

PROGRAM



The Education Trust
IN TENNESSEE

#ThrivingTogetherTN

Report Release and Convening

📅 Tuesday, December 6

📍 Belmont University | Nashville, Tennessee

THRIVE

**THRIVING
TOGETHER
TENNESSEE**

Discovering Innovative Pathways for College Success in Tennessee

Welcome to the close and celebration of our Thrive Network!

The Education Trust in Tennessee launched the Thrive Network in January of 2022 with the goal of working in partnership with students and practitioners to learn about the root causes of the gaps in college enrollment and completion in Tennessee between Black and Latino students, and for those from low-income backgrounds. We believe that students, and the organizations working every day to support them, have experiences and perspectives that must be heard and understood if we are to solve the postsecondary challenges in Tennessee.

Our work was well underway when the Tennessee Higher Education Commission released their annual report on college-going rates for the Class of 2021. The report provided urgency and the backdrop to the work we were doing, and the data validated much of what our Thrive Network saw in the field.

Our Thrive Network initiative is a cond made of four strands: the Thrive Fellowship, the Thrive Community of Practice, the monthly Thrive College Access Series and our analysis and findings on ESSER spending in Tennessee. This work was done in partnership with Our Turn and the Tennessee College Access and Success Network, and we remain grateful for their collaboration.

In sum, we spent a year working with students, partners, and experts to better understand the college attainment challenge before us, and today are eager to examine postsecondary data with you, and share our findings and recommendations in hopes of changing the trajectory of college-going for our state.

Thank you to Belmont University for hosting us today, and to each of you for your commitment to students in Tennessee.

Sincerely,

Gini Pupo-Walker

State Director | The Education Trust in Tennessee

Agenda

8:30 am	Breakfast + Networking
9:00 am	Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none">• President Greg Jones, Belmont University• Gini Pupo-Walker, State Director, The Education Trust in Tennessee• Jamie Clinton, College Access Coordinator, The Education Trust in Tennessee• Vilmaris Gonzalez, Senior Manager of Engagement, The Education Trust in Tennessee
9:15 am	From Surviving to Thriving: Advancing Equity in Higher Ed <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., Vice President of Higher Education Policy and Practice, The Education Trust in Tennessee
9:35 am	Student Reflections <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thrive Fellows
9:45 am	Data Walk <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thrive Fellows
10:30 am	Break
10:45 am	A Critical Conversation on College Access <p>Featuring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CJ Powell, Chief of Staff, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education• Dr. Adrienne Battle, Director of Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools• Samantha Gutter, Chief Access and Outreach Officer, Tennessee Higher Education Commission• (Moderator) Brea Hinds, Thrive Fellow• (Moderator) Diana Medina, Thrive Fellow

11:25 am	<p>Thriving Together: Reflections from 2022 Thrive Fellows and Thrive Community of Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Fellows • Thrive Community of Practice Members
11:55 pm	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brea Hinds, Thrive Fellow • Jamie Clinton, College Access Coordinator, The Education Trust in Tennessee • Gini Pupo-Walker, State Director, The Education Trust in Tennessee

Guest Speakers



Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D.
The Education Trust

Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., serves as Ed Trust’s Vice President of Higher Education Policy and Practice. In this role, Wil spearheads Ed Trust’s mission to highlight inequities and outline solutions in order to improve access, success, affordability, and completion in higher education for low-income students and students of color. Prior to joining Ed Trust, Wil served in Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf’s administration as deputy secretary of postsecondary and higher education, where he developed and implemented the state’s strategic vision for higher education.



CJ Powell
Chief of Staff, Office of Postsecondary Education,
U.S. Department of Education

CJ Powell serves as the Chief of Staff in the Office of Postsecondary Education at the Department of U.S. Department of Education. CJ previously served as the higher education program analyst at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund. In this role, he staffed the higher education civil rights coalition, a table of more than 50 national civil rights and policy organizations. CJ began his career in education equity as a college adviser in the College Advising Corps, assisting students in rural North Carolina in planning their postsecondary lives.



Dr. Adrienne Battle
Director of Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Dr. Adrienne Battle serves as the Director of Metro Nashville Public Schools. Dr. Battle was named director of Metro Nashville Public Schools by a unanimous vote of the city’s Board of Education on March 13, 2020, after serving 11 months as interim director. She is a Nashville native and has spent almost her entire career with MNPS. She previously served as an MNPS teacher; an assistant principal, academic principal and executive principal; a turnaround coach for principals of the district’s priority schools; and as a community superintendent overseeing all schools in the southeast quadrant as well as high schools across the district.



Samantha Gutter
Chief Access and Outreach Officer, Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Samantha Gutter serves as the Chief Access and Outreach Officer at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and oversees the access and outreach bureau, including adult learner initiatives, college access and success programs, and statewide outreach services.

Sam formerly served as Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives and Postsecondary Impact at the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) where she provided leadership and direction for implementing SCORE’s postsecondary education policy advocacy strategy. She previously served as education policy advisor for Governor Bill Haslam. In 2017, she led the legislative effort to enact the Tennessee Reconnect Act, which allows nearly all Tennessee adults to attend a community or technical college tuition-free. Sam began her career as an elementary school teacher in Metro Nashville Public Schools as a Teach For America corps member before joining THEC/TSAC as a graduate assistant on the GEAR UP TN team and as a program analyst on the adult learner initiatives team.



