

ERIKSSON COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ANNUAL REPORT | 2025-2026





Our Mission

The Eriksson College of Education prepares dynamic and effective teachers and leaders who positively impact schools and communities in the 21st century.

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On the Cover

Mollie Scruggs is pursuing a ***Bachelor of Science in education*** with a ***K-5 licensure concentration***. She served as the ***Student Tennessee Education Association president*** during the 2025-26 school year. You can listen to more of Mollie's story by scanning the ***QR code on the back cover***.

Letter from the Dean

This year has been a landmark one for the Eriksson College of Education — defined by pioneering innovation, historic milestones, and a renewed commitment to the communities we serve. As I reflect on my first year as dean, I am filled with immense pride for what our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners have accomplished together.

We advanced our Aspiring Administrator Preparation Network by piloting Tennessee's first **Principal Registered Apprenticeship Program**, a groundbreaking “earn while you learn” model that removes financial barriers for aspiring school leaders. Partnering with 54 districts across the state, this program builds on the legacy of our nationally recognized **Grow Your Own Teacher Residency**, which continues to expand and was once again highlighted as a national model for addressing teacher shortages. Together, these pathways are transforming how Tennessee develops its educators, from the classroom to the front office. As we look toward the new academic year, both programs are gaining new partnering districts across the state.

This year also marked the 10th anniversary of our **Full Spectrum Learning (FSL)** program. We celebrated a decade of empowering neurodivergent students to thrive in higher education with a week of events that brought our campus and community together, including a meaningful **Decade of Belonging celebration**. The growth of FSL, now the largest program of its kind in the state, is a testament to our college's deep commitment to creating a place where every student belongs.

Our impact extends far beyond campus. Through initiatives like the inaugural **Aspiring Teachers Day** and our annual **Rural Education Conference**, we are actively shaping the future of education in our region. Our faculty continue to produce nationally recognized scholarship, our students are earning top state and university awards, and our donors are building legacies that will support future Govs for generations to come.

The stories in these pages illuminate our vision: **when we create the best environment for educators to thrive, we ensure that students everywhere have the opportunity to soar**. In the year ahead, we will expand that environment through new programs and enhanced remote learning pathways, making our offerings more accessible across Tennessee and beyond.

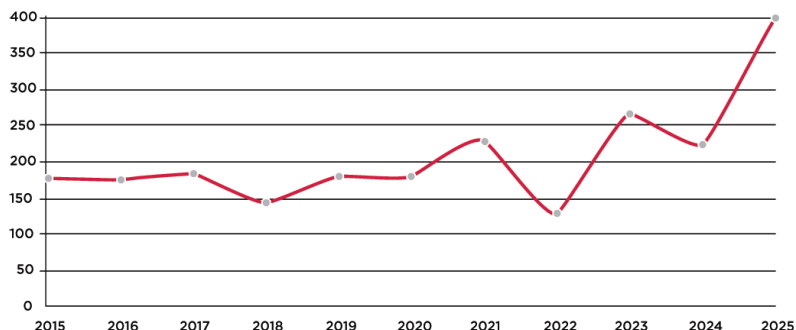
Our success is a shared one. It is made possible by every person who teaches, learns, partners, and gives. Thank you for making everything we do possible.



Dr. John R. McConnell III
Dean, Eriksson College of Education



DEGREES AWARDED

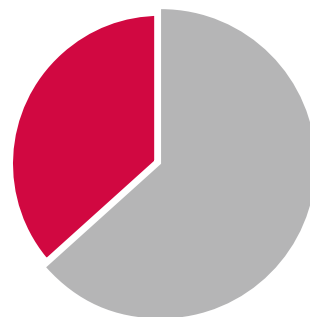


125% increase in the past 10 years

2025 - **399**

2015 - **177**

EDUCATION STUDENTS BY LEVEL (FALL 2025)



Undergraduate: **526**

Graduate: **301**

TEACHER CANDIDATES ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE

64% first-time pass rate on the Tennessee Early Literacy Assessment, the highest among all Tennessee educator preparation providers.

98% pass rate on the Praxis School Leaders Licensure Assessment.

In Fall 2025, graduating education students achieved the program's **highest edTPA pass rate** and scores since the university adopted the assessment in 2013.

TOP 5 EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY ENROLLMENT



Education (B.S.)



Educational Leadership Studies (M.A.Ed.)



Teacher Licensing Non-Degree Certificate (Graduate)



Teaching (M.A.T.)



Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT, 2025

827

^ **46%** since 2022





PIONEERING A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS

Leading The Way With Apprenticeships

The Eriksson College of Education is transforming how Tennessee prepares its educators. Building on the success of the nation's first federally registered teacher apprenticeship, the college piloted Tennessee's first **Principal Registered Apprenticeship Program**, creating a comprehensive "earn while you learn" pipeline that develops leaders at every level of the K-12 system.

Building Tomorrow's School Leaders Today

During the pilot, the program secured partnerships with **54 school districts** and enrolled **120 aspiring principals**. During the 2026-27 academic year, Austin Peay State University is partnering with school districts across the state to keep the **Aspiring Administrator Preparation Network**, which was previously grant-funded, available. In this new model, school districts will pay the tuition for promising aspiring school leaders throughout the state as they enroll at Austin Peay to complete their Master of Arts in Education in educational leadership studies. The Clarksville-Montgomery County School System is leading the way in this initiative, with five district-funded teachers enrolled in the new cohort.

Through an accelerated, one-year online master's program, these teacher-leaders work in their home districts and receive mentorship from experienced principals, all while earning their degree.

"This 'earn while you learn' model removes the biggest barriers — tuition, time away from work, and distance from quality programs," said Dr. John McConnell, dean of the Eriksson College of Education. "It's a practical, affordable, and scalable approach that keeps rising leaders rooted in the schools and communities they already serve."





Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline

The master's program builds on the groundbreaking **Grow Your Own Teacher Residency**, which has continued to grow this year. The program, which allows residents to work as paid educational assistants while earning a tuition-free degree in three years, received a **\$1.025 million grant** from the Tennessee Department of Education to fund apprentices through 2027.

Now in its seventh year, the teacher residency has expanded to include **more than 200 participants** from **11 partner school districts**. In 2026-27, new partnering districts include Metro Nashville Public Schools, Humphreys County School System, and Weakley County Schools.

This model, pioneered at Austin Peay, has been cited by the White House and replicated in **all 50 U.S. states** as a bold solution to the nationwide teacher shortage.

“Following my grandfather, a trailblazer in his own right, by graduating from this historic program is an honor. I’m proud to carry on that legacy.”

- Jzsade Davenport ('25)

Grow Your Own graduate and granddaughter of APSU basketball legend L.M. Ellis



Read more of Jzsade's #GovForLife story in the Spring 2026 Austin Peay Alumni Magazine.



FULL SPECTRUM CELEBRATION

Ten years ago, the Full Spectrum Learning (FSL) program was founded with a simple belief: that neurodivergent students have the talent and drive to succeed in college with the right support. Today, that belief has grown into Tennessee's largest and most comprehensive support program for autistic students.

Serving **over 60 students** in 2025-26, FSL has become a national model for fostering academic success and a true sense of belonging. The program celebrated its 10th anniversary with a weeklong series of events in April 2026, welcoming students, faculty, alumni, and community partners to honor a decade of impact.



This year's milestones included:

- **Third Annual Reverse Career Fair:** This innovative event, which flips the traditional career fair model, continues to grow. Students host tables for employers, providing a comfortable environment to showcase their skills. Junior Owen Fink received an on-the-spot internship offer.
- **New Learning Space:** FSL opened a revamped Learning Lounge in the Claxton Building, where students receive individualized study-skill support with access to one-on-one sessions that foster organizational skills, effective study habits, and academic confidence while minimizing social anxiety.
- **Autism Awareness Week:** This celebration included workshops, a student showcase, a student panel, and the Decade of Belonging Celebration, among other events. All events were open to the community and provided FSL students the opportunity to share more about their accomplishments and life perspectives.

FULL SPECTRUM LEARNING CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

SPECIAL GUEST: DR. TEMPLE GRANDIN

The campus was electrified by the October 2025 visit of Dr. Temple Grandin, a world-renowned autism advocate, author, and professor. As a guest of the College of STEM and in partnership with FSL, Grandin delivered her lecture, "Great Minds Are Not All the Same," to a packed concert hall. The visit, which included a book signing and student discussions, highlighted the university's commitment to embracing neurodiversity.



"Knowing when you step onto campus that there's a group of people who are here to support you is all you need sometimes. It's not just college; they help us navigate the world."

