



Creating Opportunities. Powering Possibilities.

February 11, 2015

Dr. Candice McQueen
Tennessee Department of Education
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Commissioner McQueen:

As leaders of Tennessee's community colleges, we want to express our strong support for the continued implementation of Tennessee's higher academic standards in our K-12 schools. We applaud the commitment our classroom teachers and school administrators have made over the past few years to raise expectations so that all students can graduate high school prepared for college and careers. We believe you are on the right path, and we support all efforts to ensure that path leads to college and career readiness.

Each year, Tennessee's community colleges enroll thousands of high school graduates eager to continue their education. Our mission is to help them succeed. Sadly, almost 70 percent of high school graduates who enroll in our institutions have significant gaps in their preparation and require additional learning support to ready them for college study. Bringing them up to college-level performance requires additional funding and resources, and time spent in remedial learning support significantly decreases the likelihood that students will complete their degree.

We must work harder to close this preparation gap, and we believe continued implementation of higher academic standards are our best hope for accomplishing this. The standards currently in place were developed with college and career readiness as the end goal, and higher education faculty in Tennessee and many other states had a hand in their development. We support these standards.

We have excellent K-12 teachers and administrators in Tennessee. Recent national rankings prove students are reaching the prescribed standards. The problem is those benchmarks have historically not been aligned with what students need to be prepared for college-level work. We support Governor Haslam's commitment to review the standards, and we hope changes will only be made if they further enhance college and career readiness.

We urge you to press ahead with implementation of high standards and new assessments designed to measure student achievement and align with college and career preparation. At the same time, we are committed to improving our teacher education programs through our Ready2Teach initiative with more focus on subject matter content, problem-based learning and mentor-guided residency. Our institutions welcome clearer measures of students' readiness and continued partnerships with our K-12 colleagues to create a smoother transition for students from high school to college.

The timing of this work is critical. As we implement Governor Haslam's Tennessee Promise program, we expect more students to enter our community colleges right after high school than ever before. We support working together to ensure those students are ready for success. The promise of our future and theirs depends on it.

Sincerely,

Tennessee's Community Colleges Presidents