced original content and assessments for two online courses geared toward college access professionals and high school students. She also conducted research and analysis projects related to the development of a technological tool to decrease college-student undermatching. Previously, Maggie was an admissions counselor at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. She holds a bachelor of arts in sociology/anthropology from Denison University.

KYLE SOUTHERN

Dr. Kyle Southern serves as associate vice president for higher education quality at The Institute for College Access & Success. In that role, Kyle leads work on higher education accountability at TICAS, with the goal of strengthening protections for students against predatory practices and burdensome loan debt. He collaborates with other members of the TICAS team and with a broad set of organizational partners to advance this work. Prior to joining TICAS, Kyle served as policy and advocacy director for higher education and workforce at Young Invincibles, a national organization that works to build the economic security of young adults. He previously worked in several policy and research roles for both K-12 and postsecondary advocacy groups based in Nashville, Tennessee. Originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Kyle holds both a bachelor’s degree in American Studies and master’s degree in education policy from Vanderbilt University. He also completed the doctorate in higher education program at the University of Michigan. He lives in Washington, DC.

ERIC STOKES

Dr. Eric Stokes is the assistant vice provost for strategic enrollment services and director of undergraduate admissions and orientation at the University of Memphis. In this role since 2017, he currently leads a team of 40 people to recruit and enroll new students. He is an alumnus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (2002) and The University of Tennessee Knoxville (2004, 2017). Eric was a 2021-2022 Maxine Smith Fellow, a 2017-2019 board member of the Southern Association of College Admissions Counselors, as well as the 2015-2018 co-chair for the National Association of College Admissions Counselors African American Special Interest Group. Eric is most proud to be a Christian and a member of Rogers Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville, TN. He is a second-generation brother of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and is an enthusiastic educator with a passion to serve his community.

DON YU

Don Yu joined Scholarship America in July 2022 as chief strategy and product officer, where he is responsible for developing Scholarship America’s strategy, product roadmap, expanding current initiatives and leading the design and execution of new projects, all with the goal of increasing student success and reducing systemic disparities for underserved communities of students. Prior to joining Scholarship America, he served as the chief operating officer for former First Lady Michelle Obama’s Reach Higher initiative, and as the vice president for applied policy & advancement at Common App. He also served as an appointee to several positions in the Obama Administration, including chief transformation officer at the U.S. Department of Interior’s Bureau of Indian Education and special advisor to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.
A Look at TCASN Through the Years

**HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS**

**Nov 2010**
TCASN founded by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission through a Lumina Foundation Know How 2 GO grant

**Apr 2012**
TCASN established as a 501(c)(3)

**Jul 2011**
TCASN receives $3M in funding through Race to the Top

**2012 – 2014**
TCASN awards $1.6M of the Race to the Top funds to 51 grant projects that serve more than 60,500 students and families across Tennessee

**2014**
The White House College Opportunity Summit – TCASN is invited to President Obama’s summit for their work on designing The College Access Project (CAP) and training 200 college coaches.

**2015-2016**
The TalentEd Project - TCASN partners with UBS Americas and is awarded $2M to create The TalentEd Project, a free online platform to match low-income students with colleges. Discovery Education partners to design the tool.

**2018**
MNPS GEAR UP - TCASN writes the 7-year federal GEAR UP grant which brings $13.4M to provide college access services for over 3,000 MNPS students.

**2018**
Bridge to Completion Reports: TCASN begins a 5-year partnership with the Nashville Public Education Foundation to report on college-going and success for Nashville students. The Bridge to Completion reports informed the creation of Nashville GRAD, a program that provides holistic supports to MNPS graduates attending Nashville State Community College.

**2019**
Kresge Foundation Building Pathways Report: Off the success of the Bridge to Completion reports, the Kresge Foundation funds a similar report for Memphis, TN.
2020
TCASN celebrates 10 years working to remove barriers to higher education in Tennessee.

2020
New Skills Ready – TCASN begins a 5-year partnership with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce to support their work on the JP Morgan Chase funded News Skills Ready grant, serving select MNPS high schools to provide high-quality/high-wage career pathways.

2020-2021
COVID Response – College Access COVID calls. TCASN convenes college access and success programs across the state to discuss solutions to support students through the pandemic.

