

## **Recruiting Family and Consumer Sciences Professionals through Career-Readiness Efforts in Tennessee**

**Sandra Poirier**

**Megan E. Sager**

**Emily T. Kounlavong**

Middle Tennessee State University

*This article discusses ways family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators in the State of Tennessee prepare students for college and career-related experiences. Initiatives to highlight the profession generally, and Middle Tennessee State University's FCS program specifically, are provided.*

“Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success. . . . A generation ago, we led all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us. . . . We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves—this must be a national priority. We must ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career.” (Barack Obama, 2010)

With its recognition that “nearly every good job requires some postsecondary education and/or training” in today’s job market, the State of Tennessee embraces President Obama’s challenge to prepare its students for college and careers (achieve.org, n.d.) Family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators within the state are reaching out to prepare students to succeed in life as they teach important life skills, career concepts, and career cluster courses at the secondary level. This article focuses on practices currently being implemented in Tennessee to prepare students for their future college and career experiences as well as future careers related to FCS education.

### **College and Career-Readiness Efforts in Tennessee**

Along with the states of Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nevada, Texas, and Virginia, Tennessee defines career and college readiness as “the knowledge, skills, academic preparation, and foundations expected to ensure student success in two- and four-year college credit-bearing courses, without remediation” (Conforti, 2013). Tennessee became a groundbreaking state by being the first to provide a college education for its students at no cost. With Governor Bill Haslam’s initiative, known as the Tennessee Promise, graduating seniors are being offered two full years of college coursework at any community or technical college in the state (Drive to 55 Alliance, 2014). This opportunity is offered free of charge for any senior graduating in the class of 2015 or thereafter. This is an amazing offer, but it comes with the pressing need to prepare all students for college and careers. Because Tennessee requires all students to take at least three courses in an elective area, enrollment in FCS classes at the high school level has not changed substantially; however, because more students are able to attend a post-secondary institution, they may use this initiative to follow their dreams to pursue a career in FCS. Governor Haslam projected that approximately 13,000 students would take advantage of this unique opportunity, but was surprised to find that over 22,000 students were enrolled in this program in its first year (Smith, 2015).

The State of Tennessee has implemented two learning programs to increase college and career readiness. These programs, the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers* and *Lottery for Education: Afterschool Programs*, focus on enriching the academic opportunities in low-income schools by helping students meet state standards (TN Department of Education, n.d.)

Tennessee's high school CTE curriculum has also been sequenced so that each class builds on previous classes. By organizing courses in this way, students receive all core courses necessary to be college and career ready. According to a pamphlet published by the American College Test, students who take all core courses during high school are likely to be better prepared for college and a career than those who do not (ACT, inc., 2014).

While many programs are being offered at the state level to prepare students for college and a career, FCS educators are also doing their part. Several Tennessee schools are offering career fairs solely to introduce possible career fields in career and technical education hoping that students will discover a passion and work harder in their classes. Many FCS teachers have also incorporated the skills that students need in order to be considered college and career ready into their lessons. These skills include reading, writing, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving (Achieve, inc., 2009).

Tennessee FCS teachers have found ways to help their students with these skills. Students often do group work, practice interviews, write papers, and participate in the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America Star Events. FCS teachers in Tennessee urge their students to take part in the Star events because preparing for any of the events requires the use of all of the skills needed to be declared college and career ready. FCS educators in Tennessee hope that students leave their classrooms with an idea of what they want to do following high school and a knowledge of how to attain those goals.

Many courses in FCS also provide students with the opportunity to participate in internships to help them prepare for a career not only in this field, but every field. During these internships, students learn valuable lessons about what is expected of them in a job. FCS courses in Tennessee involving internships include Early Childhood Careers IV, Human Services Practicum, and Teaching as a Profession III. These internship opportunities are perhaps the most influential thing that FCS educators are doing to prepare students for postsecondary education or a career.

There is a statewide shortage of FCS educators in Tennessee currently, guaranteeing anyone graduating with a FCS education degree an opportunity for a job right after college. With this major, college graduates are also prepared to work in the UT Extension Office. In this position, an FCS agent will work to prepare interesting and much needed lessons to help people of all ages live happier, healthier lives.

