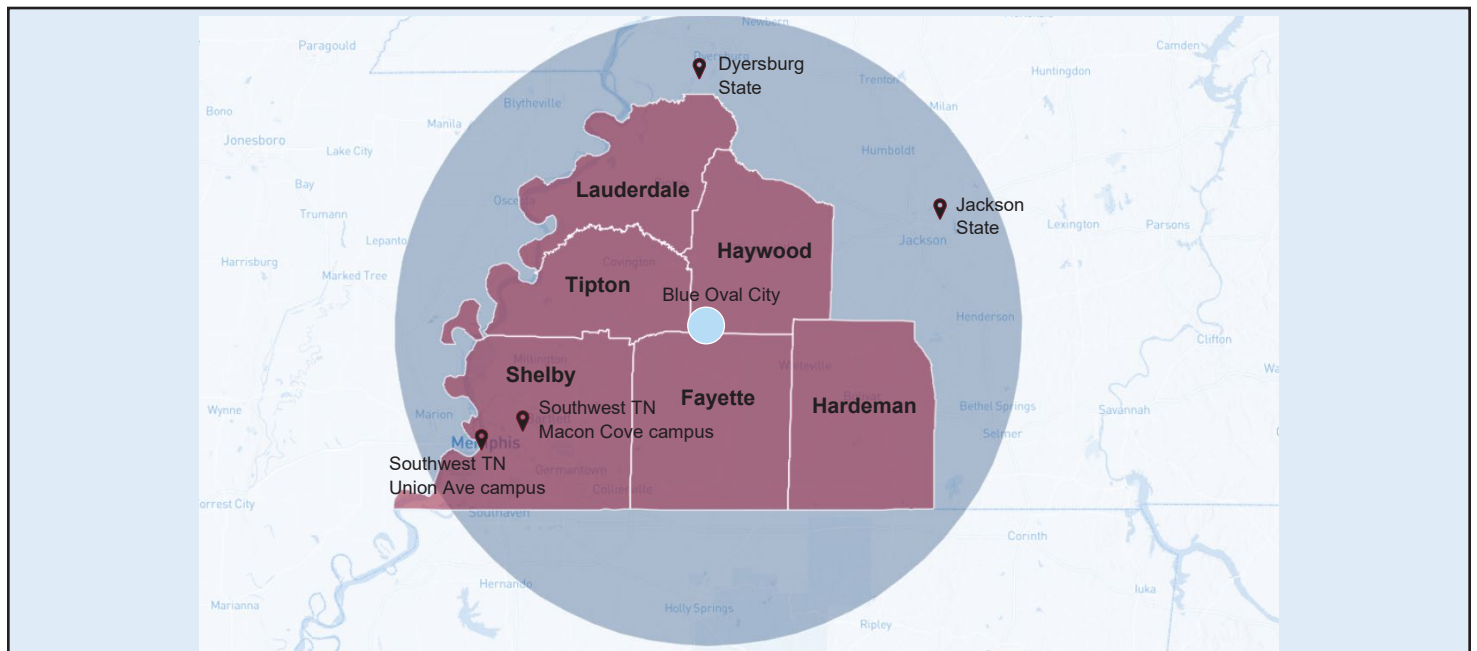


April 2022

On February 16, 2022, the Comptroller’s Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) presented its [evaluation of the Tennessee Reconnect Grant program](#) before the House Education Administration Committee. Members of the committee requested information **on the number of Reconnect students** within driving distance of Ford’s planned “Blue Oval City” in Stanton, Tennessee.

The following table shows the number (and percentage) of Tennesseans who applied for and enrolled in the Reconnect program between fall 2018 and summer 2020. Data is shown for the six counties that surround Blue Oval City: Haywood, Hardeman, Fayette, Lauderdale, Shelby, and Tipton Counties. These counties are referred to as the “Blue Oval region” throughout this memo. Due to data constraints, OREA was unable to analyze the data by zip code and thus analyzed the eligible population and program participation at the county level.