COVID Response – reacting immediately to student needs, TCASN partners with Nashville State Community College and begins purchasing computers and hotspot devices for low-income students to continue their work remotely. Within two weeks, every student at NSCC has the devices they need to continue their studies. TCASN would extend this free service to Jackson State Community College and Motlow State Community College.

COVID Response – Library parking lot Wi-Fi boosting devices. TCASN provides resources to the Nashville Public Library to purchase 10 Wi-Fi boosting devices for their branch libraries so that students and families can stay connected during the pandemic.

2021
TCASN received an advocacy grant from the National College Attainment Network

2022
TCASN provides 10 monthly college access and success professional development trainings for Ed Trust Tennessee’s Thrive Community of Practice.

APR 2022
TCASN becomes the backbone organization of GOAL Collective, a collective-impact collaboration of over 20 agencies working together to provide adult literacy and education programs.

2022
Nashville Flex – Through a Kresge CoPro2.0 grant, TCASN creates the first of its kind supplemental college promise program specifically designed for part-time college students at Nashville State Community College.
**STAFF**

Bob Obrohta  
Executive Director

Wendy Blackmore  
Director of Operations

Andrew Hunt  
Strategic Initiatives Manager

Ameshica Linsey  
Associate Executive Director, GOAL Collective

Bonnie Matthews  
Senior Operations Manager, GOAL Collective

**TCASN PROGRAM PARTNERS**

- Alignment Nashville
- Catholic Charities Diocese of Tennessee, C. E. McGruder Family Center
- Conexión Americas
- The Education Trust of Tennessee
- FUTURO
- Martha O’Bryan Center
- Meharry Medical College
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- MNPS GEAR UP
- Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
- Nashville State Community College
- Oasis Center
- Persist Nashville
- Southern Word
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Nashville (TCAT)
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
- United Way of Greater Nashville
- Vanderbilt University Peabody College
- YMCA Black and Latino Achievers

**ADVOCACY**

Our advocacy work is the core of what we do. Currently, our two major advocacy priorities are refining the TN Promise scholarship program to better serve low-income students and students of color and streamlining community college tuition fees by removing in-state and out-of-state costs differences. Both priority recommendations are designed to make postsecondary education more accessible and available for Tennesseans.

We also develop and publish an annual Policy Scan, where we review all higher education-related local, state, and federal policy to identify opportunities for improvement. Additionally, we support the work of several fellow organizations by serving in advisory roles through participation of boards and providing data resources to inform strategies.

In support of all our advocacy actions, we meet with legislators, author and share white papers, engage fellow advocacy organizations to ensure our efforts and language is aligned, and conduct pilot projects to test and reflect proof of concept around our recommendations. Learn more about our advocacy efforts at tncollegeaccess.org/advocacy.

**Advocacy Priorities**

**REFINE TN PROMISE**

Because TN Promise is a last-dollar scholarship with no need requirement, and covers only tuition and fees, low-income students receive few, if any, funds from this scholarship. Because Pell Grants help cover tuition and fees for students with lower adjusted gross incomes (equal to or below $40K), these students receive little to no Promise funding. Low-income students’ Pell grants, which could have been used to cover non-tuition costs like books, supplies and transportation, are now spent covering tuition and mandatory fees. Students with the greatest need receive the least amount of financial support from Promise; many receive none.

The Tennessee Comptroller’s Office of Research and Education Accountability found in its 2024 TN Promise Evaluation that 36 percent of Promise students have an adjusted gross income of over $80,000. Since the program’s inception, TN Promise cohorts have had higher adjusted gross income levels than non-Promise students.

Additionally, there are more requirements for TN Promise than for any other Tennessee public scholarship. These requirements discourage potential applicants who may have transportation challenges or need to be part-time students to accommodate work or family

**WHERE ARE TN PROMISE FUNDS GOING?**

TN Promise funds are not distributed equitably across racial groups. There are proportionally fewer minority Promise students (23.8%) than there are White Promise students (75.9%).

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Non-Promise AGI  
Promise AGI
responsibilities. TCASN is advocating for the refinement of TN Promise to move to a middle-dollar scholarship approach that limits the number of steps in the application process, awards scholarship dollars to cover costs outside of tuition and fees, and allows part-time students to apply, with the goal of increasing availability of funds to students with the greatest need.

