

## Report Spotlight

### Tennessee Promise

Lauren Spires, Tennessee

In 2014, the Tennessee General Assembly adopted legislation creating the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, giving recent high school graduates an opportunity to earn an associate degree or technical diploma free of tuition and mandatory fees. The main eligibility requirement is residency in Tennessee; this differs from other scholarships which may include financial need and academic merit criteria.

Community-based organizations provide a paid or volunteer mentor to assist each applicant with the college application and financial aid process. Promise students must begin an eligible degree program in the fall semester immediately after high school graduation. Students may receive the scholarship for up to five semesters or eight trimesters, or until they earn a diploma or associate degree, whichever occurs first.

Tennessee Promise is part of a larger statewide Drive to 55 initiative, which aims to equip 55 percent of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential by 2025 to meet anticipated workforce demand. Tennessee Promise supports two of the initiative's focus areas, college access and completion, for recent high school graduates.

State law requires the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) to review, study, and determine the effectiveness of the Tennessee Promise Scholarship on a recurring basis. OREA published its first evaluation in July 2020.

**Measuring program effectiveness: College access and completion.** The research process took place over two years and included more than 25 interviews with state and local stakeholders, surveys of college administrators, and analysis of data from multiple sources (such as Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, American Community Survey, and the Lumina Foundation).

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## Chair's Corner

Kristen Rottinghaus, Kansas

How quickly time flies. I can't believe it's already been six months since I started my term as chair. For any of you who know me, I'm basically always cold. So I'm especially excited to usher in the warm weather and sunny days of summer. For many of us, legislative session is over and summer marks the start of catching up on things on the backburner. It's also the season of office projects, professional development training, and family vacations.

Regardless of where you're at and what your to-do list looks like, I hope this letter finds you doing well and looking forward to an enjoyable summer. Thanks to the hard work and unwavering support of my friends on the Executive Committee, we've accomplished a lot and still have more exciting things in store.

- [Staff Hub ATL 2022](#), the fall professional development seminar, will be in Atlanta from October 10-12. NLPES is joining five other staff sections at the conference – leadership staff, research librarians, information and communications staff, fiscal staff, and research, editorial, and legal staff. Please stay tuned for additional information from Brenda Erickson about the agenda and registration very soon. The mix of legislative experiences will provide tremendous opportunities for networking and sharing ideas. On behalf of the entire Executive Committee, we hope to see you there! And another quick plug: The [NCSL Legislative Summit](#) is August 1-3 in Denver.
- We also have plenty of professional development opportunities in the works. We've made a concerted effort to provide more frequent virtual trainings this year, offering webinars or information sharing calls nearly every month. We hope you've all found value in the virtual programming so far and welcome your feedback. We've still got several more training opportunities planned for the remainder of this year so please check the [2022 training calendar](#) periodically for updates and registration information.
- The new and improved [Audit Report Database](#) is now live. After several years of work and piloting, the Executive Committee is excited to offer a more user-friendly version of the report database. We hope it quickly becomes a go-to resource for your offices to find the work of your colleagues on specific topics.
- Congratulations to the [2022 NLPES award winners](#) and to everyone who volunteered their time as a judge. It's exciting to see how much great work our legislative evaluation offices do and is personally humbling to be part of such a talented group of professionals.
- Congratulations also are in order for the four individuals who will be joining the 2022-2023 Executive Committee. We're happy to welcome Darren McDivitt (Texas), Marcus Morgan (Alabama), Micaela Fischer (New Mexico), and Ryan Langrill (Idaho), who will begin their terms this fall.

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## Research and Methodology Roundup

### NCSL Center for Results-Driven Governing Offers Valuable Resources

Brenda Erickson and Kristine Goodwin, NCSL

Evidence-based policymaking is the process of using high-quality information to improve decision-making about government policies. Momentum for “evidence-based policymaking” began in the 1970s and resurged in the 1990s.

Evidence-based policymaking requires evidence to be generated and available for policymakers to use. Unfortunately, one major challenge in using more evidence in policy deliberations historically has been the lack of relevant, timely information.

