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OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

**TENNESSEE PROMISE EVALUATION:  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**JULY 2020**



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## Promise program overview

In 2014, the General Assembly passed the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act, giving recent high school graduates an opportunity to earn an associate degree or technical diploma free of tuition and mandatory fees. To date, five cohorts of students (starting with the high school graduating class of 2015) have enrolled in a postsecondary institution using the Promise scholarship. Community-based mentor organizations pair each Promise applicant with a paid or volunteer mentor who assists students with the college application and financial aid process. Promise students must begin an eligible degree program the fall semester immediately following high school graduation and maintain continuous full-time enrollment. Students may receive the Promise scholarship for up to five semesters or eight trimesters, or until they earn a diploma or associate degree.

TCA 49-7-708(f) requires the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) to review, study, and determine the effectiveness of Tennessee Promise. This executive summary includes the key conclusions and policy options from OREA's full report.

### Exhibit 1: Requirements for Promise applicants and students

Senior year of high school and summer after graduation			
Promise applicants			
Fill out Promise application	Fill out FAFSA	Attend mandatory mentor meeting	Complete and report 8 hours of community service
Fall semester/trimester immediately following high school graduation and each semester/trimester thereafter			
Promise students			
Maintain full-time continuous enrollment*	Complete FAFSA verification (if selected) and refile FAFSA annually	Complete and report 8 hours of community service each semester/trimester	Maintain 2.0 cumulative GPA**

Notes: \*The summer term is optional for students who are enrolled in a community college but is not optional for TCAT students. \*\*Students enrolled in a TCAT are required to maintain satisfactory academic progress. Cumulative GPA is calculated at the end of the summer semester.

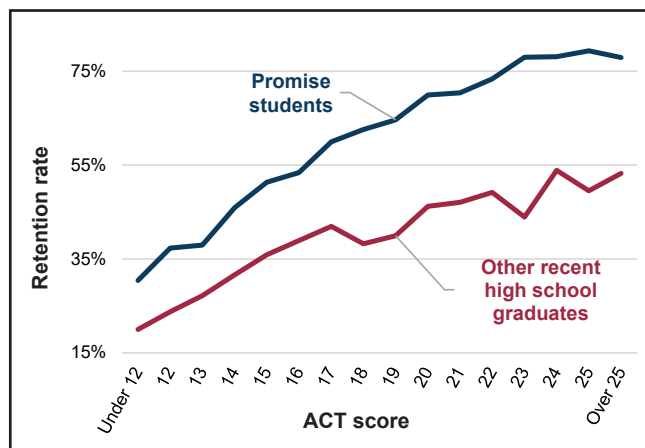
## Key conclusions

**Following the implementation of Tennessee Promise, a larger percentage of recent high school graduates attended college, and those participating in the program accumulated more credits, stayed enrolled longer, and earned credentials at higher rates than their peers.**

In 2015, the first year of the Promise program, the college-going rate increased from 58.4 percent to 64.3 percent.<sup>1</sup> This increase suggests that more students enrolled in college that year than would have absent the Promise program.

Once Promise students enrolled in college, their outcomes exceeded those of their peers. When compared to other recent high school graduates, Promise students at community colleges earned four-and-a-half more credits in their first year, representing an additional class or two. They were also twice as likely to stay enrolled and over twice as likely to earn a credential. OREA estimates that if the Promise program had not existed, between 1,561 and 1,882 fewer credentials would have been awarded at the state's community colleges during the first cohort's five semesters of Promise eligibility.

**Exhibit 2: Percent of students at community colleges who returned for the sophomore year or received a credential, by ACT score and whether they were a Promise student**



Note: This includes students who began at a community college in fall 2015 or fall 2016.

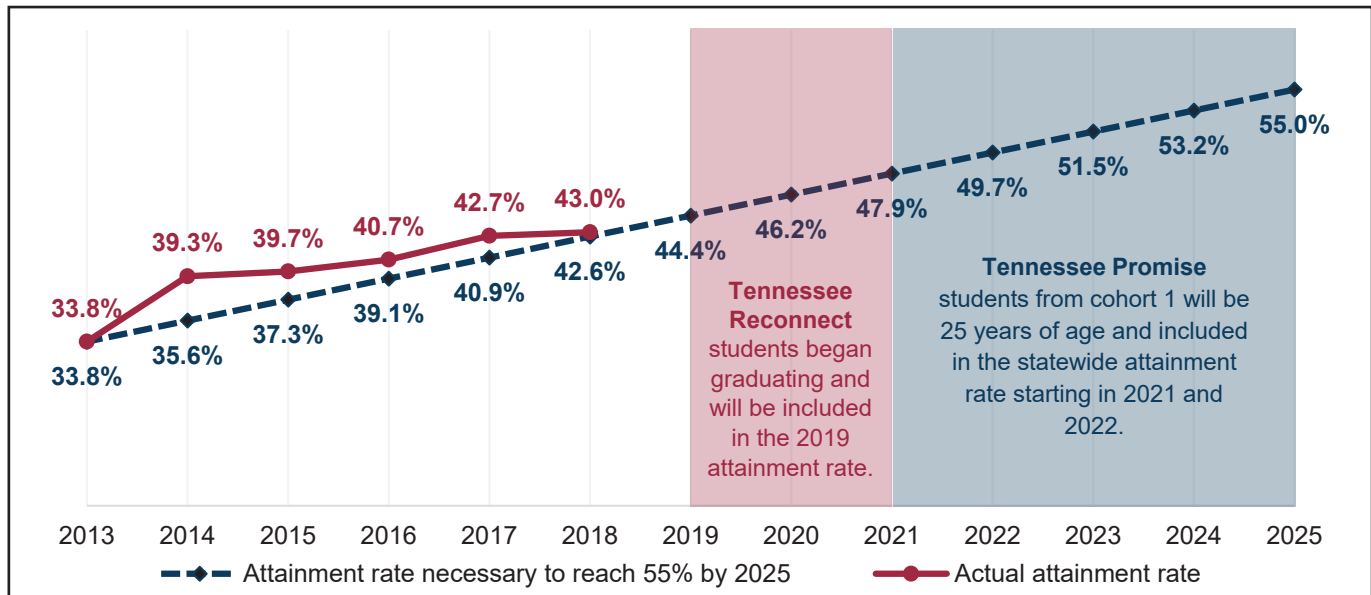
**Promise students will not be included in the Drive to 55 calculation until 2021 and 2022. After Promise students are included, the state will have a better sense of whether it is on track to meet the Drive to 55 goal, or if further efforts are necessary to stay on track.**

