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Tennessee Higher Education Commission Outlines New Goals and Launches a Momentum-Building Year for College Enrollment

NASHVILLE – October 4, 2022 – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) today announced the launch of a momentum-building year to renew and articulate the value of education in Tennessee and to increase enrollment in education and training beyond high school.

In May, THEC released the inaugural state college-going status report, [College Going and the Class of 2021](#). The report showed that the college-going rate among Tennessee's high school graduates has been trending down over the past five years, from 63.8 percent for the Class of 2017 to 52.8 percent for the Class of 2021. As with overall declines in college enrollment, much of this decline can be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a nine-percentage point drop in the college-going rate between the Class of 2019 and the Class of 2021. Since the report release, the agency has been engaging with stakeholders to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing students.

Based on feedback from state and local leaders, and to increase coordination and collaboration among partners statewide, THEC is announcing three big goals for 2023 to serve as a momentum-building year:

1. Increase the college-going rate for the high school class of 2023 to at least 60 percent.
2. Increase adult enrollment in higher education through Tennessee Reconnect participation.
3. Improve coordination and alignment in education and workforce training to ensure students have portable and stackable options for greater economic mobility.

In the coming weeks, THEC will embark on a series of regional meetings across the state to share the state-level goals, to garner buy-in, and to discuss localized college-going rate data and strategies to support student success with local education agencies, higher education institutions, business and industry and workforce development leaders, and community-based organizations.

"The playbook for how we communicate to students about the long-term career success and economic mobility that higher education can support has changed significantly in recent years," said Dr. Emily House, THEC Executive Director, "Employers want and need a skilled and educated workforce, and all students can

benefit from education or training beyond high school. But there is no one way to get there. We want Tennessee's high school graduates to know all of their options and that all doors are open to them."

The statewide mission for 55 percent of Tennesseans to obtain a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2025 remains a critical goal for the future workforce, and the momentum year and college enrollment goals will support increasing opportunity and sharing the value of education with the next generation. Tennessee has had a strong foundation of higher education access and success over the last decade with groundbreaking investment and innovative programs like the Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE), Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect, and the Complete College Tennessee Act. Looking to the future, the college enrollment declines and disparities across race and geography should serve as a call to action for Tennessee and our nation. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is relentlessly focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential and that begins with ensuring all doors are opened for students.

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