Reconnect at Community Colleges

Over the past decade, Tennessee has invested in several policies that emphasize the importance of adult learners in meeting the state’s educational attainment goal. In 2015, the state’s Master Plan for Higher Education identified adults with some college but no degree as “the ‘sleeping giant’ that must be awakened in order for the Drive to 55 to be realized.” In 2018, the state launched Tennessee Reconnect, a last-dollar scholarship for adults that covers tuition and mandatory fees at the state’s 13 community colleges.

With the launch of Reconnect, Tennessee became the first state to offer tuition-free community college to both adults and recent high school graduates. Reconnect built upon Tennessee Promise, the state’s other last dollar scholarship program. When Governor Bill Haslam announced the Tennessee Reconnect Act in 2017, he emphasized the similarities of the two programs, saying “No caps. No first come, first served. Just as we did with Tennessee Promise we’re making a clear statement to families with Reconnect: Wherever you might fall on life’s path, education beyond high school is critical to the Tennessee we can be.”

Adult Students at Community Colleges

In fall 2018, one in four students at TBR community colleges was over age 25. Adult enrollment in fall 2018 increased 18% over the prior year (and full-time equivalent enrollment increased 21%), representing the first increase since 2010. At some colleges, the growth in adult enrollment was even more significant. For example, adult enrollment at Motlow increased 59% from 2017 to 2018. At Pellissippi, where Reconnect launched a year early, adult enrollment increased 35% from 2016 to 2017.

The number of new adult enrollees nearly doubled from fall 2017 to fall 2018. The number of reconnecting students (those returning to college after at least a semester away), rose 53%, representing an influx of nearly 3,000 students. The number of adult enrollees who were already enrolled in the previous spring or summer and who continued into the fall decreased slightly, but the decline was smaller than the decline in prior years.

Tennessee Reconnect Applicants

More than 34,000 people completed a Reconnect application in the program’s first year. Of these, 39% were entering college for the first time. Another 39% of applicants were students with prior enrollment who were returning to higher education after a semester or more away, and 22% were already enrolled in spring or summer 2018.

FAFSA Completion: The majority of Reconnect applicants (81%) also completed a FAFSA application by the end of 2018. However, more than 6,000 students (19% of applicants) completed a Reconnect application but did not complete a FAFSA by the deadline.

Enrollment: 45% of Reconnect applicants completed a FAFSA and enrolled at a community college in fall 2018. Of the students who completed a Reconnect and application and a FAFSA but did not enroll at community colleges in fall 2018, 6% were ineligible for Reconnect because they did not qualify as an independent student, and 6% were ineligible because of issues with a prior financial aid awards or student loans.

By College: Nearly half of Reconnect applicants who listed Dyersburg or Northeast as their anticipated institution completed the FAFSA and enrolled at a community college in fall 2018. However, this was true of only a third of students who listed Motlow or Southwest as their anticipated college.

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1 Because the TNR application is available on a rolling cycle, some applicants may have intended to enroll in the spring or summer 2019 terms.

2 1,777 people (5% of applicants) completed a TNR application, filed a FAFSA by the deadline, enrolled in fall 2018, but were not TNR students. Of these students, 44.5% did not qualify as an independent student on the FAFSA.
Tennessee Reconnect Students in Fall 2018

At community colleges in fall 2018, 13,848 Reconnect students were enrolled, representing 40% of applicants.3

Prior Enrollment: 41% of Reconnect students were already enrolled in spring or summer 2018 and continued in fall 2018. However, 44% of students had a history of postsecondary enrollment (at a Tennessee community college or another postsecondary institution) and were reconnecting with higher education in fall 2018 after at least a semester away. Additionally, 15% of Reconnect students were new to higher education, enrolling as first-time freshmen.

Financial Aid: In fall 2018, 63% of all Reconnect students received funding from Reconnect.4 Other sources of aid covered tuition and mandatory fees for the remaining 37% of students. Nearly half of all Reconnect students received a Pell grant in fall 2018, including 66% of new enrollees.

Non-Reconnect Adult Students

More than 6,700 students at community colleges in fall 2018 were likely eligible for Reconnect but did not apply.5 Two-thirds of non-applicants were already enrolled at a community college in spring or summer 2018.

Success for Tennessee Reconnect Students

Credit Hours: The number of adult students taking at least six credit hours rose from 78% in fall 2017 to 85% in fall 2018. On average, Reconnect students attempted 10 credit hours and earned 9 credit hours. By comparison, non-Reconnect adult students in fall 2018 attempted 9 credit hours and earned 8.

Reconnect students who were new to higher education attempted and earned more hours on average than other Reconnect students. More than half (52%) of new enrollees were enrolled full time, compared to only 36% of already enrolled students and 37% of reconnecting students.