The Tennessee Promise program is one initiative in the state's Drive to 55 effort to increase the percentage of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential to 55 by 2025. Progress toward this goal is measured using the attainment rate, which measures the percent of Tennesseans ages 25-65 (also called working-age adults) who have a postsecondary credential (e.g., certificate, diploma, associate degree, bachelor's degree, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Promise students, who generally turn 18 during their senior year of high school, are not included in the attainment rate until they reach the age of 25, which is six or seven years after graduating high school. The first cohort of Promise students graduated high school in 2015, and will not be included in attainment rates until 2021 and 2022. See Exhibit 3.

<sup>1</sup> The college-going rate equals the number of high school graduates who enroll in college following graduation in a given year divided by the total number of high school graduates from the same year.

<sup>2</sup> The attainment rate is measured for residents over the age of 24 because younger Tennesseans are more likely to be working toward a credential and most are still dependents of their parents.

**Exhibit 3: Percentage of Tennesseans (ages 25-65) with a postsecondary credential (red line) and the projected rate necessary for the state to stay on track to meet the Drive to 55 goal (blue line)**



Note: Tennessee Reconnect began in 2018 and provides adult students with last-dollar scholarships to pursue certificates, diplomas, or associate degrees. Reconnect students will be included in the attainment rate earlier than Promise students because Reconnect students are often already over the age of 25, and are counted in the same year that they earn a credential. Some students complete a postsecondary credential shortly after enrolling in the Reconnect program; these students already have most of the necessary credits to earn a credential and complete the remaining credits through the program.

Tennessee’s credential attainment rate rose from 39.3 percent in 2014 to 43.0 percent in 2018 (the most recent attainment rate reported).<sup>3</sup> Over this period, the attainment rate increased a total of 3.7 percentage points, for an average annual growth of 0.93 percentage points. If this level of average annual growth continues in the future, Tennessee will not reach the Drive to 55 goal by 2025. As explained above, though, Tennessee’s attainment rate calculation does not yet include Promise students.

Evidence from OREA’s evaluation suggests that Tennessee Promise will have a positive effect on the attainment rate. The college-going rate has increased since the implementation of Tennessee Promise, meaning that more high school students are going to college directly after graduation.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Tennessee Promise students are more likely than their peers to remain enrolled and earn a credential.

The inclusion of the first Promise cohort may provide more of a positive effect on the attainment rate than cohorts two and three, however. The college-going rate increased in 2015, when the first cohort of Promise students began attending college, but the rate declined (from 64.3 to 63.4 percent) over the next two years, as shown in Exhibit 4.

Tennessee’s postsecondary attainment rate will be reexamined in OREA’s next evaluation of Tennessee Promise (which will begin in late 2021 or early 2022).

<sup>3</sup> The Lumina Foundation posts annual attainment rates by state. As of February 2020, the 2018 rate is the most recent attainment rate reported.

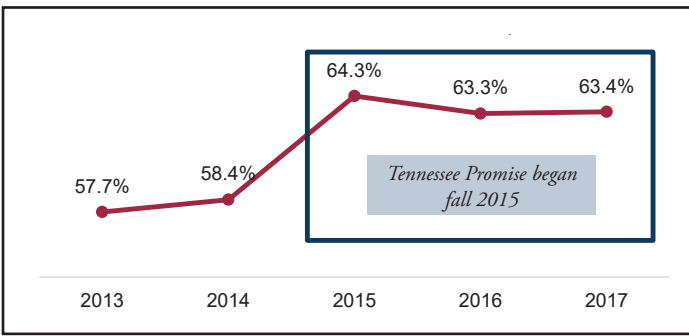
<sup>4</sup> The college-going rate equals the number of public high school graduates who enroll in college following graduation in a given year divided by the total number of public high school graduates from the same year.

**Increasing Tennessee’s postsecondary attainment rate will likely not be possible without increasing participation among students from certain subgroups and areas of the state who historically have not attended college at high rates.**

Tennessee’s college-going rate increased from 58.4 percent to 64.3 percent in the first year of the Tennessee Promise program, then held steady the following two years. (See Exhibit 4).<sup>1</sup> This means that the inclusion of the first Promise cohort will likely provide a positive effect on the attainment rate, while subsequent cohorts are less likely to increase the rate further.

