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THEC Releases 2016 LEAP Annual Report As Program Furthers Education and Industry Alignment

NASHVILLE – *January 5* – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has released the [2016 Annual Report for the Labor Education Alignment Education Program \(LEAP\)](#), highlighting the early successes of LEAP in local communities in engaging education and employers to develop a pipeline of skilled workers in Tennessee. The report showcases LEAP as a model for alignment between industry and education.

LEAP is one of the primary initiatives of the Drive to 55, Governor Bill Haslam's push to grow Tennessee's postsecondary educational attainment rate to 55 percent by 2025. LEAP ensures that Tennessee graduates possess the requisite skills needed by employers across the state and that workers are trained in the jobs that will support Tennessee's economic future. The report incorporates [data from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development](#) about which jobs will be in highest demand in coming years and industries where the greatest skills gaps exist.

In January 2015, THEC awarded \$10 million in LEAP grants to twelve local programs across the state. The community-led partnerships, comprised of industry partners, postsecondary institutions, K12 educators, and workforce development professionals, were tasked with aligning educational training and postsecondary credentials with the needs of regional industry employers. As of December 2015, **1,591 high school** students have enrolled in courses enhanced or funded by LEAP and **630 college students** have enrolled in LEAP-supported programs. In total, **13,363 students** have engaged in LEAP-funded programming, including work-based learning experiences, career exploration programs, and other industry-focused learning activities.

"LEAP is a model for how education and workforce can innovate together to change communities," said Russ Deaton, THEC's interim executive director. "The local leaders implementing LEAP are ensuring that students gain exceptional training to power Tennessee's workforce and economy."

The 2016 LEAP Annual Report outlines the programs that have been developed in local communities to address the skills gap. Program highlights include:

- **Manufacturing and Mechatronics for Soldiers and Students** is focused on training students in Mechatronics, with a particular focus on training veterans in partnership with Fort Campbell. The first cohort of Mechatronics students at Fort Campbell graduated in December, with a 96.7 percent graduation rate.
- **Advanced Manufacturing, Industrial Maintenance, & Mechatronics in the Upper Cumberland** is developing opportunities for both high school students and college students to gain postsecondary certificates and fill job openings in the region's advanced manufacturing industry. Through LEAP, the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Livingston was able to purchase additional training equipment and significantly expand its dual enrollment opportunities to high school students in surrounding counties, enrolling 118 local high school students at the TCAT in the fall of 2015.
- The **IT Pathway Collaborative** program, which focuses on Williamson, Davidson, and Sumner counties, is encouraging local students to enter the IT field. This LEAP program has partnered with 27 local IT employers to reach out to students and is building out the www.webuildtech.com website to help middle school and high school students explore tech careers.

Myra West, director of the TCAT in Livingston, noted that LEAP has provided a major benefit to the Upper Cumberland, "LEAP has transformed our ability to train students and provide highly skilled graduates to employers in our area. From the additional training equipment to dedicated instruction, LEAP has allowed us to expand our dual enrollment programs to serve even more students here in the Upper Cumberland."

The report also includes three recommendations to legislators to ensure the program's continuous growth and success:

- Appropriate funds to sustain current programs.
- Expand LEAP program to new parts of the state.
- Develop structures and resources for increased work-based learning and internship programs.

LEAP was established in 2013 when the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 338, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris (R-Collierville) and House Majority Leader Gerald McCormick (R-Chattanooga). The program is administered by THEC and advised by the Governor's Workforce Sub-Cabinet.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission coordinates two systems of higher education, the University of Tennessee institutions governed by the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and the state universities, community colleges, and colleges of applied technology governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents. There are nine public universities, two special purpose institutes, 13 community colleges, and 27 colleges of applied technology in Tennessee that educate over 240,000 students.