NORTHEAST STATE AT 50

OUR HISTORY:
A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE
A long-ago U.S. education act breathed life into Northeast State, with the simple charge: “to provide education for persons of substantially varying needs.”

Through the years, we’ve had name changes, different presidents, new buildings, and a thousand other transformations. But Northeast State has always held true to that original mission of serving individuals with diverse needs.

All types of learners, with all types of dreams have taken advantage of a Northeast State education. Whether a student needed a place to start, a second chance, or a boost to the next level, our college has lived up to its motto: “We’re Here to Get You There.”

Northeast State students have become valued employees and solid citizens. They are mechanics, welders, accountants, attorneys, nurses, teachers, police officers, physician’s assistants, office workers, entrepreneurs, engineers, programmers, and paramedics, to name a few. They are Northeast State’s legacy of excellence.

While it’s impossible to tell the college’s complete story in a few paragraphs and bullet points, what follows are some of the milestones that have been achieved. As you can see, it’s a journey of progress, starting in 1966 as a vocational school with two buildings, six programs, and 35 students; and arriving in 2016 as a comprehensive community college with five campuses, 150 programs, and more than 6,000 students.

Timeline highlights


1964 Construction begins on the Tri-Cities Area Vocational-Technical School in Blountville.

1966 Classes begin with 35 students and six programs. By fall semester, 120 students are enrolled.

1966 James M. Pierce becomes first superintendent of Tri-Cities Vocational-Technical School.

1966 Auto mechanics taught state-of-the-art diagnostics and hands-on skills.

1966 Cover of first student handbook.
BIRTH OF AN INSTITUTION

Northeast State had its start as Tri-Cities Area Vocational-Technical School, led by a superintendent named James M. Pierce.

Pierce, a cigar-chomping one-man show, managed public relations, marketing, recruiting, curriculum development, and, of course, other duties as assigned. He put the school on its feet in the spring of 1966; and, by fall, 120 students were enrolled, with evening classes also offered for working adults.

Three years later, 18,000 square feet were added to accommodate the growing enrollment, which by this time had climbed to 400 students. The expansion led to creating a Technical Division and added technical associate degrees – the first-ever offered in Tennessee. To reflect the changes, our school’s name was changed to Tri-Cities Regional Vocational-Technical School.

We achieved candidacy status for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1972, and construction of an Automotive and Welding building followed in 1975.

To reflect our evolving mission, our name was once again changed in 1978 to Tri-Cities State Technical Institute, with all 16 programs meeting requirements as associate degrees. By the end of the decade, enrollment had reached 1,400 students.

Timeline highlights

1966 Ray Dixon, welding instructor

1969 18,000 square feet added to accommodate growing enrollment, now up to 400 students.


1969 UNIVAC

1970 School renamed the Tri-Cities Regional Vocational-Technical School.

1972 School granted candidacy status for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
1972
Open house event

1974
Proud graduates

1978
School renamed Tri-Cities State Technical Institute; all 16 programs become associate degree programs.

1979
Enrollment swells to 1,400 students by the end of the decade.

BEGINNINGS

Ed Guyer, drafting instructor, 1966

Edwina Paul, office occupations instructor, 1966

Tri-Cities Regional Vocational-Technical School in the early 1970s
RAPID GROWTH AND TENNESSEE BOARD OF REGENTS RECOGNITION

As the 1980s dawned, growth was so rapid the school had to use the old Holston Middle School for teaching classes in English, math, and social studies. Our growing enrollment — now at 1,800 students — eventually led to several construction projects during this decade: the building of an auditorium in 1982, a new Administration Building in 1983, and a General Studies Building in 1985.

Notably, it was also in 1983 that we became part of the Tennessee State Board of Regents (TBR) system. Also, Pierce retired after 18 years at the school’s helm. He was succeeded by Dr. James Owen, who guided us through accreditation (1984) from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and ushered in the computer age with the largest single computer equipment acquisition in our history. His other achievements included creating a foundation for fundraising (1985) and purchasing about 60 acres of land adjacent to the campus that would later be used in multi-million dollar expansion projects.

After nearly four years of service, Owen departed for Piedmont Community College — to be replaced by Dr. R. Wade Powers on July 1, 1987. Fresh from serving as interim president at Motlow State, Powers led our institution through some of the most important changes in our institution’s history. His biggest challenge was achieving the TBR’s mandate to expand Tri-Cities State Tech into a comprehensive community college. To that end, he and his staff spent much of 1988-89 readying the school to offer college-transfer credits, which meant developing new curricula and hiring new faculty.