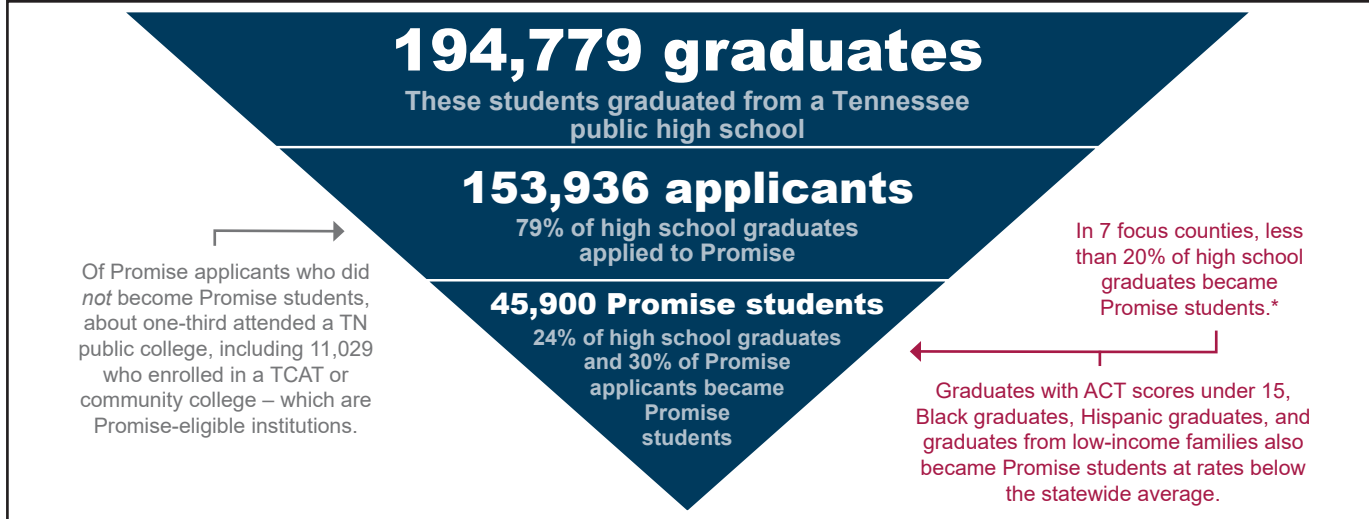
OREA identified several student subgroups and counties with low rates of college attendance before the implementation of Promise; students in these two categories make up the majority (over 80 percent) of high school seniors.

**Exhibit 4: Tennessee college-going rates | 2013-2017**



Note: The college-going rate includes the number of public high school graduates who enrolled in college following graduate in a given year divided by the total number of public high school graduates from the same year.

**Exhibit 5: Number and percent of public high school graduates who applied to Promise and became Promise students | 2014-15 to 2016-17**



Note: \*OREA focused on counties with a college-going rate below the state median in 2014, the year before Promise was implemented.

Promise applicants with low ACT scores, minority applicants, and those from lower-income households were less likely to complete program requirements and become Promise students. In seven counties, 20 percent or less of high school graduates became Promise students (10 percentage points below the statewide average).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The seven counties in which 20 percent or less of high school graduates became Promise students were Hardin, Fayette, Haywood, Stewart, Putnam, Montgomery, and Henry.

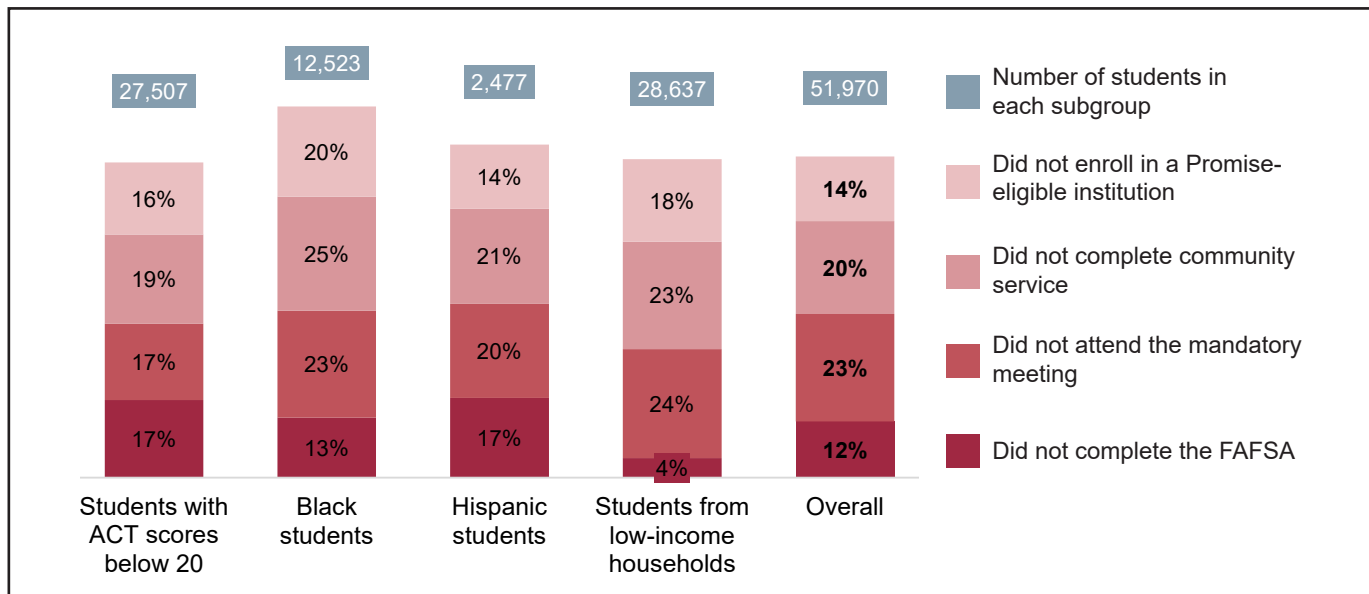
If more students from these subgroups and counties participated in the Promise program, the statewide college-going rate would likely increase.