To help decision makers use data and evidence to make budget and policy choices, NCSL launched the [Center for Results-Driven Governing](#) in September 2020. The Center also offers a framework and a set of tools that can be used to allocate resources most effectively.

The generation of evidence to inform government decisions is a collaborative process that benefits from participation by officials from all branches of government as well as researchers, evaluators, statisticians, information technology officers, data scientists, and program managers.

With support from [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#) and an advisory group of state legislators, legislative staff, and executive branch officials, the Center released the

“[ABCs of Evidence-Informed Policymaking](#),” which outlines evidence-informed policymaking principles and strategies.



From defining key terms — so decisionmakers know what’s meant by evidence-based or promising programs — to embedding evidence into the way states budget and prioritize spending, the report highlights strategies states have used to get the best results and from taxpayer-funded programs.

The Center researches state actions, provides a forum for sharing best practices, and delivers training and technical assistance to states to build awareness and enhance capacity to assess the quality of programs.

In addition, the Center — together with the [Council of State Governments](#) and the [Policy Lab at Brown University](#) —

launched the Governing for Results Network in August 2021. The peer learning network engages state legislators, budget directors and legislative and agency staff from 11 states.

Members exchange insights, best practices and lessons learned with peers within and across network states, and they participate in and have access to:

- Virtual and in-person convenings and webinars.
- A resource library and online communication platform.
- Customized state supports and assistance.
- Publications and resources to amplify the network’s accomplishments.

Using evidence to inform policy decisions can help policymakers invest wisely and achieve meaningful results. NCSL’s Center for Results-Driven Governing is willing and able to assist with the process.

*Brenda Erickson is the NCSL liaison to NLPES, and Kristine Goodwin is the director of NCSL’s Center for Results-Driven Governing.*

## Chair’s Corner (cont.)



At the same time, we are sad to say goodbye to four members whose terms will be ending: Emily Johnson (Texas), Kiernan McGorty (North Carolina), Mary Jo Koschay (Michigan), and Paul Navarro (California).

Thank you to each of you for your service to this committee. We wouldn’t have been able to accomplish everything we have without your efforts and creativity.

As my time chairing the committee comes to a close, I want to thank the members of the Executive Committee and Brenda Erickson for their continued commitment to NLPES.

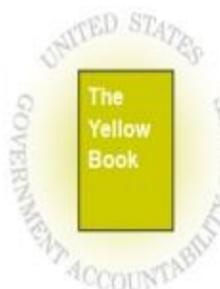
I’d also like to thank each of you as NLPES members for your involvement. We’ve got a pretty unique job and it’s nice to have the advice, wisdom, and support of colleagues to count on. It’s been my pleasure and privilege to serve the committee and I look forward to seeing all of the wonderful things this group will continue to accomplish!

*Kristen Rottinghaus is the 2021–2022 NLPES Executive Committee Chair.*



Kansas State Capitol

## Did You Know?



The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) first issued its *Government Auditing Standards*, better known as the “Yellow Book,” in 1972.

GAO managers had proposed naming the book, “The Golden Rules of Auditing,” matched by a gold cover. Elmer Staats, who was Comptroller General at the time, objected to the presumptuous nature of the design, and the governmental auditing standards were downgraded from gold to yellow.

In 2004, the Congress changed GAO’s name to “Government Accountability Office” to reflect its broader role in performance auditing and program evaluation, while retaining its well-known acronym.

## Alabama Office Has ACES in the Hole

Marcus Morgan, Alabama

Budget decisions can be difficult for a part-time legislature and the challenge can be amplified by limited resources. After the Great Recession and three consecutive years of proration, the Alabama Legislature looked for an approach to make decision-making more data-driven and results-oriented.

In 2017, at the direction of the Legislature and with the support of the Governor, Alabama launched the Alabama Support Team for Evidence Based Practices (ASTEP). Located within Alabama's Legislative Services Agency, two ASTEP analysts were tasked with finding a cost-effective way to systematically evaluate how state-funded programs were performing. After two successful pilot projects, executive and legislative branch leaders concluded that consistent and sustained success would require commitments from both branches.

The Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services (ACES) was formed in 2019 with that mindset and the duty to advise the Governor and Legislature on the evaluation of services, including evidence-based practices. The 14-member cross-branch collaboration is a unique approach to program evaluation and is the state's first dedicated evaluation agency.

Commission priorities for the upcoming fiscal year are set annually based on recommendations from members and staff. The work plan is a living document combining flexibility with clear direction that consists of the following three phases:



- Current priorities and evaluations.
- A *development* phase where staff begins researching and scoping upcoming evaluations.
- A *discovery* phase where potential evaluation topics are examined for potential future work.

ACES' non-partisan staff of four full-time employees supports the Commission and executes the annual work plan. In the first three years, ACES published seven reports evaluating multiple policy areas including public and rural health, corrections, and education. The Commission used the findings and recommendations to update enabling legislation to strengthen program accountability, align program design with desired outcomes, and expand program reach.

Notably, legislation is not always the necessary course of action. After ACES' first evaluation on suicide prevention, leaders from both branches met to decide how to implement the report's recommendations, resulting in multiple agencies acting and improving collaboration to prevent suicide.

As ACES continues to evolve and refine its evaluation process, it remains laser-focused on providing valuable, meaningful, and actionable information to policymakers.



*Marcus Morgan  
is the Director of  
the Alabama  
Commission on  
the Evaluation of  
Services.*

## Let's Get (L)inked

The NLPES LinkedIn Group was created to promote the exchange of ideas among NLPES member offices and staff, and to inform members of upcoming events.

As of this writing, we had 87 members from Maine to Arizona, but we'd like to expand our reach. Mississippi's PEER office is, well, without peer: it has the most members of our LinkedIn Group (10).



The group is open only to NLPES members. There are two ways to verify your membership and join the group.

### Option 1

Hit the "Request to Join" button on the [NLPES LinkedIn Group page](#). If a group manager can verify your eligibility through your LinkedIn profile, the manager may accept your request. If sufficient information is unavailable, the manager may direct you to Option 2.

### Option 2

Send an email requesting to join the NLPES LinkedIn Group to [Brenda Erickson](#), our NCSL liaison. In the message's subject area, type "SUBSCRIBE to NLPES LinkedIn Group." Please include the following information:

- Name
- Job title
- Audit agency/organization name
- Phone number
- Work email address
- LinkedIn address (*you must be registered with LinkedIn to join*)

## NLPES Recognizes Exemplary Work

Jason Juffras, District of Columbia

NLPES recently announced its [annual awards](#), culminating a review process that is both inspiring and challenging due to the sheer volume of excellent work. Executive Committee member Drew Dickinson, who serves on the Awards Subcommittee, noted that, "There were many impressive submissions this year for each of the award categories, and I know that the judges found it challenging to pick the winners."

**Outstanding Achievement.** James Barber, who retired last year as executive director of Mississippi's [Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review](#) (PEER), received the Outstanding Achievement award for contributions to legislative performance evaluation. During his 43 years with Mississippi PEER, Mr. Barber performed two stints as chair of the NLPES executive committee and even found time to edit this newsletter for 10 years – among many other accomplishments.

**Excellence in Evaluation.** Michigan's [Office of the Auditor General](#) won the Excellence in Evaluation award for significant contributions to the field of performance auditing.



**Excellence in Research Methods.** Florida's [Office of Policy Program Analysis and Government Accountability](#) and Kansas' [Legislative Division of Post Audit](#) were honored for Excellence in Research Methods. The award reflects exceptional breadth, depth, and scope of field work, innovative methodology, and technical difficulty or sophistication.

**Certificates of Impact.** A total of 27 states won Certificates of Impact for reports resulting in documented policy changes, program improvements, savings, or other critical impacts.

Congratulations to the award winners and many thanks to NLPES members who served as award judges!