Tennessee Reconnect and Blue Oval City

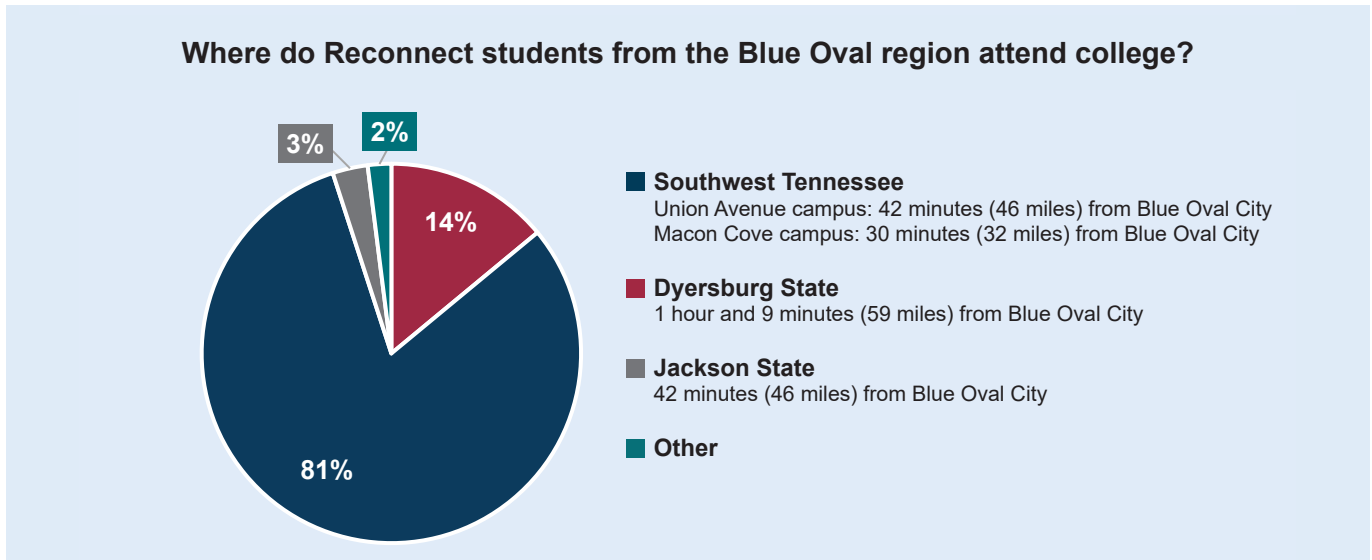


In the table below, **blue** shaded boxes indicate a percentage above the state average, while **red** shaded boxes indicate a percentage below the state average.

County	Percentage of the population that applied	Percentage of the population that enrolled	Percentage of applicants that enrolled	Eligible population	Applied	Enrolled
Haywood	2.50%	0.72%	28.92%	8,144	204	59
Hardeman	1.72%	0.70%	40.50%	11,637	200	81
Fayette	1.73%	0.63%	36.33%	16,720	289	105
Tipton	3.10%	1.29%	41.73%	25,718	798	333
Lauderdale	2.07%	0.87%	41.95%	11,376	236	99
Shelby	3.07%	0.96%	31.15%	308,939	9,483	2,954
Tennessee	2.82%	1.11%	39.23%	2,423,758	68,340	26,810

Institutions

As shown in the chart below, most Reconnect students from the Blue Oval region attended Southwest Tennessee Community College. Southwest has two campuses in Memphis that are within driving distance to Blue Oval City. Its Macon Cove campus is about 30 minutes away, while its Union Avenue campus is about 42 minutes away.



Fourteen percent of students attended Dyersburg State Community College. Dyersburg State is located in Dyersburg, Tennessee, and is roughly one hour and nine minutes (or 59 miles) from Blue Oval City. Another 3 percent of Reconnect students in the region attended Jackson State Community College in Jackson, Tennessee, which is roughly 42 minutes from Blue Oval City.

Demographics

Reconnect students from the Blue Oval region resembled Reconnect students statewide with regard to age: the median age of a Reconnect student (both inside and outside of the Blue Oval region) was roughly 32 years old. However, the Blue Oval region's population of Reconnect students differed in terms of race. Between fall 2018 and summer 2020, 61 percent of Blue Oval region students were Black, compared to 21 percent across the state.

Additionally, Reconnect students in the Blue Oval region were 8 percentage points more likely to be female and 5 percentage points more likely to care for dependents. Students in these counties were also 7 percentage points less likely to have internet access at home and 4 percentage points more likely to rely on the college's library computers than students from other counties. This suggests that these Reconnect students may be less technologically secure.

Reconnect students in the Blue Oval region are...