**The program requirements most often missed by Promise applicants were the mandatory meeting and the community service requirement.**

The Promise application process includes various requirements during the senior year of high school and in the summer following high school graduation. See Exhibit 1. If a student fails to fulfill any of the application requirements, he or she is no longer eligible for the Tennessee Promise scholarship.

Of public high school graduates from 2015 to 2017, almost 80 percent applied to Tennessee Promise. More than two-thirds of those applicants (70 percent) did not complete program requirements to become Promise students. For most student subgroups, this percentage was higher. See Exhibit 6.

**Exhibit 6: Percent of Promise applicants in the third cohort who failed to complete each program requirement | by student subgroup**



Notes: Percentages do not add up to 100 percent because this chart shows only the percent of applicants who did not complete program requirements, and does not include the percent of applicants who became Promise students. Taller bars represent student subgroups in which a larger percent of students missed requirements and became ineligible for the program. Over the first three cohorts, changes were made to the program requirements and data collection. Because the third cohort represents the most up-to-date program requirements, it was the only cohort included in this exhibit.

Understanding which requirements were missed most often can provide insight into where supports could be targeted to increase the number of students who participate in the program.

Overall, attending the mandatory meeting hosted by the mentor organization and completing eight hours of community service were the program requirements that the highest percentage of Promise applicants failed to complete, making them ineligible for the program. Those who missed one of those two requirements represented over 60 percent of applicants who did not ultimately become Promise students.



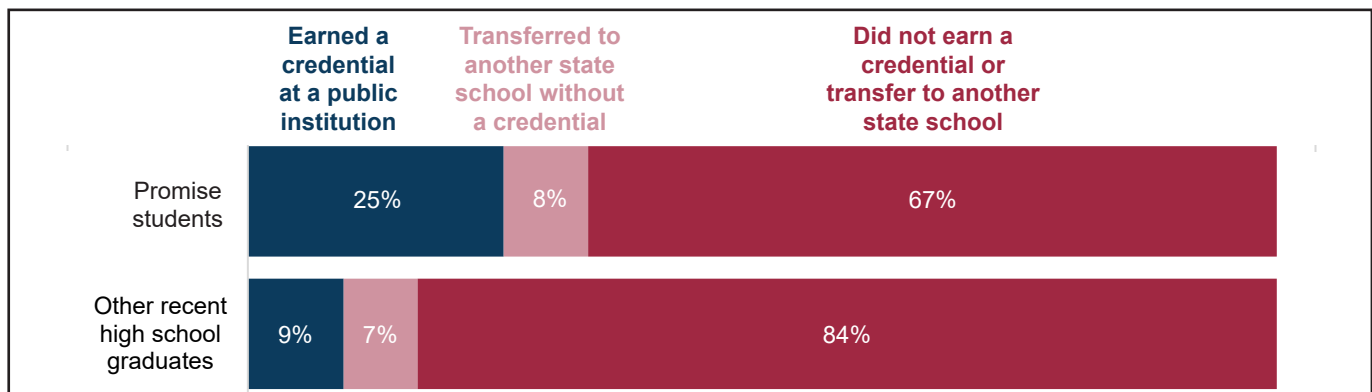
Applicants are expected to attend the mandatory meeting with a mentor organization and complete community service requirements outside of school hours.<sup>6</sup> When asked what typically prevented applicants from becoming Promise students, mentor organizations cited lack of transportation as a barrier, especially for students in rural areas.

There is evidence that some of the students who miss the mandatory meeting or community service would have gone to college as a Promise student if missing those requirements had not made them ineligible. There were approximately 11,000 students in the first three cohorts who applied for Promise and did not become Promise students but still enrolled in a TCAT or community college (which are Promise-eligible institutions). These students did not receive additional supports through the Promise program, such as mentoring, assistance with the FAFSA process, or encouragement from institution-based advisors to stay continuously enrolled as a full-time student. The 11,029 students had lower rates of persistence and completion than their Promise-eligible peers, even when conducting analyses that took ACT scores, family income, race, gender, and whether the student was a first-generation college student into account.

**The majority (75 percent) of Promise students at community colleges did not earn a credential within the five semesters of Promise eligibility. During interviews and surveys with OREA, community college officials cited several barriers to Promise students’ academic success.**

Through interviews and surveys of community college administrators, OREA identified elements within the program that hinder Promise students’ retention, persistence, and credential completion.<sup>7</sup> When asked what they would change about the Tennessee Promise program, administrators most often discussed the summer term, the cost of fees and textbooks, and Promise eligibility requirements and deadlines. (The cost of fees and textbooks is discussed in the next conclusion.)

**Exhibit 7: Whether community college students received a credential in five semesters | percent of Promise students compared to other recent high school graduates**



<sup>6</sup>This applies to students who attend a high school served by TNAchieves, which serves 90 of the state’s 95 counties and hosts schoolwide mandatory meetings on a designated date. Students served by the Ayers Foundation, which serves the remaining five counties, meet one-on-one with counselors who work daily in their high school. Because the Ayers Foundation counselors meet individually with Promise applicants, there is greater flexibility to schedule meetings when students are available.