*Jason Juffras is a senior analyst in the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor and serves on the NLPES Executive Committee.*



## Report Spotlight Tennessee Promise (cont.)

The effectiveness of Tennessee Promise was measured by evaluating the program’s two objectives, college access and completion. OREA measured access by college-going rates (i.e., the number of high school graduates who enroll in college immediately following graduation) and completion by credit hour accumulation, year-to-year retention, and degree attainment. OREA also analyzed these measures by student subgroup. Students from certain racial, gender, geographic, and socioeconomic subgroups have historically been less likely to enroll, persist, and earn a postsecondary credential, so the degree to which access and completion rates could increase for these subgroups is considerable.

OREA also evaluated the processes applicants must follow to become and remain Promise students, using measurements such as program application and Free Application for Federal Student Aid filing rates, mandatory meeting attendance, community service completion, and postsecondary enrollment. Once enrolled in higher education, students must meet additional requirements to maintain Promise eligibility, such as completing community service hours each semester as well as maintaining a 2.0 cumulative GPA and full-time continuous enrollment.

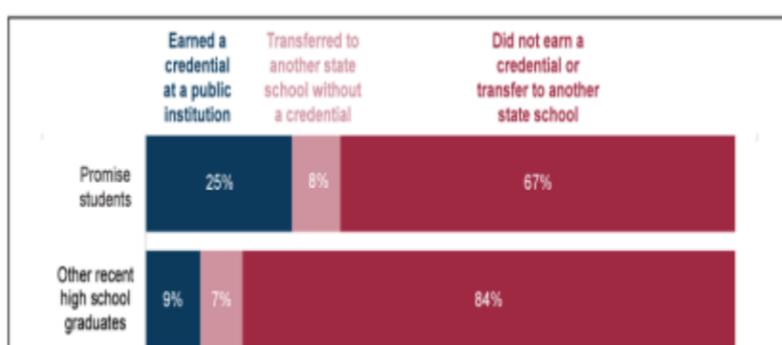
OREA analyzed available data to measure success and identify the program rules most often missed by Promise applicants. Researchers used STATA to conduct statistical analyses including a simple linear regression, binary logistical regression, and logistic regression to measure Promise student performance against other recent high school graduates who were enrolled in college but not participating in the program.

The report also highlighted the issue of transportation and proximity. To analyze the distance Promise students must travel to reach the nearest eligible institution, OREA compared the addresses of all 371 Tennessee public high schools with all Promise-eligible institutions (including satellite campuses). Public high schools are a reasonable proxy to use in calculating how far students must travel to attend the nearest eligible institution. OREA conducted three different analyses, each accounting for the variance among eligible institutions (i.e., program and course offerings, cost to student, and enrollment capacity), to determine the distance to reach a Promise-eligible institution.

OREA also calculated the average amount Promise students must pay after the last-dollar scholarship is applied to their tuition and mandatory fees, analyzed the biggest drop-off points in the application process, and projected the necessary growth in the state’s postsecondary attainment rate.

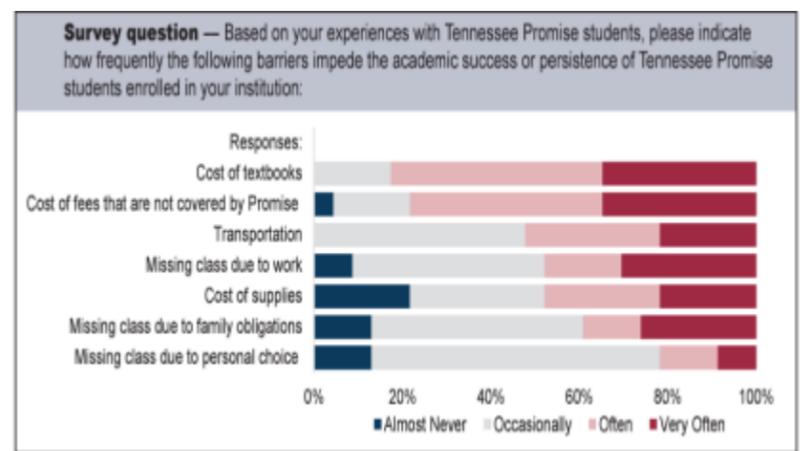
**Results.** Controlling for ACT scores, race, gender, expected family contribution, and first-generation college student status, Promise students were about two times more likely to return for sophomore year and earn a credential than other recent high school graduates enrolled at Promise-eligible schools.

