

STEP Ahead >>>

SUMMER
NEWS
JUNE, 2024

A Note from Executive Director, Karen Harrison

As the world marvels at the celestial wonders of an eclipse and the breathtaking dance of the Northern Lights gracing Tennessee skies, here at TNSTEP, we're also gearing up for a season of brilliance and possibility. Just as these natural phenomena captivate us, we're excited to share the remarkable happenings within our organization as we step into the summer months.

Just as the Northern Lights paint the night sky with vivid hues, TNSTEP seeks to illuminate the lives of families with a vibrant spectrum of opportunities and resources. From educational workshops to community outreach programs, we're committed to shining a light on the diverse needs and aspirations of every individual we serve. Together, we create a tapestry of support that fosters growth, resilience, and joy.

As summer approaches, TNSTEP is buzzing with excitement and energy. Our team is hard at work, planning engaging activities, workshops, and events designed to inspire, educate, and uplift. We understand that each child's journey is unique, and we're dedicated to ensuring every child receives the education they need to thrive. From advocating for inclusive learning environments to providing resources for skill development and beyond, we're passionate about empowering families to advocate for their children's educational rights.

So, as you embrace the warmth and adventure of summer, remember that TNSTEP is here to support you every step of the way. Let's ensure that each child's educational journey is filled with opportunities for growth, discovery, and success. Contact us with your questions, concerns, or to connect. We're here to help make this summer—and every season—a time of learning, growth, and possibility for your child.

Whether you're a parent seeking support, a volunteer eager to make a difference, or a supporter cheering us on from afar, there's a place for you in our TNSTEP family. Here's to a summer filled with brightness, both in the sky and in our hearts.

Warm regards,

Karen Harrison



In this edition...

[10 Cool Summer Activities from Porter-Leath](#)

[TNSTEP's Youth Transition Tour Visits Bledsoe County Schools](#)

[Tennessee High School Diploma Options](#)

[Inspiration Station: Stories of Success](#)


[Staff Spotlight: Fun Facts About Joey Ellis](#)

[A HUB of Disability Resources from TN Pathfinder](#)

[Summer Holiday Highlights](#)



TNSTEP YOUTH TRANSITION TOUR AND PARENT PREP RALLY



TNSTEP Youth Transition Tour Visits Bledsoe County Schools

TNSTEP successfully launched its 2024 Youth Transition Tour and Parent Prep Rally at Bledsoe County High School on April 28th. TNSTEP youth mentors spent the day talking with 93 students who have IEPs or 504 Plans about the importance of self-advocacy, how to become more independent, and strategies they can use to help them live their best lives after high school.

Students were encouraged to engage in these important conversations throughout the event, speaking into the microphone, building confidence, and learning new and relatable things about their classmates. The teens talked about the challenges they face because of their disability, their career goals, and what they're doing and need to be doing to prepare for adult life. Drawings for Amazon and McDonalds gift cards, Samsung tablets, and other small gifts were held as incentives for students to return on time, after breaks—another important lesson for teens and young adults.

“This event seamlessly blends education with entertainment, captivating 8th-12th graders with fun activities, while secretly imparting crucial transition education,” said Corey Garrett, Director of Special Education for Bledsoe County Schools. “TNSTEP is leading the way in preparing our youth for a bright and independent future.”

As a new addition to the tour, a Parent Prep Rally was held in the evening, where parents of transition-age teens joined the TNSTEP team for dinner, a presentation packed full of transition resources, activities, and a Q&A. Parents were empowered with tools, strategies, and a better understanding of the important role they play in their teen’s transition plan. Yes, pom-poms were involved, and fun was had! Let’s all cheer—resources are here!

The TNSTEP Youth Transition Tour will resume in August making stops in Middle and West Tennessee with the support of Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, Nashville Predators, and Rehabilitation Services Administration.

For information on scheduling a Youth Transition Tour event at your school, contact SUTP@tnstep.info.



Inspiration Station Featuring TNSTEP Parent, Ryanne

My name is Ryanne, and I am a divorced, mother of three children. My oldest daughter Nakhila was diagnosed With Autism Spectrum Disorder at the age of 7 and my only son was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder at the age of 13.

I was always taught that it take a village to raise a child. That is a very true statement. Around 2009 when my daughter was first diagnosed, I felt so lost however I did not want to fail my child. Early on I realized I had to seek out resources to help me to understand my child and help my child. Throughout my daughter’s education in school, I found my village by locating resources and educational support programs such as TNSTEP.

Despite any adversity and or challenges I gained strength and motivation through my faith, family, friends and advocacy programs to surpass. Today I would like to encourage you. You are not alone. The road may seem rough but you will get through as long as you keep striving to advocate for your children. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Today, Nakhila is 21, thriving as an adult, and living at home. In May, 2023, she graduated from The Edge Program at Union University in Jackson, TN. My son Nevin is a thriving 10th grader looking forward to becoming a junior in high school. Although our journey has not always been easy, my experiences have made me who I am today. In 2019, I completed The Volunteer Advocacy Project. In my spare time, can provide instrumental and effective support to families of children with disabilities within my community and surrounding communities voluntarily. I appreciate TNSTEP for being there for me, providing support for me and my children, when I needed them, and allowing me to share my story with you. Thank you, TNSTEP.