<sup>7</sup>About 84 percent of Promise students from cohorts 1-3 enrolled in a community college. At least one official from each of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges was interviewed by OREA in 2018. In total, 47 community college administrators representing various departments (e.g., admissions, financial aid, student affairs, etc.) participated in interviews with OREA. In 2019, OREA invited administrators from all 13 community colleges to participate in an online survey. In total, 23 community college administrators responded to the survey. At least one administrator from each of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges participated. In most cases, multiple administrators from the same community college (i.e., administrators representing different departments) completed the survey. OREA reviewed interview comments and survey responses to identify common themes.

Once enrolled in college, Promise students must meet ongoing program requirements: maintain enrollment full time continuously, complete eight hours of community service each semester, and maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher. See Exhibit 1. Granting students more latitude regarding program eligibility requirements, as is done with other state-funded scholarships, was suggested by administrators from 12 of the state’s 13 community colleges.

**Exhibit 8: Promise compared to other public scholarships**

	<b>Promise</b>	<b>Reconnect</b>	<b>HOPE</b>
<b>Are students required to enroll full time?</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Can students enroll part time in the summer?</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Are students required to complete community service?</b>	Yes	No	No

**Full-time enrollment**

Through interviews and surveys with OREA, administrators at nine of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges stated Promise students struggle to attend full time because they are not academically prepared or because they must work full time to financially support themselves and/or their family. Students who drop below full time (i.e., at least 12 credit hours) for reasons not currently allowed are no longer eligible for Promise.<sup>8</sup> Students who participate in the Reconnect program or who receive the HOPE scholarship may enroll part time (i.e., at least six credit hours).

**Summer term**

Community college officials indicated some Promise students would benefit from part-time enrollment during the summer term but may be reluctant to do so because of the associated cost. Summer term courses offer students who have fallen behind academically an opportunity to get back on track to graduate on time. The summer term also provides students a final opportunity to increase their GPA before the end of an academic year (i.e., when cumulative GPA is calculated). Promise students who choose to attend college during the summer semester can use the Promise scholarship only if they enroll full time, in which case the summer term counts toward the program’s five-semester limit. HOPE scholarship and Reconnect students may attend college part time during the summer term using scholarship dollars.

**Community service**

Additionally, Promise students are required to complete and report eight hours of community service each semester or trimester. Community college administrators told OREA that students lose Promise eligibility after enrolling in college because they do not meet the program’s community service requirement. When asked how often this happens, administrators from seven of the state’s 13 community colleges said it happened “often” or “very often.” Other public scholarships, such as Reconnect, do not include a community service requirement. Meeting this Promise scholarship requirement typically requires transportation since community service opportunities take place outside of class time and off campus. Administrators from eight of the state’s 13 community colleges stated transportation access is an issue for Promise students “very often” or “often.”

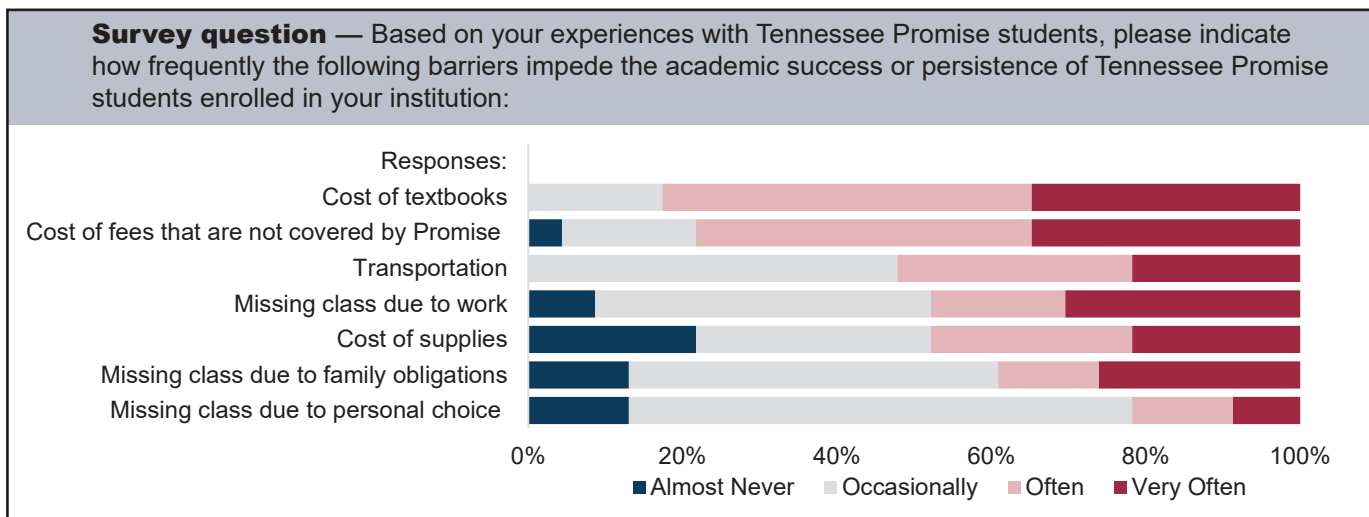
<sup>8</sup> Currently, waivers to the full-time status requirement for Promise students are considered only for those whose course enrollment options are limited due to the requirements of their chosen program, who have documented learning disabilities, or who have been granted a personal or medical leave of absence due to medical issues, extreme financial hardship, or religious or military obligations.