As 1990 approached, we eagerly anticipated a new era of technical advancement and university parallel education.

Timeline highlights

1979 Enrollment climbs to 1,800. Overflow classes meet in the old Holston Middle School building.

1982 Auditorium building constructed.

1982 Student services building constructed.

1982 Ground breaking held for Pierce Administration Building.
Superintendent James M. Pierce retires; Dr. James Owen takes the helm as Tri-Cities State Technical Institute’s administrative leader. Tri-Cities Tech becomes part of the Tennessee State Board of Regents system. Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Tri-Cities Tech invests in the future with the largest single computer equipment acquisition in the school’s history. Tri-Cities Tech Foundation is established. 60 acres of land adjacent to campus is purchased, making future expansion possible. Dr. R. Wade Powers (left) begins his tenure as president of Tri-Cities State Technical Institute.
1990 was a watershed year for Northeast State. We officially became a comprehensive community college on July 1, 1990. Tri-Cities State Tech was now Northeast State Technical Community College, which prompted a rise in enrollment to 2,826 — a 35 percent increase over the previous year. Academic offerings were expanded at off-campus sites in Bluff City, Elizabethton, Erwin, and Mountain City — and evening classes added at neighboring Holston Middle School.

In the spring of 1991, Northeast State started construction on a $5.5 million project that included student services and faculty office buildings. We also broke ground on a Center for Applied Technology in Gray — a facility for providing specialized workforce training.

By 1993, enrollment exceeded 3,500 students, which prompted the Tennessee Board of Regents to approve funding for a 25,000 square-foot classroom/laboratory building. Completed in 1995, the facility was later named the Powers Science/Math Building, in honor of Dr. R. Wade Powers. Northeast State also landed a significant Department of Education grant in 1994, designed to increase our scholarship endowment. Based on a two-for-one matching component, we were charged with raising $250,000 to achieve $500,000 in matching funds.

We quickly reached the goal, and $750,000 was placed, per grant regulations, in an investment account for 20 years. The funds would later play a huge role in a technology initiative in 2015.

Powers retired in early 1996 and was succeeded by Dr. William W. Locke, former vice president for academic affairs at Walters State Community College.
Northeast State celebrated its 30-year anniversary in 1996 with a day-long celebration that included tours, music, workshops, and storytelling. That same year, we also welcomed a visit from U.S. Vice President Al Gore, who drew an estimated 3,000 people into our courtyard.

By fall of 1999, we had broken the 4,000-student enrollment barrier, having added more than 1,000 students in a little more than five years. The late ‘90s also saw one of our greatest dreams realized when Gov. Don Sundquist authorized funds for a $12.8 million library, which was completed in 2002 and named for Wayne G. Basler, a long-time supporter. This new facility is six times larger than our former library, with the capacity to accommodate 65,000 volumes. The project also added much needed parking.

In 2001, Northeast State established a partnership with the City of Kingsport and Sullivan County to create the Educate and Grow Scholarship program, which provided two years of tuition to graduating high school students. Our initiative served as inspiration for Gov. Bill Haslam’s Tennessee Promise program, which he unveiled more than a decade later.

Wayne G. Basler Library, completed in 2002

1994 Department of Education grant offers matching funds to establish a scholarship endowment fund.

1995 The 25,000 sq. ft. classroom and laboratory building is completed, named the Wade Powers Science/Math Building.

1996 Dr. William W. Locke becomes president of Northeast State Community College.

2001 Educate and Grow Scholarship program established for Kingsport and Sullivan County students, pioneering the K–14 education model.

2002 Regional Center for Applied Technology opens in Kingsport.

2004 Northeast State Ambassadors shown at work—part of student leadership since 1991.
KINGSPORT PARTNERSHIPS DRIVE OUR VISION

The footprint for Northeast State’s expansion into the City of Kingsport occurred with the downtown opening of the Regional Center for Applied Technology in 2002. The $1.1 million facility contained classrooms and computer labs, and provided college credit courses and industry-specific training.

Northeast State achieved landmark success in fall 2004, when enrollment exceeded 5,000. That same year, our value to the local region was confirmed when an economic study reported that the school’s presence had contributed $213 million to the economy between 1999 and 2004.

In spring 2006, construction began on a new $15 million humanities complex at our Blountville campus. Building plans included space for the humanities and behavioral/social sciences divisions, as well as a 500-seat theater for the performing arts. Finished in 2007, the facility was named the William W. Locke Humanities Complex — in honor of the school's serving president.

