Getting There by Degrees

Governor Haslam has challenged our state with a critical new mission: the Drive to 55. It’s not just a mission for higher education, but a mission for workforce and economic development, a drive to reduce unemployment and improve quality of life.

We lag behind the national averages in residents with higher education, ranking 42nd in working adults with certificates and degrees. Tennesseans with a college degree or technical certificate increase their earning potential with each credential they obtain beyond the high school level, with bachelor’s degree recipients ultimately earning up to 75 percent more than high school graduates.
Drive to 55 measures our workforce readiness. Research shows: To meet the workplace demands, 55 percent of jobs will require a credential or degree beyond the high school level.

Every percentage point below that means a full percentage of Tennesseans will be unemployed or underemployed.

Because of natural population growth, this number will increase gradually over time.

Our Challenge: 494,000 Additional Credentials

Where we will be without additional strategies.

Drive to 55 is a must for the future of Tennessee.
Drive to 55 Strategies

1. Get students ready. Reduce the need for remedial courses; boost participation in dual enrollment and dual credit.

2. Get students in. Improve mentoring & guidance. Reduce financial barriers, especially to community colleges & colleges of applied technology.

3. Get students out. Enhance programs to increase graduation rates. Once they get in, they must also get out, on time with as little debt as possible.

4. Finish. Create new programs for the 940,000+ adults with some college but no degree.

5. Create alignment and accountability. All departments, educational institutions and employers will work together to identify skills gaps of the future and proactively fill them. And we will keep score, measuring our investments to assure accountability and value.
Key Facts

67 percent of students need remedial math or English in college—significantly reducing their chances of graduating.

Just over 20,000 high school graduates don’t go to college. Even if they all graduated from college, we wouldn’t get to 55 percent by 2025. To succeed, we must also help working adults.

Statewide graduation rate after 6 years in our community colleges is 26.7 percent; in our universities, the rate is 54.4 percent.

Tennessee is 42nd in the U.S. in earning degrees and certifications.

For more information, please visit driveto55.org.
We Need Your Support.

“We have to make college education accessible, affordable and tailored to the needs of our students...to have the best trained workforce in America.”

—Governor Bill Haslam