**Tennessee Promise does not cover the cost of books, supplies, tools, or non-mandatory fees. For certain courses and programs of study, these items are required. Community college administrators estimated that Promise students pay an average of \$1,150 each year for these items.**

The Tennessee Promise scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship, meaning it is applied to a student’s tuition and mandatory fees after other sources of gift aid. In a 2019 survey by OREA, 75 percent of community college administrators stated that the cost of textbooks, fees, tools, and supplies not covered by Promise impede the academic success and persistence of Promise students enrolled at their institution “often” or “very often.”<sup>9</sup> Almost all of the officials indicated that at least half of students did not understand that the Promise program, though promoted as “free college,” does not pay for these items.

**Exhibit 9: Barriers to success and persistence for Tennessee Promise students, based on surveys of community college financial aid officers and academic and student success officials**



Note: OREA received responses from 23 community college officials and at least one official from each community college participated in the surveys.

The Tennessee Promise scholarship covers tuition and mandatory fees, defined as tuition and fees that are required for enrollment or attendance and are charged to all students. Students enrolled in certain courses (e.g., natural science, allied health, and online courses) are typically required to pay additional fees that are not covered by Promise. Most TCAT programs require students to purchase tools and supplies that are not covered by the Tennessee Promise scholarship.

Exhibit 10 provides examples of non-mandatory fees, tools, and supplies not covered by the Promise scholarship that are required for specific courses and programs of study.

<sup>9</sup>In 2019, OREA invited administrators from all 13 community colleges to participate in an online survey. In total, 23 community college administrators responded to OREA’s 2019 survey. At least one administrator from each of Tennessee’s 13 community colleges participated in the survey. In most cases, multiple administrators from the same community college (i.e., administrators representing different departments) filled out the survey. OREA reviewed interview comments and survey responses to identify common themes.

**Exhibit 10: Examples of non-mandatory fees, program-specific fees, supplies, and tools not covered by Tennessee Promise**

Non-mandatory fee examples	Approximate cost not covered by Promise	
Science lab fee*	\$20 per course at Vol State (amount varies by community college)	Students are required to take 2 science courses for most associate degrees
Online course fees*	Varies by community college	Online courses are optional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institution-based online course</li> </ul>	\$30 to \$126 for one course	Charged at 5 of 13 community colleges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TN eCampus</li> </ul>	\$175 to \$600 for one course; up to \$1,273 for 15 credit hours	Cost varies by student and community college
Examples of fees charged for specific programs	Approximate total cost of fees, supplies, and tools not covered by Promise	
Nursing	\$975 (Associate of Applied Science in Nursing, Pellissippi State)	
Culinary arts	\$660 (Associate of Applied Science, Walters State)	
Dental assistant	\$2,097 (TCAT Dickson; 12-month program)	
Surgical technology	\$664 (TCAT Murfreesboro; 12-month program)	
Pharmacy technology	\$1,351 (TCAT Oneida; 12-month program)	
Master automotive technology	\$4,260 (TCAT Nashville; 20-month program) \$4,655 (TCAT Athens; 20-month program)	

Note: \*Applies to students enrolled in associate degree program at a community college.

**Transportation and online fees**

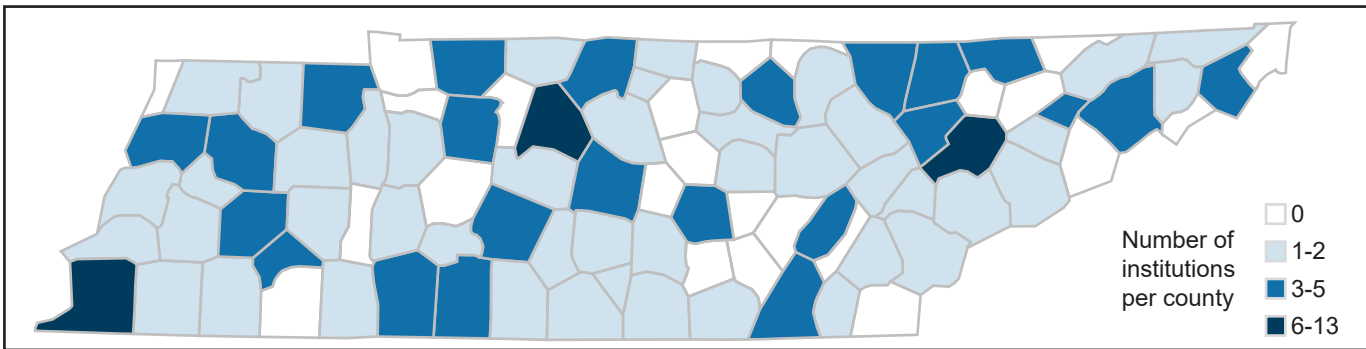
Students who live in certain areas of the state must travel longer distances to reach a Promise-eligible institution, and could benefit from enrolling in online courses. Of Tennessee’s 95 counties, 24 did not have a Promise-eligible institution during the first three years of the program. See Exhibit 11. The remaining 71 counties had at least one eligible institution. Additionally, there are 76 public high schools<sup>10</sup> located over 30 minutes from the nearest community college campus where an associate degree can be completed.<sup>11</sup> (See Exhibit 3.15 in Section 3 for a list of the 76 high schools.) Students with unreliable transportation, work, or

<sup>10</sup>To analyze the proximity of students to Promise-eligible institutions, OREA compared the physical addresses of Tennessee’s public high schools with Promise-eligible institutions. Public high schools are a reasonable proxy to use in calculating the distance students in certain areas of the state must travel to attend the nearest eligible institution. Commute times vary for individual students based on the location of their particular residence. Most Promise students attend community colleges or TCATs, neither of which offer on-campus housing.