- Traonna Cunningham

junior biology major & Full Spectrum Learning participant



Learn More

Full Spectrum Learning is tailored to the needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorder, offering class cohorts with other participants, peer and faculty mentors, tutors, study hours and support meetings with FSL staff.

apsu.edu/full-spectrum-learning
fullspectrumlearning@apsu.edu



MAKING AN IMPACT

The Eriksson College of Education's mission extends far beyond our university walls. Through strategic partnerships, advocacy, and outreach, we are committed to strengthening communities and shaping the future of education across the region.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Teachers

In October 2025, we hosted our inaugural Aspiring Teachers Day, welcoming over 100 high school students from Teaching as a Profession programs across Middle Tennessee. Participants engaged in hands-on activities in the Furniture Connection EdTech Studio, the Jack Hunt STEM Center, and the Center for Rural Education, getting a firsthand look at the innovative programs that await them at Austin Peay.



Strengthening Partnerships with School Districts

Office of Teacher Education & Partnerships
apsu.edu/ready2teach/teachered

Our Partnership Advisory Council convened each semester to connect district leaders with college faculty and staff. These productive meetings provided a forum for sharing program updates, discussing the evolving needs of regional school districts, and coordinating support for partnering educators.

Faculty and staff demonstrated their dedication to local schools through the Peayple in the Community day of service, participating in nearly 30 service projects across the region. The college community made tangible impacts through hands-on activities at Moore Magnet Elementary in Clarksville, led by Dr. Donna Short, and by supporting the CMCSS Teacher Warehouse to ensure educators have access to essential classroom resources.

Throughout the year, college personnel regularly volunteered at partner schools, bringing expertise and enthusiasm directly to K-12 students. Activities ranged from reading sessions at Westside Elementary in Springfield to hosting campus visits from West Creek High School, Middle College and more. These ongoing partnerships reinforced the college's role as an active, invested member of the regional education community.



T BEYOND CAMPUS

Advancing STEM Education Across Tennessee

Jack Hunt STEM Center
apsu.edu/jack-hunt-stem-center

The Jack Hunt STEM Center strengthened partnerships with schools throughout the region, providing hands-on learning experiences and professional development. The center also secured a \$5,000 TVA STEM grant for Cumberland Heights Elementary's innovative "Tackling Roadside Littering" project, where students designed trash-pickup prototypes using Finch robots and LEGO Education kits.

Throughout the year, center faculty and students led workshops for partner schools including Cumberland Heights Elementary, Richview Middle School, and Minglewood Elementary, while hosting campus visits that brought STEM learning directly to K-12 students.

Empowering Educators Through Educational Technology

Furniture Connection EdTech Studio
apsu.edu/education/ed-tech-studio

The Furniture Connection EdTech Studio served as a hub for innovation and creativity, hosting multiple on-campus events that introduced students and educators to cutting-edge teaching tools.

Through a \$50,000 Google grant, the center led the "Collaborative STEM Education Initiative for Middle TN K-12 Students" project by partnering with local libraries and schools across five counties to narrow the technology gap in rural communities.

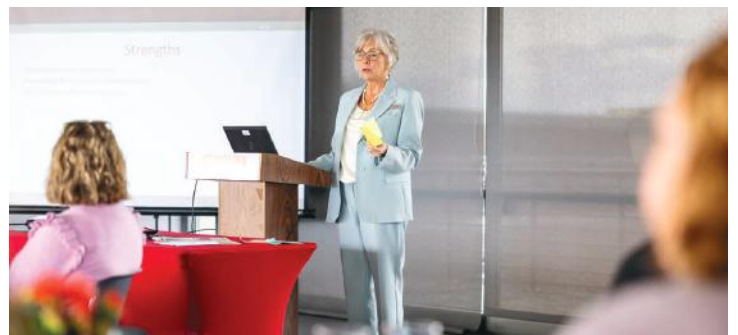
Supporting Our Rural Partners

Center for Rural Education
apsu.edu/education/ruraled

The Center for Rural Education, under the leadership of Dr. Erica Boone, hosted its sixth annual conference in March 2026 with the theme "Rooted in Rural: Cultivating Place, Partnerships, and Possibilities." For the first time, the conference featured international presenters, connecting local educators with global perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in rural education.

Beyond the annual conference, the center provided targeted professional development across the region. Boone and Short traveled to Coffee County to lead workshops on soil pH and water-testing techniques for third through fifth grade teachers at Hickerson Elementary. In Decaturville, Dr. Allison Oliver delivered a keynote on student-centered behavior management strategies to more than 200 rural educators.

The center also established a faculty interest network, enabling college professors to deliver specialized professional development in rural counties based on local needs.





