Student Experiences Utilizing the Tennessee Reconnect Scholarship: A Narrative Analysis

What is the TN Reconnect?
A last-dollar scholarship to attend a two-year college, technical institution, or associated degree granting institution tuition-free.

Who does the TN Reconnect fund?
Tennessee residents over the age of 25 who do not currently possess a degree can apply for the grant.

Why does TN want adults to get a postsecondary degree?
The TN Reconnect Program is a part of the larger Drive to 55 initiative, which challenged Tennessee to get 55% of Tennesseans a college degree or certificate by 2025.

Purpose of Study
To understand the experiences of students who participated in the Tennessee Reconnect Program.

Research Questions
1. How do TN Reconnect students describe their experiences with the program?
2. What opportunities, challenges, and barriers exist for TN Reconnect students?
3. What are best practices and scalable changes for the TN Reconnect program?

Understanding How Students Reconnect: Participant Descriptive Data (n=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
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| Average Age             | 40     |
| Average Semester Credit Hours | 8.5   |
| Average Years Since Last Attended College | 10.5 |

Current Employment Status
- 50% Employed Full-Time
- 25% Employed Part-Time
- 25% Unemployed

Current Marital Status
- 25% Single/Never Married
- 50% Married
- 25% Divorced/Separated

Current Dependents
- 70% Are Primary Caregiver for Child/Other Dependent

Method
- Chronological Narrative Analysis
- 4 TN Community Colleges
- 20 Participants
- Constant Comparative Coding

Themes

Prior to Reconnect
1. A Rocky Start
2. Life Happens

Enrolling in College
1. Decreased Financial Barriers
2. Opportunity to Improve

First Semester
1. Motivated
2. Barriers and Learning Curves

Discussion & Implications
1. Develop orientation or bridge programs more accessible and relevant to adult Reconnect students
2. Assess and improve advising models for adult students at community colleges
3. Expand Reconnect Scholarship funding to a first-dollar scholarship program to allow further financial support
4. Create proactive student success initiatives to support students who may be experiencing a “rocky start”

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