<sup>11</sup> There are 64 total community college campuses in Tennessee, including both main and satellite campuses. There are 11 campuses where a student cannot earn an associate degree; students who attend classes at one of those 11 campuses can enroll in online courses or travel to another campus location to complete their degree.

family obligations could also benefit from taking online courses.<sup>12</sup> In interviews with OREA, administrators from 12 of the state’s 13 community colleges cited students’ lack of access to reliable transportation as a problem, and administrators from five community colleges said that the cost of online fees are among the concerns they hear most frequently from Promise students.

**Exhibit 11: Tennessee Promise-eligible institutions per county | 2015-16 through 2017-18**



Low-income students, such as those who are Pell-eligible, may struggle more than other students to pay for items not covered by Promise. The Pell grant is awarded based on financial need and students from the lowest-income families receive a full Pell grant, which exceeds the cost of tuition and mandatory fees, leaving them with extra funds to pay for books, non-mandatory fees, tools, and supplies. Some Pell recipients receive a partial grant, however, in which case the Tennessee Promise scholarship will kick in to cover the remaining cost of tuition and mandatory fees. Depending on the Pell award amount, partial Pell Grant recipients may not have any remaining financial aid to pay for items not covered by Promise.

Some community colleges have created institutional scholarships to help Promise students pay for books. None of the community college officials interviewed by OREA indicated their institution’s scholarship covered the cost of all books for Promise students.

**Community colleges have made changes to help Promise students navigate the challenges associated with remaining eligible for the Promise scholarship and completing a credential.**

The influx of younger students due to Tennessee Promise required community colleges to change some of their practices, according to interviews with academic and student success professionals and financial aid officers at the community colleges. These changes included creating safeguards to prevent Promise students from dropping below full-time status and losing their Promise eligibility, the creation or expansion of first-year seminars, and the employment of completion coaches.

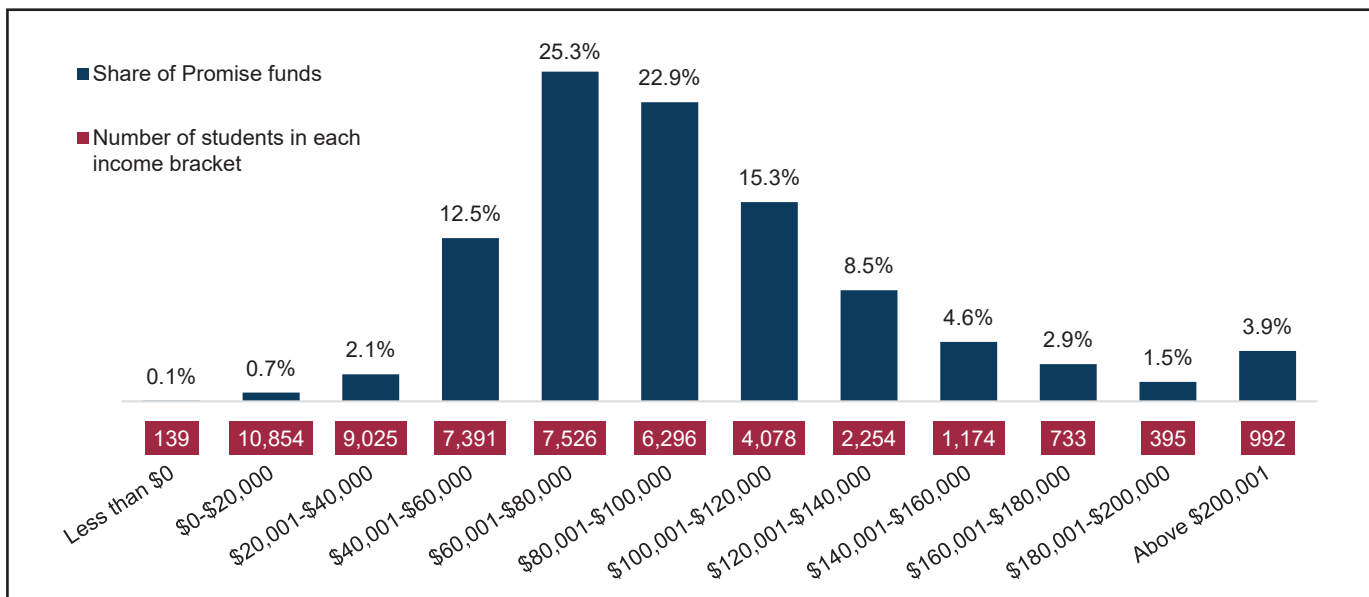
The success of Promise students compared to other recent high school graduates suggest these adjustments have been effective in supporting Promise students.

<sup>12</sup> A limited number of TCAT programs also offer online courses, but OREA only examined online courses available through community colleges for this evaluation.

**About 60 percent of all Promise funds went to students from households with annual incomes over \$80,000. About 37 percent of Promise funds went to students from households with annual incomes over \$100,000. Students from lower-income households were more likely to qualify for the Pell grant or other need-based scholarships.**

Not all Promise students receive funding from the Promise scholarship because Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship. Promise funds are used to pay for tuition and mandatory fees that are not already paid for by other sources of gift aid, such as the HOPE scholarship or federal Pell grant. Students from households with incomes less than \$60,000 are more likely to qualify for the Pell grant or other need-based scholarships. These other sources of financial aid cover some or all of the cost of tuition and mandatory fees; thus, students from low-income households are less likely to receive funds through the Promise program.