OUR FACULTY, STAFF & STUDENTS SOAR

FACULTY & STAFF AWARDEES

- **Dr. Allison Oliver**, assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, received the **Socrates Award for Excellence in Teaching**, one of Austin Peay's highest teaching distinctions, for her dynamic and inspiring instruction in special education.
- **Dr. Benita Bruster**, professor in the Department of Educational Specialties, earned the **APSU National Alumni Association Distinguished Professor Award** in recognition of her exemplary career and tireless commitment to students.
- **Dr. Bobette Bouton**, professor and chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning, and **Megan Simpson**, director of communications, received the **Everyday Excellence Appreciation Award** presented by the Office of Institutional Culture.
- **Amber Button**, coordinator of academics for teacher residencies, received the **Governors Excellence Award** for Academic Affairs — one of the top staff recognitions at Austin Peay. She brings calm, clarity, and genuine care to her work with the Grow Your Own Teacher Residency program.
- Recognizing outstanding contributions to the college's mission in the areas of teaching, research, service, and leadership, the following individuals were honored during the college's **Spring Awards and Celebration Ceremony**: **Dr. Benita Bruster, Dr. Christi Maldonado, Amanda Bradley, Sloane Helmintoller, Amber Kiser, Bethany Patterson, Dr. Adam Attwood, Dr. Allison Oliver, Angela Gordon, and Jessica Langston.**



STUDENT LEADERS

- **Tyler Rose**, senior music education major, received the **Harvill-Civitan Citizenship Award**, one of the university's most prestigious student awards. Rose served as president of the Student Government Association (SGA) and was crowned 2025 Homecoming King.
- **Rylei Johnson**, a freshman integrated early childhood education major, won the title of **Teen Tennessee Petite** and is using her platform to lead the Women's Organization of Wellbeing (W.O.W.) Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting women's shelters.
- At the Student Organization and Leader Awards, junior elementary education major **Sarah Cooley** was named **Outstanding Student Veteran of the Year**. The Marine veteran served as the vice president of the Student Tennessee Education Association.
- The following students were honored as the college's final **edTPA Scholars** for outstanding assessment performance: **Casey Coppock, Chanel Hunter, and Carson VanWinkle.**
- The following students were honored at the **Spring Awards and Celebration Ceremony**:
 - Outstanding Undergraduate Students: **Gimal Cruz Pagan, Alli Johnson, Savanna Miles, Peyton Dziadon, and Tori James**
 - Outstanding Secondary Students: **Sara Blanton, Andrew Hoffman, Kierstin Holman, and Katelin Csiszer**
 - Outstanding Graduate Students: **Zachary Quinn and Megan Schneck**
 - Dissertation of the Year and Dr. Carlette J. Hardin Research Award: **Emmanuel Méjeun**
 - Fred A. Bunger Memorial Award: **Ugochukwu Onumadu**

ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE



Our faculty are not just teachers; they are active scholars, researchers, and leaders whose work is shaping educational practice and policy at the local, national, and international levels.

Dr. Adam Attwood published a new edited volume, *Teaching Labor History in the United States, 1850-2020*, addressing a key gap in secondary social studies curricula.

Dr. Benita Bruster and **Dr. Tara Hill**, along with APSU Center for Academic Support and Enrichment Director Dr. Blaire Hodge-Woodring, released *Critical Reading and Inquiry*, a textbook that provides literacy support for students to closely read, think critically, and grapple with questions and issues related to the human spirit. Bruster and Hodge-Woodring presented on the textbook during the Felix G. Woodward Library's Celebration of Scholarship.

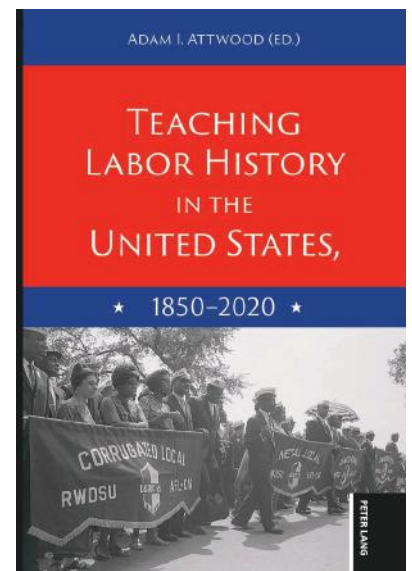
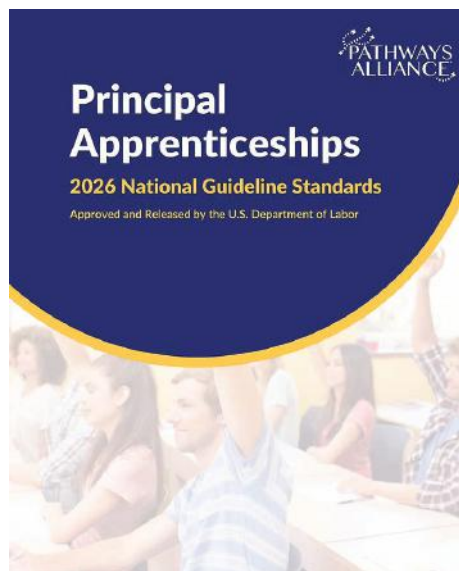
Dr. Joanne Philhower presented research on how military service prepares veterans for teaching careers at the national Association of Teacher Educators conference with APSU Military & Veterans Affairs Assistant Vice President Jasmin Linares.