More likely to be **female**



More likely to **care for dependents**



Less likely to have **home internet access**

Since roughly 81 percent of the region's students were from Shelby County, some conclusions differed when Shelby County data was excluded. For example, students' work plans did not differ significantly from statewide trends. However, when Shelby County data was omitted, students from the region's other counties

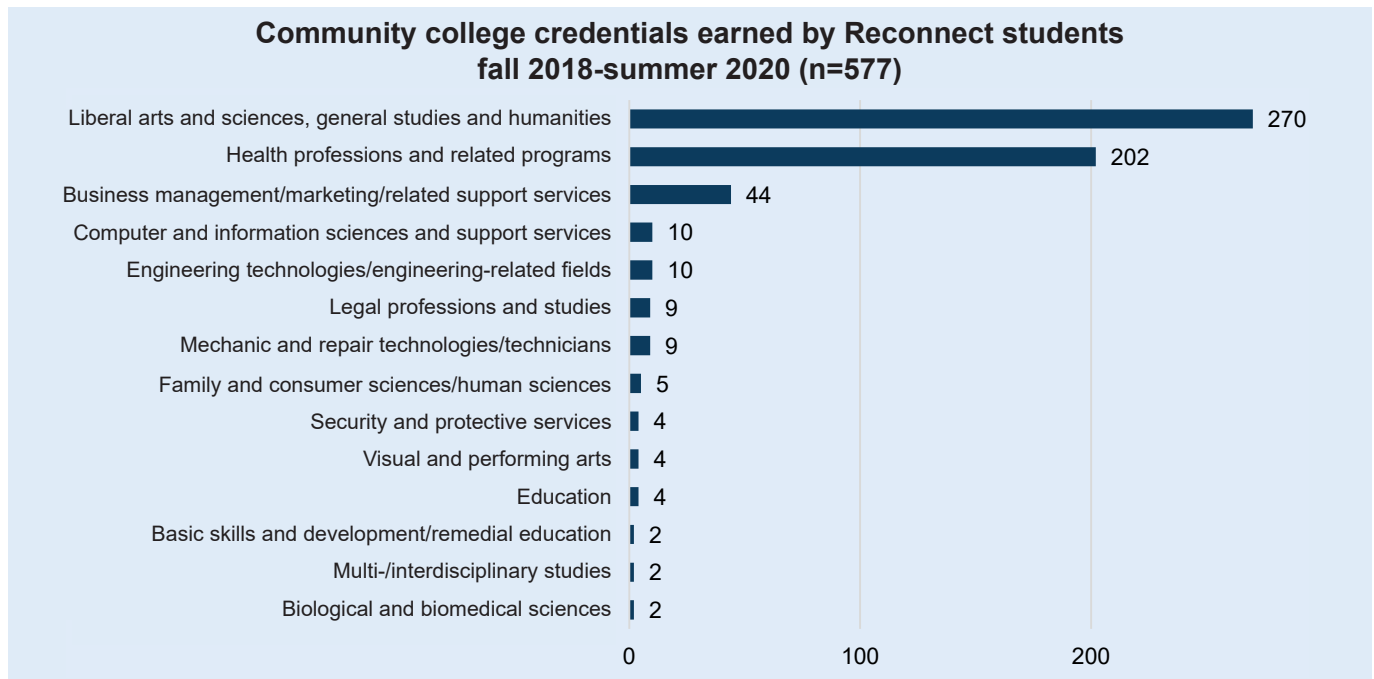
were 4 percentage points less likely to work full-time while enrolled in college as part of the Reconnect program. Further, with the exception of students in Shelby County, the median income of a Reconnect student in the Blue Oval region was nearly \$2,000 higher than the statewide median of \$31,127. Conversely, the median income for a Reconnect student in Shelby County is \$4,407 below the statewide median.

Programs and credentials

Since Blue Oval City is an automotive assembly complex, the plant will need workers with credentials related to engineering, mechanics, and repair. The plant will also need workers with construction credentials to assist with the plant’s construction.

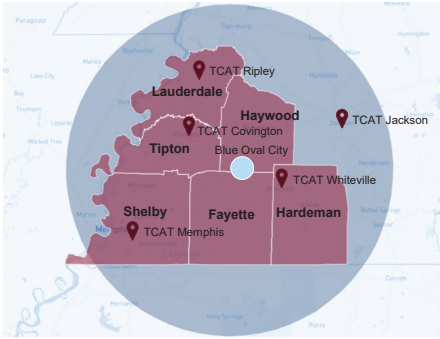
The chart below provides a retrospective look at the types of degrees that Reconnect students from the Blue Oval region have earned. Most Reconnect students in the Blue Oval region (82 percent) earned credentials in health professions or liberal arts and sciences. The share of students earning health-related credentials is 4 percentage points higher than the rest of the state’s Reconnect population (35 percent, compared to 31 percent).