One long-time objective of Locke had been to establish an associate degree in nursing at Northeast State. His goal was realized in 2007, when the State Board of Nursing gave its approval for the program.

As the decade closed, the City of Kingsport and Northeast State also came together, realizing a collaborative vision for higher education and workforce development through what is now known as the Kingsport Academic Village. The effort led to construction of three new buildings for furthering education in the region: the Regional Center for Health Professions, the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing, and the Kingsport Center for Higher Education.

After 13 years at the helm, Locke announced his retirement, effective June 20, 2009. In the days immediately following, our college’s name also changed — this time, to Northeast State Community College — reflecting our institution’s expanded outreach and diverse range of programs.

Locke was succeeded by Dr. Janice H. Gilliam, a former vice president at Haywood Community College. That fall (of 2009), our enrollment increased by 14.6 percent.

Timeline highlights

2007 William W. Locke Humanities Complex completed, including 500-seat theater for the performing arts.

2009 Kingsport Center for Higher Education and Regional Center for Health Professions open in downtown Kingsport.

2009 Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing opens in Kingsport Academic Village.

2009 Pinning ceremony program from Northeast State’s first nursing class recognized with Harvard Innovations in American Government Award.
COMPLETE COLLEGE TENNESSEE ACT SPURS GROWTH

A portion of Northeast State’s recent growth has come to fruition due to the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 — legislation that challenges community colleges across our state to increase participation and completion rates of citizens in higher education.

The Act coincided with our own rising enrollment, which climbed to 6,775 students in fall 2010 — making us the fastest growing community college in the Tennessee Board of Regents system.

Gilliam initiated a visioning campaign, “Access, Completion, and Community,” as a way to inspire Northeast State faculty and staff to meet the state’s new challenge. We met the directive by realizing a number of expansions and projects carried out in Bristol, Elizabethton, Johnson City, and Kingsport. These include:

- Opening the Pal Barger Regional Center for Automotive Programs in downtown Kingsport in 2012.
- A 15,000 square-foot expansion at Northeast State at Elizabethton that will include new instructional and office space.
- The 2013 opening of Northeast State at Bristol located at 620 State Street, which houses our entertainment technology program.
- Starting an aviation maintenance technology program in fall 2014, offering a 29-hour certificate and adding an Associate of Applied Science degree for fall 2016.
- Opening the Northeast State at Johnson City facility in 2015, which debuted with an enrollment of 288 students and contains 38,000 square feet of high-tech teaching space.
- Projected construction (2017) of a $35 million Emerging Technologies Complex on the Blountville campus, which will contain nearly 130,000 square feet for accommodating various business and advanced technologies programs.

![Artist’s rendering of the Emerging Technologies Complex on the Blountville campus, which will house business and advanced technologies programs.](image)

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**2012** Pal Barger Regional Center for Automotive Programs opens in downtown Kingsport.

**2013** Northeast State at Bristol opens with entertainment technology program.

**2014** Aviation maintenance technology program begins, offering a 29-hour certificate.

**2015** Northeast State at Johnson City facility opens with 288 students and 38,000 sq. ft. of high tech teaching space.
The years 2010 through 2015 at Northeast State saw expansion of programs, campuses, renovations, parking lots, an amphitheater, and two new buildings in design phase (Emerging Technologies Complex and expansion of the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing). Notably, it was also in 2010–11 that we saw the largest rise in enrollment on record with 8,700 students.

Possibilities for continued growth were heightened in 2015, when the Tennessee Legislature passed Gov. Haslam’s Tennessee Promise initiative, a scholarship program for high school students that covers remaining tuition and mandatory fees after all other financial aid. The scholarship can be applied at any of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges, 27 colleges of applied technology or other eligible institutions offering an associate’s degree program.

Northeast State complemented this initiative with an iNortheast program, which provided iPad mini 2 devices to Tennessee Promise students and eligible full-time students during the 2015–16 academic year. Funded by the Northeast State Foundation and an Appalachian Regional Commission grant, the program distributed 1,800 devices.

The College posted the largest improvement for a TBR or UT institution in performance outcomes as established by the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010. As a result, a 6 percent increase in the success of students measured by funding formula criteria provided an additional $1 million for the 2015–16 and 2016–17 state budget allocations.

As we go forward, our original mission from the 1960s continues to ring true: “to provide education for persons of substantially varying needs.”

Clearly, we aren’t finished yet.