**Exhibit 12: Distribution of Promise funds across adjusted gross income levels | 2015–2017**



In contrast, students with incomes above \$60,000 do not generally qualify for the federal Pell Grant or other lottery scholarships based on family income. If those students do not qualify for the HOPE scholarship or other sources of gift aid, Promise covers all tuition and mandatory fees. Students from families with incomes above \$60,000 received the majority of Promise funds. (See Section 1 of the full report for more analysis.)

Exhibit 12 shows the distribution of Promise funds by household income level. Nearly half of all Promise funds went to students from households with an annual income between \$60,000 and \$100,000.

## Policy Options

Tennessee Promise was created to increase the number of recent high school graduates who attend college and complete a credential. Based on an analysis of the available data, OREA found that Promise students outperform their peers by staying enrolled longer, earning more credits, and completing credentials at higher rates. Meeting Tennessee's Drive to 55 goal, however, will likely not be possible without increasing the number of students who enter and remain in the program. About 70 percent of applicants did not complete all the requirements necessary to become a Promise student, and about 75 percent of those who became Promise students did not complete a credential within the program's five-semester limit.

The following policy options identify changes that could be made by various stakeholders to increase the number of students who:

- apply for the scholarship,
- become Promise students,
- remain in the program, and
- earn a credential.

The General Assembly and other stakeholders will have to weigh the cost of any program changes with the potential benefits, such as enhanced workforce development.

Tennessee Promise scholarships are paid from the Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund. In addition to investment earnings, the fund has received an average allocation of \$54.9 million from excess lottery reserves in each of the last four years (\$219.6 million total). At the end of the 2019 fiscal year, the fund contained a total of \$594.7 million, of which \$233.3 million was available for scholarships. The remaining \$361.4 million constitutes the fund's principal, which is kept intact while the investment earnings and other sources of revenue are used for scholarships.

Making changes that result in more students entering or remaining in the Promise program may result in greater scholarship payments from the fund. The extent to which the fund is impacted will depend on the program component and the affected students. Not all Promise students receive the same amount of Promise funds. Students from low-income households are more likely to qualify for need-based gift aid (e.g., Pell, TSAA), and students who meet academic requirements qualify for academic-based gift aid (e.g., HOPE). Students who meet one or both criteria receive little or no funds from the Promise scholarship.

Some policy options are cost-neutral while others may increase fund expenditures. The associated cost of some policy options would be lower if the option were targeted for specific students (e.g., those from low-income households). Additional appropriations from the lottery reserves could be allocated to the endowment or the General Assembly could appropriate general funds to support some policy options.

**The Tennessee General Assembly could appoint a working group to consider the conclusions and policy options presented in this report.**

In addition to the conclusions and policy options, the working group might also consider the following questions:

- How can mentor organizations and K-12 and higher education stakeholders increase the number of high school seniors who apply to the Promise program? OREA identified several counties in which a low percentage of students applied to the Promise program. The working group could determine best practices to increase application rates in these counties.
- How can mentor organizations and K-12 and higher education stakeholders increase the number of Promise applicants who become Promise students? OREA identified 11,029 students from cohorts 1-3 who applied for Promise but did not complete all Promise application requirements. Notably, these students ultimately enrolled in a TCAT (1,079 students) or a community college (9,950 students), both of which are Promise-eligible institutions. Understanding more about these types of students could inform possible changes to help more students complete the application process.
- Can the Promise program be modified or adjusted to ensure that more Promise students remain in the program and on track to earn a credential? Through interviews and surveys with OREA, college officials cited several barriers to Promise students' academic success, including the full-time enrollment requirement in the summer term and costs not covered by the Promise program. Adjustments to those elements of the program, among others, would likely allow more students to remain Promise-eligible and enrolled in college.
- Can Promise-eligible colleges implement or expand best practices to increase the number of Tennesseans earning a credential each year? For example, first-year seminars that teach skills necessary for college success and hiring completion coaches are best practices that have been implemented at several community colleges.





## **Policy options for the Tennessee General Assembly**

1. The Tennessee General Assembly could encourage or require that students are given the opportunity to attend the mandatory mentor meeting and complete eight hours of community service at their high school during the school day.
2. The Tennessee General Assembly could change Promise program requirements to more closely resemble those of other public scholarships.
3. The General Assembly could allow the Tennessee Promise scholarship to cover some or all non-mandatory fees, books, tools, or supplies. This could apply to all Promise students, or certain students based on financial need, residence in certain geographic areas of the state, enrollment in high-demand programs, or some combination of the three.
4. The General Assembly could fund completion coaches at all 13 community colleges.

## **Policy options for mentor organizations**

1. Mentor organizations could target additional supports in high schools with a large percentage of students in subgroups identified by OREA, such as students from low-income families.
2. Mentor organizations should ensure Promise students understand that books, non-mandatory fees, supplies, and tools are not covered by the Tennessee Promise scholarship and provide students with the estimated cost.

## **Policy option for institutions of higher education**

1. Officials at institutions of higher education could continue to learn from effective practices at other institutions.

## **Policy option for LEAs**

1. School districts with lower college-going rates could require all students to apply for the Promise program.
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