About 8 percent earned credentials in business management, while the remaining graduates earned credentials in other fields. Nineteen students earned credentials in fields directly related to Blue Oval City’s operations: nine credentials in mechanic and repair technologies and 10 credentials in engineering technologies.



Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs)

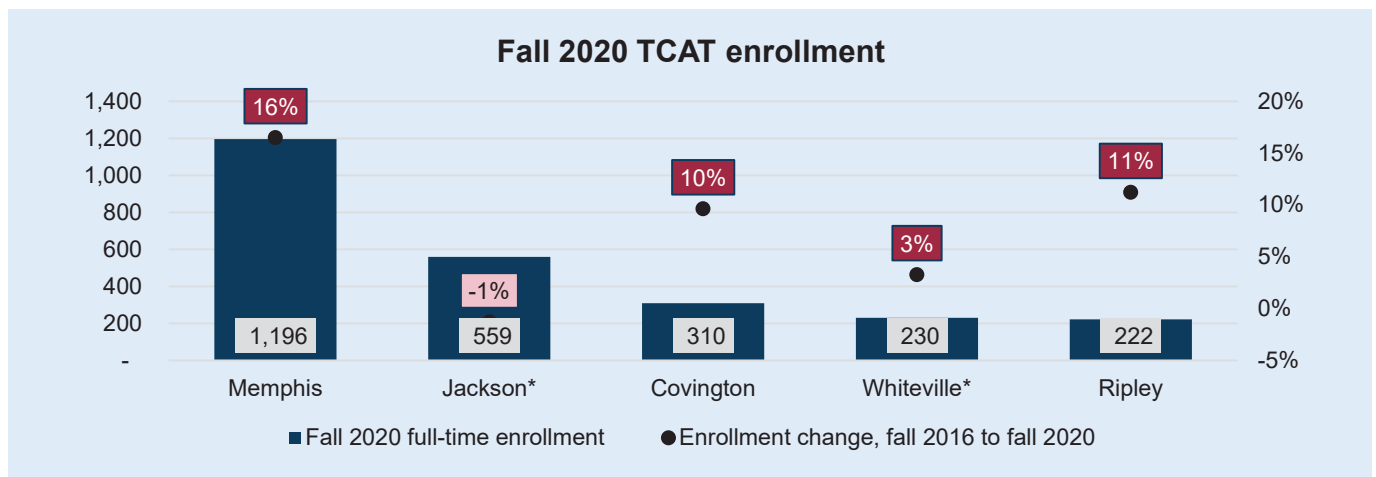
OREA’s evaluation of Tennessee Reconnect focused primarily on community colleges since the majority of Reconnect students enroll in a community college. However, Tennessee’s Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) may also supply labor for Ford’s Blue Oval City.



As shown in the map to the left, there were five TCATs within the Blue Oval region as of fall 2020: TCATs Covington, Jackson, Memphis, Ripley, and Whiteville. TCATs Jackson and Whiteville were consolidated in fall 2021, and the Tennessee Board of Regents recently approved a merger of TCAT Covington, Ripley, and Newbern to be implemented by fall 2023. To address the new Ford plant’s workforce demands, a new TCAT will be built in Haywood County.

As of fall 2020, there were 2,517 full-time students enrolled in one of the Blue Oval region’s five TCATs. Since 2016, four out of five of these TCATs have seen positive growth in enrollment (TCAT Jackson’s enrollment declined just 1 percent). Overall TCAT registrations rose 13 percent in fall 2021 compared to fall 2020. This trend suggests COVID-19’s impact on TCAT enrollment is minimal and therefore the production of TCAT graduates may be unaffected.

Top program enrollment in the Blue Oval region’s TCATs included mechanic and repair technologies (31 percent), health professions (23 percent), and precision production (13 percent). As TCATs are closely aligned with the workforce needs in their region, it is anticipated that programs will be offered that train students in the specific skills needed in Blue Oval City.



*TCATs Jackson and Whiteville were consolidated in fall 2021.

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