

Student services are on-campus services in place to support students outside the classroom, including programs such as academic advising, on-campus childcare, orientation, housing, personal or career counseling, and transfer support. Services can be targeted towards specific student populations, such as veterans, adult learners, students with disabilities, or first-generation students. These services provide the information, support, and assistance necessary for students to successfully stay on track. Many students depend on these services for the support they need to earn a degree.

Student support services are particularly necessary at community colleges, with the diverse student bodies these institutions serve. Students of all ages, with varying degrees of academic preparedness attend community colleges. Some enter the institution with strong support networks in place, while others rely on on-campus supports as their main source of information. To serve such a diverse student population, community colleges need specific support services with trained personnel who understand the unique needs of the population. In order to be able to persist and complete a degree, students need to be able to easily identify and access the supports they need on campus.

Professional student support services can be targeted to help specific student populations succeed.

Why this Matters in Tennessee

Student support services are an important component in achieving the Drive to 55, and will support students from vulnerable populations in completing degree or certificate programs.

Some populations in Tennessee that can be aided by student support services:

Adult Learners: With Tennessee Reconnect going into effect in fall 2018, institutions can expect an influx in the number of students ages 25 and up. Many of these students have spent an extended time away from school, and require support with the transition back to formal education. These students are also more likely to have responsibilities outside of school, such as work and/or family duties, and may require support managing these responsibilities while in school.

Students with Children: According to a September 2016 briefing paper from the Institute of Women's Policy Research, in Tennessee, 70% of public four-year institutions offer campus childcare, while only 15% of Tennessee's public two-year institutions offer campus childcare.¹ This is important to consider, particularly with the number of parents who might want to access two-year institutions through Tennessee Reconnect.

First-Generation Students: In Tennessee, first-generation students graduate at lower rates than their peers.² Being the first in their family to go to college, these students may not have an already-established information network to help them navigate postsecondary education. Campus supports are essential to help these students adjust to college, persist, and stay on track to earn a degree.

Questions to Consider

- In what ways does this policy recognize the importance of professional student support services?
- How can student supports be structured to help bridge the gap between K-12 and postsecondary?
- How does state funding affect the ability of campuses to provide necessary student supports?
- What formal training or expertise should student support professionals be expected to have?

¹Child Care for Parents in College: A State-by State Assessment, Institute for Women's Policy Research, page 7 (2016)

²First-Generation College-Goers: Unprepared and Behind, The Atlantic (2014)