One Tuition Rate

The differences in the cost of in-state versus out-of-state tuition can pose a huge financial barrier for many potential students who live in Tennessee but are not considered residents. In some cases, out-of-state tuition is more than double what in-state students pay.

TCASN advocates for TN community colleges to offer their programs to all students at one tuition rate, similar to TN Colleges of Applied Technology. By moving to one tuition rate, students who are not TN residents or are not U.S. citizens will be able to participate in higher education without having to pay out-of-state tuition.

2023 TCASN Policy Scan

Created with support from Nashville’s JP Morgan New Skills Ready Grant, our annual policy scan provides a comprehensive review of education-related local, state, and federal policies in an effort to identify aspects that create direct or indirect barriers to higher education success for students in the Metro Nashville area. We work collaboratively with our network of organizations and individuals to identify inequities, develop possible solutions, and provide qualitative data from stakeholders.

Advisory Support

Another aspect of our advocacy work is providing advisory support to a myriad of organizations. This includes being present in leadership roles, as well as providing key data and documentation to back critical advocacy work by other organizations. We also serve as a connection point to convene the right organizations together at the right time, to achieve their individual goals.

“TCASN is the heartbeat of Nashville’s College and Career Readiness Community. GEAR UP Nashville relies heavily on TCASN’s perspective, research and leadership, to better serve our first generation and low-income community. TCASN’s support is crucial in driving the work forward.”

—John Paul Gray, Project Director with GEAR UP Nashville
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

NASHVILLE COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS COLLABORATIVE

Starting in the Fall of 2022 the Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN) began exploring and initiated an ongoing college access and success network in Nashville. Working with Moore Strategic Consulting, TCASN convened local partners to plan a “common agenda” and how we might be organized to make progress on college access and success locally. This is truly a foundational component when building a CI group, as these models are built around five qualities, one of them being a common agenda.

In May of 2023, Collaborative organizations began working toward developing the common agenda and identified three priorities for the work moving forward.

1. Pilot a Common Application and Acceptance Day

Lack of access and guidance can become barriers for some students in their goals of attending college. To reduce these issues, the group is reviewing successful programs in other markets, including facilitated on-site application days. These on-site days support students applying for and being accepted to college in a one-stop session. The pilot is being designed to target one high school to test whether the logistical challenges navigating multiple higher education admissions offices can be resolved to allow for students to accelerate and complete hurdles all at once. Partners are working to develop this pilot for the Fall of 2024.

2. Identify the Impact of Community-Based Supports through Shared Information

Collectively the group shares a belief that the students applying for and attending college in Nashville are most likely being engaged by community partners. The group is scoping a research effort to input program participation information into a common data set – likely the GEAR UP data sets at MNPS – in order to analyze data to identify the impact of community partners. Initial conversations have begun on what this would take, including the staffing component necessary to facilitate data entry, coding, and serving as a liaison with a research partner.

3. Connect Disparate Collaborative College Access and Success Conversations

Continuing the effort to create an ongoing college access and success collaborative seems to necessitate figuring out the best coordination and connection with a number of other overlapping discussions. Several different Middle Tennessee collaborative efforts are asking similar questions. What is the needed ongoing fit for this unique group? How can we stay organized to be adding value to these discussions? Creating clarity around roles and goals as a collaborative is a critical first step.

In 2024 and beyond, TCASN will continue convening the Collaborative and harnessing the power of collective impact to remove barriers to higher education for middle Tennessee students.

GOAL COLLECTIVE

GOAL Collective is a collective impact group focused on growing opportunities for adult learners by driving innovation and connections throughout the learning systems in Davidson County. The group hit major milestones in 2022, with key accomplishments of establishing GOAL Hub, the portal to facilitate referrals and partner relationships, and finalizing the Common Intake Form for learner enrollment information.

The group also expanded engagement opportunities through new partnership and sponsorship levels, held an inaugural Community Engagement networking event for partners and funders, and facilitated data collection among all partners to gather learner engagement and collaboration strategies.

Learn more at goalcollective.org.

THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS:

Alignment Nashville, Conexión Americas, GEAR UP Nashville, Oasis College Connection, Martha O’Bryan Center, Nashville State Community College, Persist Nashville, Southern Word, and YMCA Black/Latino Achievers, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, and The United Way of Greater Nashville.
PROGRAMS

Our primary impact to the community is the support and insight we deliver to our partners, helping these organizations as they design equitable approaches to serving students. In addition to this work, we maintain two of our own programs, Nashville Flex and, most recently, MIRA: the Minority, Immigrant, Refugee and new American College Access and Success Program.

TCASN Programs

NASHVILLE FLEX

Part-time students make up over 50% of the student body at community colleges across the nation. Locally, they make up 56% of Nashville State Community College’s student body. However, many traditional programs and scholarships require students to be full time. Additionally, engaging part-time students is often a challenge for colleges. The Nashville Flex program provides eligible students with financial and academic support while pursuing a part-time education at Nashville State. By addressing the financial and social needs of part-time students, the Nashville Flex program improves persistence rates. In the Fall of 2023, TCASN provided 5 scholarships through New Skills Ready grant dollars. Students receiving the scholarships were part of the Flex program and attended New Skills Ready-affiliated schools.

Due to this program’s long-term proven success, in November of 2023 the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, through Mayor Freddie O’Connell, assumed the funding responsibilities for Davidson County students. This shift of program management will allow TCASN to expand the program into other counties, with a goal of offering the program statewide.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM ADVISORS KEEPS STUDENTS ENGAGED AND CONFIDENT.

Almost two-thirds of students felt that their advisor’s support went beyond navigating college, explaining that conversations with their advisors provided them with essential emotional support that kept them motivated and reduced their stress.

“I can work 8 hours less this week and still be able to get groceries. It really, really does give you this sense of comfort and this level of ‘things are going to be okay.’”

— Shane, Flex student
MIRA - MINORITY, IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE AND NEW AMERICAN COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS PROGRAM

TCASN partnered with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Nashville (TCAT) to begin a pilot project called MIRA. This program provides a no-cost certification program in general constructions to undocumented students. Because Tennessee does not have a tuition equity policy, these students are left with no way to access financial aid or qualify for in-state tuition. MIRA provides a path for education and opens opportunities for students to achieve financial stability.

The MIRA pilot is thoughtfully designed, with input from our Programmatic and Student Referral Partners, to remove barriers around trust, accessibility, transportation, language, and income.

First, we identified a location that was familiar and trustworthy to students, the C. E. McGruder Family Resource Center. Many of the students referred into the program had either been to this facility before or were aware of it. Second, we gave students $100 weekly stipends for food and transportation to remove those issues as barriers to participation. Third, we hired a bilingual instructor to remove language barriers and create a sense of belonging.

The first MIRA class started with nine students, who enrolled through our Student Referral Partners. Four successfully completed a building trades program and received their certifications, and all four were hired shortly after completing the program.

Looking forward, we will continue to build on the success of the program by replicating this model throughout other Nashville area neighborhoods, offering additional courses/certifications, and expanding our class sizes.

NEW SKILLS READY / MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

New Skills Ready and the Tennessee College Access and Success Network partnered with Meharry Medical College’s Bridge to Success program to deliver a Patient Services Representative certification program for both students and parents. Taught on Meharry’s campus and by Meharry staff, this “two generations, one future,” approach was offered on weekends from September through December of 2023. Sixteen students completed the coursework and a graduation ceremony was held Friday, December 1, 2023. As of January 2024, three of the sixteen graduates have already secured employment.

Funded by
New Skills Ready

Programmatic Partners
Meharry Medical College

Student Referral Partners
Oasis College Connection
FUTURO
Conexion Americas
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalitions
MNPS ELL Office

Funded by
Scarlett Family Foundation

Programmatic Partners
Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Nashville (TCAT)
Catholic Charities
Diocese of Tennessee, C. E. McGruder Family Center
Partner Programs

**NASHVILLE GRAD**

**Partners: Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County, Nashville State Community College**

The Nashville GRAD program provides financial assistance for full-time students pursuing higher education in Davidson County. Students also receive wraparound services including academic and career counseling. In addition, eligible students can receive financial assistance in purchasing textbooks, transportation, industry certification fees, and emergency needs.