**Exhibit 1: Promise students were more likely to earn a credential in five semesters compared to other recent high school graduates**



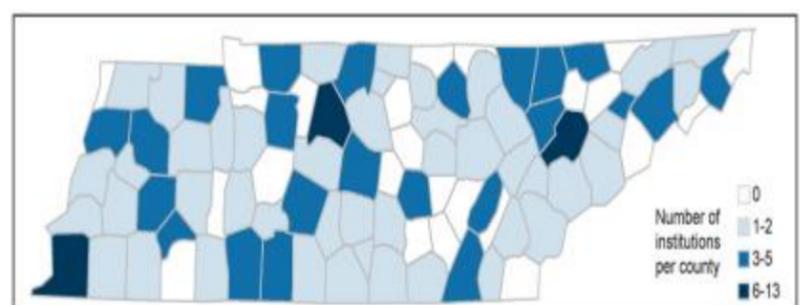
While Tennessee Promise ensures students can attend college free of tuition and mandatory fees, it does not cover other expenses such as books, supplies, tools, and non-mandatory fees (e.g., online course fees, science lab fees). Community college administrators estimated that Promise students pay an average of \$1,150 each year for these items. Moreover, 75 percent of survey respondents said the cost of textbooks, fees, tools, and supplies not covered by Promise impede the academic success and persistence of Promise students enrolled at their institution “often” or “very often.” Almost all respondents indicated that at least half of students did not know that the Promise program, though promoted as “free college,” does not pay for these items.

**Exhibit 2: The cost of textbooks and fees not covered by the Promise scholarship were identified as the most common barriers to academic success and persistence by college administrators**



OREA found that students who live in certain areas of the state must travel further to reach a Promise-eligible institution. This could impact both college access and completion because research has shown that students who live over 30 minutes from their college are less likely to stay enrolled or obtain a credential. Specifically, there are 76 public Tennessee high schools located more than 30 minutes from the nearest community college campus; on average, 42.5 minutes (or 29 miles) separates these high schools from the nearest community college campus. Five of these high schools are located about an hour or more away, with the maximum distance being 74 minutes (or 49 miles).

**Exhibit 3: There are areas of Tennessee where students must travel longer distances to attend a Promise-eligible institution**



The report concluded that the Promise program works, but more students from various subgroups and rural parts of the state must enter and remain in the program for Tennessee to meet its statewide Drive to 55 goal.

*Lauren Spires is a principal legislative research analyst and the higher education resource officer in the Tennessee Comptroller’s Office of Research and Education Accountability.*

(Editor’s note: The Tennessee Promise report won a 2021 NLPES Excellence in Research Methods award).



## Websites, Professional Development, and Other Resources

**Audit Report Database** – NLPES has launched its updated, more user-friendly [audit report database](#), which will provide easy access to reports from colleagues around the country. This database includes five years of reports and is organized into 28 categories such as agriculture, education, public health, and transportation.

The audit report database will be updated quarterly. To include your latest reports, please e-mail [Brenda Erickson](#) with the report title and ID number (if any), date of release, office name, [relevant categories](#), and link. Please use “Report Listing” in the e-mail subject line.

Linda Triplett, a former chair of the NLPES executive committee who worked at Mississippi PEER for 40 years, was instrumental in developing this initiative.

**NLPES Listserv** – The NLPES listserv is an email discussion group for NLPES members. Users can query other states about evaluation work, receive announcements of evaluation reports and job opportunities from other states, and get notified when the latest edition of this newsletter is available!

To join the listserv, email [Brenda Erickson](#), NCSL liaison to NLPES, with the subject “SUBSCRIBE to NLPES Listserv.” Include your name, job title, agency name, mailing address, phone number and email address.

You will receive a “Welcome” message once you are added to the listserv. This [link](#) provides guidance on how to post a message to the listserv.