Inspiring Station Submissions: Do you have an inspiring story to share? We would love to hear from you! Please submit your stories to be featured in our newsletter. Email your submissions to Katherine Williams: katherine.williams@tnstep.info.

Diploma Options in Tennessee

High School is designed to help a young person make the transition into adulthood and prepare for their future. In the state of Tennessee, students receiving special education services have four options for diplomas when graduating from high school. These options are the regular diploma, the Alternate Academic Diploma (AAD), the Occupational Diploma, and the Special Education Diploma.



Regular Education Diploma

- Must be earned within four years plus a summer to count towards graduation rates
- A student with an IEP can return to school to pursue a regular diploma until they receive the diploma or until they age out of school at 21 inclusive, whichever comes first. "Twenty-one inclusive" means if a student is 21 at the beginning of their final year of high school, they can stay in school and continue to receive special education services during the school year in which they turn 22.
- Must complete 22 units of credit, take an ACT or SAT, and have a satisfactory record of attendance and discipline. Special Education within the school system is complete once a regular education diploma is earned.

Alternate Academic Diploma

- Recognizes the learning and success of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Diploma aligns with the coursework and ACT requirements of students earning a Regular Education Diploma. It helps to ensure that all students have access to rigorous and meaningful instruction.

Occupational Diploma

- Awarded to a student who has successfully: Completed a Skills, Knowledge, and Mastery Assessment (**SKEMA**) with a performance level of "3" or higher on all four Required skills, or a performance level of "3" or higher on 8 of 10 Critical skills
- Completed their IEP
- Attended school regularly
- Completed two years of work experience, paid or unpaid
- Choosing the Occupational Diploma is an IEP Team decision made on or after the conclusion of the 10th grade or two years prior to exiting high school.
- Students may work toward **both** the Occupational Diploma and a Regular Education Diploma.
- View the full SKEMA Assessment: <https://bit.ly/3AfuFzh>

Special Education Diploma

- Awarded to a student who does not meet the requirements of a regular diploma but has completed an IEP and has a satisfactory record of attendance and discipline



Information provided by:
Joey Ellis, Director of Youth Services &
Dorca Rose, Bilingual Community Outreach
and Education Specialist



10 Cool SUMMER ACTIVITIES

from Porter-Leath



It's crucial to address and mitigate the potential for summer learning loss, especially in younger children at such a formative stage of development. Here are some tips parents can employ to keep their children engaged and learning during the summer months:

1. **Read Every Day:** Encourage a daily reading routine. Reading aloud to your child or having them read to you can improve vocabulary, comprehension, and language skills. Visit the library regularly to explore new books together.
2. **Incorporate Learning into Play:** Utilize games and activities that incorporate learning concepts such as counting, sorting, matching, and identifying colors and shapes. This can include board games, puzzles, building blocks, and imaginative play.
3. **Outdoor Exploration:** Take advantage of outdoor activities to encourage learning through exploration. Nature walks, gardening, and trips to parks or museums can provide hands-on learning experiences and foster curiosity about the world.
4. **Arts and Crafts:** Engage in creative activities like drawing, painting, crafting, and sculpting. These activities encourage fine motor skills and allow children to express themselves and explore their creativity.
5. **Educational Apps and Websites:** Introduce age-appropriate educational apps and websites that offer interactive games and activities designed to reinforce early learning concepts in literacy, numeracy, and other areas of development.
6. **Cooking Together:** Involve your child in simple cooking or baking activities. This not only teaches practical skills but also incorporates math concepts like measuring and counting and science concepts like observing changes in materials.
7. **Maintain a Routine:** While summer offers more flexibility, maintaining a consistent daily routine can provide structure and stability for young children. Include designated times for learning activities, outdoor play, meals, and rest.
8. **Encourage Curiosity:** Foster a love of learning by encouraging your child's natural curiosity. Answer their questions, explore topics of interest together, and provide opportunities for hands-on learning experiences that cater to their interests and strengths.
9. **Emotional Regulation:** Talking about discoveries provides opportunities for children to express their emotions and learn how to manage them effectively. Parents can support their children in identifying and understanding their feelings, leading to better emotional regulation and coping strategies.
10. **Incorporating Home Libraries:** Access to books at home has been consistently linked to higher educational achievement. **Preventing Summer Learning Loss:** Reading during the summer months is crucial for preventing the decline in reading achievement known as the "Summer Slide." Just five books can make a significant difference in maintaining reading skills over the break. Research indicates that children from homes with a rich literary environment tend to complete more years of schooling, highlighting the long-term impact of access to books.

By incorporating these tips into their summer routine, parents can help prevent the "Summer Learning Slide" and support their child's ongoing development and readiness for Kindergarten and beyond.

Some additional fun and engaging activities to explore Memphis are attached to the following link: <https://www.memphistravel.com/trip-ideas/free-things-do-in-memphis-with-kids>.