Online Coursertaking: In fall 2018, 33% of courses taken by Reconnect students were online, while 57% were conventional courses, and 6% were hybrid courses that combined in-person and online instruction.6 However, coursertaking differed slightly based on students’ enrollment history. In fall 2018, 55% of “reconnecting” students took at least one online class, compared to 38% of new enrollees and 49% of already enrolled students. However, these patterns varied somewhat by college.

Reconnect students succeeded at lower rates in online courses than in conventional courses. In fall 2018, 79% of conventional courses taken by Reconnect students were passed with a grade of C or better, but the same was true for only 71% of online courses. “Reconnecting” students were more likely to take online courses than other TNR students, but pass rates in online courses were lowest among “reconnecting” students.

Overall, one in five Reconnect students (20%) in fall 2018 took all of their coursework online. Another 30% took at least one online course. Students who took all of their coursework online also attempted fewer credits, earned fewer credits, and had lower GPAs than other Reconnect students.

Non-TNR Adults

With No


Courses

With Some

Online Courses

With All

Online Courses

% of Students

100%

50%

30%

20%

Credits Attempted

9.8

9.7

10.7

8.6

Credits Earned

8.8

9.0

9.4

7.6

Average Term GPA

2.8

2.9

2.9

2.6

Retention and Graduation

More than three-quarters of Reconnect students from the fall 2018 cohort returned to TBR community colleges in spring 2019. Plus, over 1,600 Reconnect students (12% of the fall 2018 Reconnect cohort) graduated with an associate degree or technical certificate in the 2018-19 academic year.

According to preliminary data, 56% of Reconnect students from the fall 2018 cohort who had not yet graduated returned in fall 2019. The retention rate was even higher for students who received funding from Reconnect in fall 2018.

3 This includes students who applied for TNR, completed the FAFSA by December 31, 2018, were eligible for TNR, and enrolled at a community college in fall 2018, regardless of whether they received funding from TNR.
4 For the remaining 5,122 students, tuition and fees were covered by other sources of aid, so the TNR grant in fall 2018 was $0.
5 Adult students who were likely eligible for Reconnect include degree-seeking students who were Tennessee residents and over age 24 who were enrolled in fall 2018 and who had not previously earned an associate degree or higher, according to data from the National Student Clearinghouse. This excludes students who were not degree seeking in fall 2018, who were in technical certificate programs, or who were transient students enrolled simultaneously at another institution.
6 Another 4% of courses were delivered through other methods of instruction, which includes field courses, clinical training hours, and courses delivered through synchronous interactive media.
More than 2 million Tennesseans between ages 25 and 64 lack an associate degree or higher, and 746,000 have some college but no degree.

**Tennessee Reconnect** launched statewide in 2018 as the state’s last dollar scholar for adult students.

Eligible applicants are independent students according to the FAFSA and must not already have earned a degree. To maintain eligibility, students must enroll in 6 hours, must be continuously enrolled in each fall and spring, and must maintain a 2.0 GPA.
Note: Adult students are age 25+ at the time of enrollment, according to end-of-term enrollment data. Unemployment rates are based on the statewide unemployment rate in July of each year using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
In fall 2018, one in four TBR community college students was over age 25.

Adult enrollment at community colleges increased 18% from fall 2017 to 2018 (and FTE increased 21%).

At Pellissippi, where Reconnect launched a year early, adult enrollment increased 35% from 2016 to 2017.

Note: Adult enrollment is based on end-of-term data in the TBR Student Information System. Adult students are age 25 and over.

*At Pellissippi State Community College, Reconnect Now launched a year early in fall 2017.
How did adult enrollment change?

From fall 2017 to fall 2018, new adult enrollees at TBR community colleges nearly doubled (an increase of 96%).

- Enrollment of reconnecting adults rose 50%, an increase of nearly 3,000 students.
- The number of continuing adults who were already enrolled the prior semester decreased slightly (0.1%).

Note: Adult enrollment is based on end-of-term data in the TBR student information system. Adult students are age 25 and over. “New enrollees” are students enrolling for the first time in college. “Reconnecting” students are those who have enrolled at some point in the past and are returning to college. “Already Enrolled” students are those who were enrolled during the preceding semester (spring 2018 or summer 2018).

*These trends exclude Pellissippi State, where Reconnect Now launched in fall 2017.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied for TNR</td>
<td>34,353</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed FAFSA</td>
<td>27,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNR Student</td>
<td>13,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received TNR Funding</td>
<td>8,726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **40%** of applicants enrolled as TNR students in fall 2018.
- **63%** of TNR students who enrolled in fall 2018 received funding, with an average award of **$1,431**. For the remaining students, tuition and mandatory were covered by other sources of aid.