Gini Pupo-Walker

State Director, The Education Trust in Tennessee

Gini Pupo-Walker serves as the State Director for Tennessee, where she works alongside advocacy organizations and stakeholders to increase educational opportunity and achievement among historically under-served students. Gini brings more than 20 years of work in education as a teacher, administrator, and nonprofit leader. Prior to this role, Gini worked at Conexión Américas, where she led education programs and advocacy efforts to improve outcomes for Latino students across Tennessee. Before that, Gini worked in education as a teacher at the high school and college level, and also served as the executive director of family and community partnerships in Metro Nashville Public Schools.

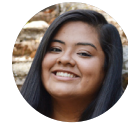


President Greg Jones

Belmont University

Dr. Greg Jones became president of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee in June 2021. Prior to his appointment at Belmont, he served as dean of Duke Divinity School for more than 13 years. During his time at Belmont, Greg has established a new vision for the institution “to be the leading Christ-centered university in the world, radically championing the pursuit of life abundant for all people.” Achievements during his first year include securing more than \$35 million in grants and gifts, launching the Belmont Data Collaborative, expanding the Bridges to Belmont program to support Metro Nashville Public School students and establishing a program that more deeply connects Belmont students, faculty and staff to the regional community to create programs that foster social good.

Meet the Thrive Fellows



Alejandra Osorio

Maryville College



Autumn Grimsley

Belmont University



Benjamin Lyman

University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Brea Hinds

University of Memphis



Diana Medina

Middle Tennessee State University



Elijah Watley

University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Miracle Awonuga

Belmont University



Soziema Dauda

Belmont University



Vianney Muniz

Belmont University

Meet the Thrive Community of Practice

The Thrive Community of Practice is an opportunity for organizations working directly with students on post-secondary access or success to receive funding to develop or expand a strategy that ensures more students of color are making it to and through college. The Education Trust in Tennessee has awarded funding to support five projects over the course of 2022. Grant recipients received targeted coaching and support as they implemented their projects, including workshops on project evaluation, advocacy, communications and policy analysis from experts in the field.



Communities in Schools of Tennessee

Thrive Project: CIS-TN used the Thrive grant to train 23 site coordinators working in high schools in the most economically distressed counties in Tennessee. Coordinators learned about best practices for postsecondary coaching and provided multi-tiered support to help low income, rural students understand the possibilities available to them and helped them navigate a path forward.



FUTURO

Thrive Project: This project recruited students across all active FUTURO Chapters to serve as mentors for high school students, providing them with direct access to Latino college students who provided information on college access and tips on how to succeed in college. By meeting near peers who are role models, this project provided a critical and culturally inclusive way to support high school students while building leadership skills among current FUTURO members.



Walter State Community College

Thrive Project: Walters State Community College's RHITA Program (Recruiting Hispanics to Achieve) partnered with HOLA Lakeway, Niswonger Foundation, Sevier County Schools, Hamblen County Schools, and Equal Chance for Education (ECE) to tackle post-secondary obstacles and created a welcoming environment for underserved students, with a focus on the region's growing Hispanic population. Additionally, they defrayed some college costs for potential ECE scholars, promoting this outstanding scholarship opportunity in their ten-county, East Tennessee service area.



Centro Hispano de East Tennessee

Thrive Project: Centro Hispano recruited and trained Latino college students to act as near-peer mentors who met weekly with Latino high school students from the spring of their junior year through fall of their senior year. Together they worked through a curriculum to explore their post-secondary options, completed applications and financial aid, and celebrated their identity and unique aspirations.



Frayser Community Schools

Thrive Project: This project sought to increase access to college by utilizing one on one consultancies with high school students beginning in 9th grade. They helped students develop goals, action plans, and provided supports to ensure students could overcome barriers to entering the world of higher education by planning from the first day of high school.

Special Thanks

Special thanks to the Thrive Community of Practice and Thrive Fellows who dedicated the past year to the Thrive Network. Additional thanks to the panelists from the Department of Education, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and Metro Nashville Public Schools who shared their expertise with us today. Finally, thank you to the following people for supporting this report by sharing their resources, findings, and perspectives, but more importantly for their dedication to accessible and equitable education.

- Sarah Mehrotra, Ed.M, The Education Trust
- Alexis Parker, Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education

College Access Learning Series

Hosted in partnership with



The Thrive College Access Learning Series is a monthly series designed to help practitioners, counselors, teachers and advocates understand the current college access landscape in Tennessee. Designed and offered in partnership with the Tennessee College Access and Success Network, the Learning Series equips attendees with knowledge, tools and skills to understand barriers to college access for students of color and students from low-income families. Attendees learn how to examine their current practices, understand current policies and systems that impact college-going for students, and deepen their advocacy skills on this critical issue. The series features national and local experts, and includes pre-reading materials to provide context and depth.

Seminar Series:

- A6 Framework
- The Real Cost of College

- Using Data to Inform College Access Decisions
- Federal and State Policy
- Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions
- College Student Development Theory
- Role of Higher Education Institutions in Student Success
- Higher Education Success- Focus on Strategies to increase persistence, retention and completion

View webinar recordings from the entire seminar series at: edtrust.org/tennessee/thrive/thrive-college-access-learning-series





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VISIT edtrust.org/tennessee/thrive