"Porter-Leath is a nonprofit organization that offers programs and services to empower children and families to achieve a healthy, optimal, and independent lifestyle" (porterleath.org)

MONEY FOR COLLEGE >>>>

Tennessee offers a range of scholarship opportunities to support students on their educational journeys. There are resources designed to help make college more affordable. Additionally, non-traditional students and those with intellectual disabilities can find tailored support. Explore the following options to find the financial assistance that suits your needs.



For more information visit:

<https://www.tn.gov/thec/learn-about/student-resources.html> or <https://www.collegefortn.org/tsacstudentportal/>

TENNESSEE HOPE SCHOLARSHIP Lottery revenue-based and available only to Tennessee residents.

<https://www.collegefortn.org/tennessee-hope-scholarship-3/>

For Non-Traditional students, see here: <https://www.collegefortn.org/tennessee-hope-scholarship-for-home-school/>

TENNESSEE PROMISE Provides students with a last-dollar scholarship, meaning the scholarship will cover tuition and fees not covered by the Pell Grant, the HOPE scholarship, or state student assistance funds. Students may use the scholarship at an eligible associate degree program.

<https://www.tn.gov/tnpromise>

TENNESSEE STEP-UP SCHOLARSHIP Assists students with intellectual disabilities who have completed high school and enrolled in an individualized program of study of up to four (4) years at an eligible postsecondary institution. <https://www.collegefortn.org/tennessee-step-up-scholarship/>

Staff Spotlight:

Fun Facts About Joey Ellis, Director of Youth Services

By Donna Jennings

What would your dream car be?

A 67-69 Camaro blue with white stripes.

Who is the most famous person you have met?

Amy Grant and Vince Gill

Spring, Summer, Fall or Winter? Fall

Favorite Entertainment Venue?

Nashville's Ryman Auditorium

One thing on your bucket list? To buy a beach house.





A HUB of Disability Resources

Whether you are assisting a child at your center with disability services or trying to help a family navigate on their own, turn to Pathfinder to make the task more simple.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder ("Pathfinder"), helps people with disabilities, their family members, educators, and other professionals find and access disability resources, support, and services across the state. Pathfinder has a directory of services that contains over 3,000 agency resources in Tennessee organized by county, including rural areas and marginalized communities.

Pathfinder is considered a centralized location (a hub) for resource information and can help you navigate in the right direction to finding resources for children's specific needs and in their local area. Resource information can be obtained by searching Pathfinder's Directory of Services on our website or by calling our team of experienced information and referral specialists.

Call Pathfinder

Pathfinder has a team of dedicated individuals who are passionate about their work and very knowledgeable about the availability of resources within the state. With care, attention to detail, active listening, and research skills honed by decades of lived and professional experience, our team is committed to serving all Tennesseans who need assistance finding disability resources. The Pathfinder team also consists of multicultural services coordinators who can assist people who speak languages other than English and live in marginalized communities.

Search Website

Pathfinder's website, TNPathfinder.org, is a step-by-step search tool that allows users to determine how broad or narrow their results will be based on the following criteria:

- Stage of Life: Prenatal/Infancy, Early Childhood, School Age, Transition / Young Adult, Adulthood, Aging,
- Topic of Interest: 25 different service categories to select,
- Diagnosis: 18 different types of disability or health conditions to select,
- Benefit / Payment Options: Forms of payment, such as type of insurance, government program, private pay, or no cost, accepted by the agency provider,
- Service Area: Select counties where services are provided.

We are committed to helping you find the resource information specific to your needs or the needs of a person you are supporting.

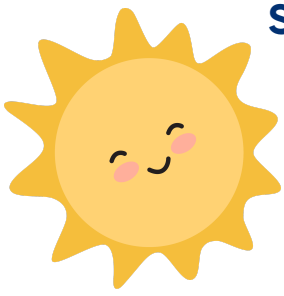
Contact Information:

Statewide Helpline: 800-640-4636 or tnpathfinder@vumc.org

Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Website: TNPathfinder.org

Social Media: @TNPathfinder



Summer Holiday Highlights

By Donna Jennings

June 4, National Cheese Day
June 19, Juneteenth
June 27, National Sunglasses Day

July 4, Fourth of July
July 21, National Ice Cream Day
July 28, National Parent Day



Save the Date: Upcoming Events

Summer 2024 Youth Leadership Academy
hosted by Empower Tennessee.

Here is the link for more information.

<https://tnstep.info/event/summer-2024-yla/>

CONNECT WITH TNSTEP!

ESPAÑOL: (800) 975-2919

BUSINESS OFFICE: (423) 639-0125 (phone)

TOLL-FREE: (800) 280-7837

gethelp@tnstep.info

Follow us online at tnstep.info and on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn at @tnstep

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If mailing an item to our business office, please send to TNSTEP, 1113 Tusculum Blvd. #393, Greeneville, TN 37745.

If coming by for an appointment, the physical address is 113 Austin Street, Greeneville, TN 37745.



Tell a parent of a child with a
disability or special health care need

"You don't have to walk
this journey alone."

by making a donation today.

www.tnstep.info