Dr. Zack Barnes contributed expert commentary on literacy and special education to national outlets including Newsweek, HuffPost, and the Nashville Scene.

Dr. Terri Clark was featured as a nursing expert by NursingColleges.com and presented on work-life balance at multiple conferences, including one hosted by the Mayo Clinic.

Amanda Bradley, Sloane Helmintoller, Amber Kiser, and Bethany Patterson joined the college as instructors for Reading 1010. The Critical Reading and Inquiry course provides additional reading support for students across the university and was previously housed in another department. Beginning in Fall 2025, the instructors experienced great success in improving students' reading comprehension and vocabulary. The instructors presented a qualitative research poster about the course at the National Social Science Association Conference in Las Vegas.

Dr. Christi Maldonado participated in the Pathways Alliance Principal Apprentice Working Group. This group played a role in shaping the development of National Guideline Standards for principal apprenticeships, which were approved by the U.S. Department of Labor in April.





Scholarships, endowed funds, and direct gifts provide the resources our students need to thrive and empower our faculty to innovate. This year, we are honored to celebrate new endowments that will create opportunities for generations of future educators.

NEW ENDOWMENTS

- **The Virginia Rosenbalm Gray Future Educator Endowment:** Established by alumna Ginny Gray Davis ('87) and her husband Craig, this endowment honors Davis' mother, a 30-year veteran of Dickson County Schools, and supports education majors who demonstrate leadership and financial need.
- **The Brunson-Chapman Family Memorial Scholarship Endowment:** Established by John Chapman, this fund honors his parents, Mary Lena and Alfred T. Chapman, and supports elementary education students, with a preference for graduates of Montgomery Central High School.
- **The Jerome P. Ellis Memorial Education Endowed Scholarship:** Created by the Ellis Family Foundation of Tennessee and Tim and Dena Ellis, this fund will support students in the Eriksson College of Education. It was established to commemorate the accomplishments and dedication of Tim Ellis' father, Jerome.





Legacy Transform a Life

Your Gift Makes a Difference

Your generosity fuels our mission. Whether you support a specific program, fund a scholarship, or contribute to our Fund of Excellence, your gift directly impacts students and strengthens our ability to prepare the next generation of leaders.

WAYS TO GIVE

Online: Give a one-time or recurring gift with your credit card at give.apsu.edu.

Mail: Send a check to:
Austin Peay State University
Foundation
P.O. Box 4417
Clarksville, TN 37044

Phone: Call 931-221-7127

In-Person: Visit the Jenkins Building (318 College St., Clarksville, TN 37040)

CONNECT WITH US

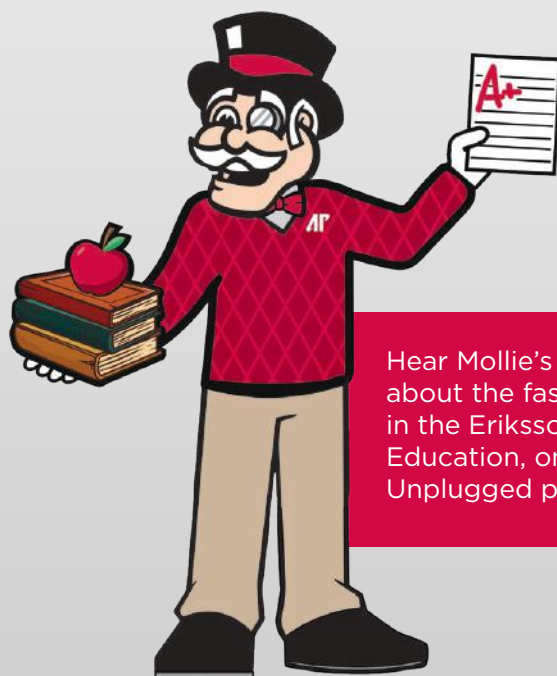
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WANT TO
GIVE?



Eriksson College of Education

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Hear Mollie's story, and more about the fascinating people in the Eriksson College of Education, on the Govs Teach Unplugged podcast.



#GovsTeach

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