*Note: Because the TNR application is available on a rolling cycle, it may be the case that some later applicants intended to enroll in the spring and summer 2019 terms. The number of TNR applicants who filed the FAFSA excludes students who filed the FAFSA after December 31, 2018. TNR Students are those who were eligible for TNR funding and enrolled in fall 2018 at a community college, even if other sources of aid covered their tuition and fees. Data on TNR applications and payment certification is provided by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission/Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.*
Who applied?  
Who enrolled?

- Who applied for TNR but didn’t enroll?
  - 18,000+ applicants didn’t enroll at a community college in fall 2018.
  - Among applicants who didn’t enroll, more than half had no prior postsecondary enrollment.

- Who enrolled but didn’t apply for TNR?
  - 6,700+ adult students were enrolled at a community college in fall 2018 but didn’t apply for TNR.
  - Non-TNR adults were more likely to be Black, more likely to be Pell recipients, and less likely to be female than TNR students.

Note: Prior postsecondary experience is based on data from the National Student Clearinghouse and TBR’s student information system. Data on Reconnect eligibility and FAFSA completion is provided by THEC/TSAC.
More Courses: The number of adult students taking 6+ credit hours increased 18% from 2017 to 2018.

Increased Success: Reconnect students attempted and earned more hours, on average, than non-TNR adults and pre-TNR adults.

New Methods of Instruction: In fall 2018, 50% of Reconnect students took at some of their coursework online, and one in five Reconnect students took all coursework online. Pass rates in online courses were 9 points lower than in conventional courses.
Three Types of Reconnect Students

**Already Enrolled**
- 40% of Reconnect students in fall 2018 were already enrolled at a TBR community college in the spring or summer prior to Reconnect.

**Reconnecting**
- 44% of Reconnect students had some prior postsecondary experience and were “reconnecting” after at least a semester away.
- More than a third had been out of college for 6+ years.

**New Enrollees**
- 15% of Reconnect students were new to higher education and had no prior postsecondary experience.
Three Types of Reconnect Students

**Already Enrolled**
- 47% were Pell recipients.
- 49% took online courses.
- 22% of these students earned a degree or certificate in 2018-19.

**Reconnecting**
- 40% were Pell recipients.
- 55% took online courses.
- 47% changed their academic area of focus when they returned.

**New Enrollees**
- 66% were Pell recipients.
- 38% took online courses.
- 75% required learning support in math, reading, or writing.
## Reconnect Student Success in the 1st Year

### Fall 2018 Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All TNR Students</th>
<th>Already Enrolled</th>
<th>Reconnecting</th>
<th>New Enrollees</th>
<th>Non-TNR Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Hours Attempted</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Hours Earned</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Term GPA</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2018-19 Outcomes

| Graduated in 2018-19 | 12% | 22% | 6% * | 16% |

**Note:** Includes all TNR students who were enrolled in fall 2018. Credit hours include all credit hours attempted and earned during the fall term, including college-level hours and remedial hours. Excludes students where credit hour and GPA information are missing.
First-Year Success for TNR Students

The 2018 Reconnect Cohort

11.8% graduated in 2018-19.

49.4% returned in fall 2019 to a community college but have not yet graduated.

1,600+ TNR students earned a degree or certificate in 2018-19.

79% of TNR graduates earned an Associate degree.

78% of TNR graduates were already enrolled immediately prior to TNR.

Note: TNR Students are those who were eligible for TNR funding and enrolled in fall 2018 at a community college, even if other sources of aid covered their tuition and fees. Fall 2019 enrollment data is based on Census enrollment and is preliminary. Graduates are those who earned a degree or technical certificate from a TBR community college in fall 2018, spring 2019, or summer 2019.
Adult Enrollment in Fall 2019

Adult Students at Community Colleges
As of 14th Day Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Headcount</th>
<th>FTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>24,356</td>
<td>14,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>24,584</td>
<td>14,249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Fall 2019 enrollment is preliminary census data.
Connecting Data to Action

- Engaging with colleges and state partners to identify opportunities for support.

- **From Application to Enrollment**: How can we increase the share of Reconnect applicants who successfully enroll at a Tennessee community college? Did students encounter barriers that impeded them from enrolling?

- **Reapplication and Retention**: Students need to re-apply for Reconnect on an annual basis. How can we help students successfully complete the renewal requirement and return?

- **Non-Reconnect Adult Students**: Some likely-eligible students who did not apply may not have been aware of Reconnect or may not have believed they would be eligible. How can we promote greater awareness?