Please note that a new NLPES listserv procedure means that any response to an NLPES listserv posting will be sent to *all subscribers*. Therefore:

- When you post a message to the NLPES listserv, please include an email address in your signature block to which a separate, private response to your inquiry may be sent.
- If you wish to respond to a listserv posting but do not want your response sent to all listserv subscribers, do not “Reply” or “Reply All” to the initial posting. Instead, please send a separate, private email addressed to the person who posted the original inquiry.

**IT Evaluators Form Subgroup** – NLPES has formed a new subgroup for information technology (IT) auditors and evaluators to engage in information-sharing calls.

The group's first call was held Tuesday, July 26. During its introductory call, the group discussed what information system/information technology audits are, who decides if IS/IT audits should be done and why they are important.

Topics for the group's next call weren't determined, but the group may delve further into assessing the reliability of computer-processed data and evaluating agency access controls.

If you would like to join the IT subgroup, please email [Brenda Erickson](#).

## Staff Happenings

**Joel Alter** has retired after nearly 40 years in Minnesota's Office of the Legislative Auditor. He served most recently as Director of Special Reviews, handling concerns or allegations with a narrower scope than a typical audit. Equally important, Joel generously shared his knowledge and insights with NLPES throughout his career. He served on the NLPES executive committee from 1999 to 2004 and as NLPES chair in 2001-02.

**Michael Tilden** became California's Acting State Auditor in January 2022. He has worked at the State Auditor's Office for more than 28 years.

**Lucia Nixon** left her position as Director of Maine's Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability to join the legislature's Office of Fiscal and Program Review. **Peter Schleck** has been hired as OPEGA's new director.

**Tom Hewlett** is the new Deputy Director of Research and Communications for Kentucky's Legislative Research Commission, replacing long-time LRC staffer Teresa Arnold, who retired. Tom will oversee the Legislative Oversight and Investigations Committee staff.

Longtime employees of the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts—**Leslie McGuire**, director of the Performance Audit Division, and **David Arner**, one of the division's deputy directors—announced their upcoming retirements.

## Put These on Your NLPES Radar



**NCSL Legislative Summit.** The largest bipartisan gathering of state legislators and staff, [NCSL's Legislative Summit](#) took place August 1-3 in mile-high Denver. Find recordings of some sessions—such as “How to Find and Keep Talent in the Great Reshuffle,” “Five Big Ideas to Improve Crisis Response,” and “Supreme Court Center Stage”—on the [NCSL website](#).

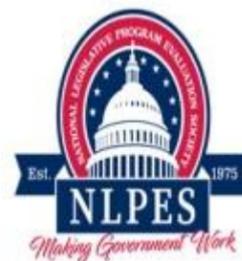
**Staff Hub ATL 2022.** In place of our annual professional development seminar, NLPES will participate in [Staff Hub ATL](#), from October 10-12 in Atlanta. NLPES will be among six NCSL staff associations involved in this joint effort to share knowledge and build connections among legislative offices. Topics to be discussed include strategic communications, time management and productivity, and the economic outlook and state budgets.

**Upcoming Member Survey.** This fall, the NLPES executive committee will survey the membership to get feedback and ideas on professional engagement, communication methods, this newsletter, and other topics. Please respond so we can practice what we preach – continuous improvement!

*The Working Paper* is published two times a year by the [National Legislative Program Evaluation Society](#), a professional staff association of the National Conference of State Legislatures. NLPES serves the professionals of state legislative agencies engaged in government program evaluation. The purposes of NLPES are to promote the art and science of legislative program evaluation; to enhance professionalism and training in legislative program evaluation; and to promote the exchange of ideas and information about legislative program evaluation.

*The Working Paper* is produced by the NLPES Communications Subcommittee:

- \*Emily Johnson (Texas), 2021-2022 chair
- \*Jason Juffras (District of Columbia), newsletter editor
- \*Eric Thomas (Washington), member
- \*Darin Underwood (Utah), member



NCSL Liaison to NLPES:  
[Brenda Erickson](#)

Please contact [Jason Juffras](#) with any article suggestions, comments, or questions.