### **Initiatives at Middle Tennessee State University**

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) faculty and students are participating in a nationwide movement to promote the career shortage of FCS educators. This movement, appropriately titled *Say Yes to FCS*, was started in Kansas (Randel & Spavone, 2016) to showcase the many opportunities and benefits that accompany a career in FCS education. At MTSU, FCS has been promoted in several ways. Faculty and students have participated in career fairs and published many resources including PowerPoints, fact sheets, fun activities for students such as crossword puzzles, and many more. These resources have been sent to local FCS teachers to help them raise awareness and interest in FCS with their students. MTSU students and faculty have also been heavily involved in a local community center where they have been

able to conduct nutrition classes with middle school students. Every time they are out in the community, they promote FCS. In response to these efforts, many middle and high school students have expressed interest in FCS at the collegiate level.

In addition, FCS is promoted annually as a part of the “Legislative Day on the Hill” held in Nashville. University students majoring in a variety of academic and CTE fields from across the state visit “the Hill” where they can talk to legislators about their field and what they would like to see in the future.

Many colleges, including MTSU, provide funds in the form of scholarships to help students in varying fields prepare to become FCS educators. Most universities in Tennessee also promote FCS by giving back to their communities. Several ways that state schools have given back include collecting donations for the Flint Water Crisis in Michigan, packing boxes for Operation Christmas Child (Sanders, 2016), raising money for St. Jude’s Up Til Dawn (Sanders, 2016), and building houses with Habitat for Humanity. By participating in these community service opportunities, FCS students are also promoting FCS and what the field stands for, which is bettering the lives of ourselves, our posterity, and the community as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

The State of Tennessee ensures that students are college and career ready by providing them with opportunities to engage in real-world experiences during high school and offering them the possibility of a free college education. Tennessee’s FCS educators are working, more than ever, to provide students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills so that these students can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them. Tennessee urges FCS students and educators to promote the profession and make a difference in the communities in which they live.

FCS, as a profession, focuses on improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities. With this said, should we not do everything in our power to accomplish this mission? FCS educators are currently in short supply. In order to guarantee that the profession is around for many years, we must continue to recruit new teachers to continue FCS classes for many generations to come.

### **References**

- Achieve, inc. (2009, May 1). *What Is College- And Career-Ready?* Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/what-college-and-career-ready>
- Achieve.org. (2016). *How states are making career readiness count: A 2016 update.* Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/publications/how-states-are-making-career-readiness-count-2016-update>
- ACT, inc. (2014). *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2014: Tennessee.* Retrieved from [https://www.tbr.edu/sites/tbr.edu/files/media/2015/02/Tennessee ACT College](https://www.tbr.edu/sites/tbr.edu/files/media/2015/02/Tennessee%20ACT%20College)
- Conforti, P. A. (2013, May). *What is college and career readiness? A summary of state definitions.* New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc. Retrieved from [http://researchnetwork.pearson.com/wp-content/uploads/TMRS-RIN\\_Bulletin\\_22CRCDefinitions\\_051313.pdf](http://researchnetwork.pearson.com/wp-content/uploads/TMRS-RIN_Bulletin_22CRCDefinitions_051313.pdf)
- Drive to 55 Alliance. (2014). *Tennessee Promise.* Retrieved from <http://driveto55.org/initiatives/tennessee-promise/>

- Obama, B. (2010, March). *A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act*. United States Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>
- Randel, G. & Spavone, S. (2016). Say yes to FCS: A national campaign to meet the demand for FCS teachers. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 33 (Special Issue 1), x-xx.
- Sanders, E. (Ed.). (2016, February). FCS students give back to the community. *The Department of Family and Consumer Sciences Alumni Newsletter*, p.6.
- Smith, A. A. (2015, August 26). Responding to free. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/08/26/first-batch-tennessee-promise-students-kick-academic-year>
- TN Department of Education. (n.d.) *Extended learning & afterschool programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.tn.gov/education/topic/extended-learning>

### **About the Authors**

Sandra L. Poirier is a professor of Family and Consumer Sciences Education in the Department of Human Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Megan E. Sager is an undergraduate student majoring in Family and Consumer Sciences Education in the Department of Human Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Emily T. Kounlavong is an undergraduate student majoring in Family and Consumer Sciences Education in the Department of Human Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

### **Citation**

Poirier, S., Sager, M.E., & Kounlavong, E.T. (2016). Recruiting family and consumer sciences professionals through career-readiness efforts in Tennessee. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 33 (Special Issue 1), 16-19. Available at <http://www.natefacs.org/Pages/v33se1Poirier.pdf>.