



**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR  
STATE OF TENNESSEE

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**HASLAM ANNOUNCES NEXT STEP IN DRIVE TO 55**

*Changing landscape in higher education prompts new discussion around alignment, focus*

NASHVILLE – Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam today announced the next step in the Drive to 55: ensuring that colleges and universities are organized, supported and empowered in efforts to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential to 55 percent by 2025.

To enhance student success across higher education the plan includes key strategies to provide more focused support for community and technical colleges, increase autonomy and local control for Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) universities and strengthen the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC).

“Since the launch of the Drive to 55 we have made tremendous progress, becoming No. 1 in the nation for federal student aid completion and increasing the size of our freshman class by 10 percent in one year,” Haslam said. “Tennessee is at the forefront of innovation in public higher education, and the conversation has brought us to this point – making sure Tennessee colleges and universities are organized, supported and empowered to meet the demands of Drive to 55.”

For the 2015-2016 school year – the first year of Tennessee Promise and Reconnect – there was a 24.7 percent increase in first-time freshmen enrollment at community colleges and a 20 percent increase in first-time freshmen at Tennessee colleges of applied technology (TCATs).

Joined by Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey, House Speaker Beth Harwell, Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris, House Majority Leader Gerald McCormick and higher education leaders, Haslam said the state is developing legislation to bring during the coming session called the “Focus On College and University Success (FOCUS) Act.”

Several features will include:

- A sharpened focus by TBR on the state’s 13 community and 27 technical colleges;
- Creation of local boards for Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University and the University of Memphis;
- Enhancing the role of THEC to provide greater coordination across the state, to include capital project management, institutional mission approval and higher education finance strategy;



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- And creation of a transition task force consisting of higher education, business, and community leaders from around the state that will serve as the administrative and advisory body throughout the transition.

Currently TBR oversees 46 colleges and universities ranging from technical colleges to medical and law schools. Under Haslam’s proposal, TBR would have a concentrated focus on the state’s 13 community colleges and 27 TCATs, as other elements of the plan free up TBR to give more attention to enrollment and student success challenges that have emerged while trying to increase the number of Tennesseans pursuing credentials in higher education.

The six state universities under TBR would have increased autonomy by transitioning from sole TBR oversight to a new model that would include a local governing board. These boards would appoint the campus president, manage the university budget and set tuition, and oversee other operational tasks. TBR would continue to provide key administrative support to the six state universities.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission would assume an enhanced coordinating role in higher education, ensuring progress on a cohesive, statewide master plan for higher education; maintaining academic program quality; formulate a strategic finance plan for state higher education that incorporates tuition, capital and funding formula components and setting binding tuition and capital recommendations.

“Tennessee’s future in economic development will depend on us having a workforce that is ready for high skill, high wage jobs, and as part of that effort we have to make sure our colleges and universities are strategically aligned in supporting student success,” Haslam said. “The FOCUS Act will put us on that path.”

By 2025, 55 percent of the jobs available in Tennessee will require a postsecondary credential, and currently only 33 percent of Tennesseans qualify. The governor launched his Drive to 55 two years ago to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or certificate.

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