TERA
TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE

Insights for Action Research Summary

Postsecondary Readiness

Celebrating 10 years of actionable insights from TERA

August 2026

Key Insights:

1 Schools that strengthen collaborative partnerships with postsecondary and community organizations increase student access to work-based learning opportunities that prepare students for college and careers.

Strategic partnerships among K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, businesses, and community organizations are essential in creating and expanding work-based learning or educational pathway programs. Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers recognize work-based learning and career pathways as transformative opportunities that equip students with critical skills and connections for postsecondary success. CTE programs are bridging the gap between classroom learning and future career opportunities, and about two-thirds of CTE teachers report industry partner involvement with their school. These collaborative networks create dynamic, responsive educational opportunities that reflect unique community needs and enhance student preparedness.

Links to learn more:

- Counselors' Insights on Early Postsecondary Opportunities: Trends from the 2025 Tennessee Educator Survey
- Teachers' Experiences with Career and Technical Education: Trends from the 2025 Tennessee Educator Survey
- 2025 Tennessee Educator Survey Snapshot: Career and Technical Education
- Career and Technical Education Teachers' Experiences: Trends from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey
- EPSOs In Action: Promoting Equitable Access and Success in Early Postsecondary Opportunities

2 Early Postsecondary Opportunity (EPSO) participation rates vary across student groups, and under-represented student groups could benefit from targeted recruitment strategies to increase their participation in EPSO offerings.

EPSO participation is associated with positive student outcomes such as achievement, graduation, and college-going rates. Tennessee has invested heavily in expanding access to EPSOs, while local school contexts influence EPSO offerings, implementation, and uptake. School counselors play a key role in recruiting students, relying on student data and planning conversations to identify eligible participants. To increase participation among underrepresented students, schools need tailored strategies that address school-level differences in recruitment, student interest, and program structure.

Links to learn more:

- Counselors' Insights on Early Postsecondary Opportunities: Trends from the 2025 Tennessee Educator Survey
- School-Level Support for Online Advanced Placement Students: An Implementation Study of Tennessee's AP Access for All Program
- Supporting Online AP Learners
- EPSOs In Action: Promoting Equitable Access and Success in Early Postsecondary Opportunities

3 Counselors who implement comprehensive support systems and resources for students participating in EPSOs increase student success outcomes.

Complex enrollment and verification processes limit participation in programs that support children's development. Streamlining eligibility and access at the state level can EPSO expand reach, particularly for students with the greatest needs, and strengthen the effectiveness of existing investments.

Links to learn more:

- 2025 Tennessee Educator Survey Snapshot: High School and Beyond Plans
- School-Level Support for Online Advanced Placement Students: An Implementation Study of Tennessee's AP Access for All Program
- EPSOs In Action: Promoting Equitable Access and Success in Early Postsecondary Opportunities

4 Investing in coaching supports as students transition into postsecondary is critical for community college student persistence and academic success.

The tnAchieves coaching program provides targeted support for community college students with high financial need. Achieves coaches engage students through targeted interactions across multiple communication channels. Students receiving targeted communication is associated with an increased likelihood of second-year college persistence. The growth in college persistence highlights the value of personalized interventions in helping students overcome barriers to successfully transition through postsecondary education.

Links to learn more:

- Implementation and Impact of TNAchieves Coaching in Tennessee Community Colleges

Additional publications are available on our website: https://tnedresearch.org/publications/.