Leveraging the existing outreach list and materials developed for the FLEX program, GRAD information was added to the messaging and design to create a combined marketing outreach about both programs.

**NEW SKILLS READY**

**Partner: Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce**

New Skills Ready is a five-year, $7 million-dollar grant from JP Morgan Chase focused on supporting the seamless transition of underrepresented students from high school into postsecondary programs, to earn a credential or degree and enter a high-wage, high-demand career. Granted in 2020, TCASN is part of the lead team in developing action plans and tracking progress.

**Transportation Report**

For postsecondary students, lack of transportation can become a barrier to their success. TCASN researched and published “Point of Departure: Navigating Nashville as a College Commuter”. This report explores public transit accessibility to Nashville’s colleges and universities by analyzing existing transit options and gaps, through a partnership with the Seldin-Haring Foundation’s Civic Mapping Initiative. It also showcased real-world student experiences, and provided clear recommendations for progress.

**THRIVE NETWORK**

**Partner: The Education Trust of Tennessee**

The Thrive Network is a program built to equip Black and Latino students, and community organizations serving these students, with tools and resources to identify and advance proven strategies to increase the number Black and Latino students progressing to postsecondary education.

The initiative includes the Thrive College Access Learning Series, a monthly professional development workshops; communities of practice; and a fellows program for students. TCASN partnered with Thrive to design the The Thrive College Access Learning Series, helping practitioners, counselors, teachers and advocates understand the current college access landscape in Tennessee and the barriers to college access. This included presenting three of the workshops:

- College Student Development Theory with Bob Obrohta
- Federal and State Policy with Wendy Blackmore
- The Real Cost of College with Bob Obrohta

TCASN also served as a consultant for The Education Trust’s Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), an approach to problem-solving that involves those who are experiencing the problem to participate in developing solutions. Learn more about YPAR.

**GEAR UP NASHVILLE**

**Partner: Metro Nashville Public Schools**

The TCASN team wrote the current GEAR UP grant proposal for Metro Nashville Public Schools, bringing $13M+ to the district to serve over 86,000 students. Today, TCASN hosts GEAR UP Nashville’s annual School Leaders Institute, a professional development opportunity for GEAR UP schools to study data and collaborate on their yearly work plans. The TCASN team is currently preparing for future GEAR UP opportunities.

Currently, GEAR UP Nashville proudly serves the following MNPS high schools: Antioch, Cane Ridge, Glencliff, John Overton, Maplewood, Pearl-Cohn, and Stratford.

Download the report at tncollegeaccess.org/point-of-departure.
LOOKING FORWARD: 2024 GOALS

As we look toward the future, we are excited to expand our work in developing innovative programs that break long-standing barriers faced by under-resourced populations. Through strong partnerships with community-based organizations and institutions, we are increasing the number of students who are able to access and succeed in achieving their higher education goals.

TCASN PROGRAM FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Expanding the Flex Program
With the long-term success of the program in Nashville, we will look to expand this program into other areas of Tennessee.

Grow the MIRA Program
With a successful pilot completed and key elements of success identified, we are working to secure long-term funding that would allow us to expand this program by replicating the model at other community-based facilities.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Securing GEAR UP Partnership and Other Federal Grants
TCASN aims to assist communities with securing funding to help underserved students access and succeed in higher education. Federal grant programs such as GEAR UP and TRIO programs provide financial resources to school districts and/or higher education institutions to best serve students. We look forward to partnering with communities and institutions to apply for these opportunities.

“While we have made significant progress, our work is far from finished. We will continue to advocate for policy changes and initiatives that remove barriers to higher education for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. Our efforts are fueled by a deep belief in the power of education and the belief that everyone deserves access to a quality education.

As we move forward, I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. Together, with our expanded board and staff, committed partners, and unwavering dedication, I am confident we will continue to make a lasting impact.”

— Bob Obrohta, TCASN Executive Director

THANK YOU PARTNERS

In our educational journey, each one of us has our own unique story influenced by our family and community, our personal goals, and the educators and resources present at each step. At TCASN, we know how critical educators and resources are in helping students navigate barriers to reaching their goals. Our mission is to advance efforts to improve college success for Tennessee students through research, facilitation, best practices, and expertise. Thank you to all our partners who have made this possible.

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