



THE AYERS  
FOUNDATION

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**Ayers Foundation Scholars Program Reports Big College-Going Success  
in Latest Round of Rural Tennessee Expansion Counties**

*Average 19 Percentage Point Increase for Students in Just One Year*

**PARSONS, Tenn.** - Janet Ayers, President of The Ayers Foundation, announced today significant increases in 2022 college-going rates in seven rural Tennessee counties thanks to the help and support of The Ayers Foundation Scholars Program (AFSP.)

In 2021, with the support of Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly, The Ayers Foundation partnered with the State of Tennessee through the Governor's Rural Education Foundation to scale The Ayers Foundation Scholars Program (AFSP) to more priority communities, adding new high schools in seven rural, economically distressed or at-risk counties: Benton, Claiborne, Hardin, Haywood, Lewis, Union, and Wayne.

**After just one year of AFSP support, the overall college-going rate in the seven 2021 expansion counties increased from 46% to 65% - an average 19-percentage point increase in just the first year.** These dramatic jumps occurred even while state and national college-going rates have been declining in recent years due in part to the impact of the pandemic.

"Thanks to the continued trust and support of Governor Lee and the General Assembly, and the dedicated work of our Ayers counselors with local educators, school leaders, students, and parents, we are very pleased to see and report these big jumps in college-going rates in the latest counties and high schools we serve," said Janet Ayers, President of The Ayers Foundation. "Our mission is to improve the quality of life of people of rural Tennessee, and we believe education and increased employability that will lead to higher standards of living are key."

The Ayers Foundation Scholars Program is a nationally-recognized highly effective college access and counseling program delivering outsized results for students in more than 20 high schools across 12 rural Tennessee counties.

Founded in 1999 in a single high school, the program has shown dramatic success in increasing college-going, persistence, and completion rates for students who enroll in a range of postsecondary experiences, including technical, community and four-year colleges and universities, and the military.

The AFSP has achieved this success through an unwavering commitment to its unique model: investing in an expert, full-time, trained advisor to serve as the student's champion, coach, guide and technical and emotional supporter from 8th grade through the postsecondary experience and beyond.

"Tennessee is leading the nation in expanding educational opportunities across our state's rural communities," said Governor Bill Lee. "I commend The Ayers Foundation for its partnership to support students, strengthen our workforce, and transform rural Tennessee."

**Detailed county-by-county 2022 college-going results for the seven most recent AFSP expansion counties are attached.**

Serving primarily low-income, first-generation, rural students, The Ayers Foundation Scholars Program defines success in terms of moving the needle on student access and completion, and it invests in the resources students need to realize those opportunities.

Prior to the 2021 expansion, the program served five rural counties in Tennessee. Participating communities have seen extraordinary success, with up to an 87% college-going rate and up to an 82% college-completion rate while helping students obtain more than \$150 million in grants and scholarships.

"We are gratified to see these big gains in the expansion counties after just one year, but we are not satisfied. Our goal is to help every student gain the skills and training they need after high school to pursue a rewarding career and be truly workforce-ready for employers across our state," said Janet Ayers. "We're excited to continue and build upon this important work."

For more information about the many programs of The Ayers Foundation, please visit [TheAyersFoundation.org](https://TheAyersFoundation.org).

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