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Comptroller's Office Examines Successes and Challenges of Tennessee Promise

The Tennessee Comptroller's Office has released a new update in its ongoing evaluation of the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Program.

The update shows more students are attending college after graduating from high school following the implementation of Tennessee Promise. Tennessee's college-going rate increased from 58.64 percent to 64.4 percent in the first year of the program.

The program has also helped more students stay enrolled in college and on track to earning a credential, especially for the first group of program participants. The increased enrollment and retention of these students will likely result in a higher attainment rate for Tennessee in 2021 and 2022, as the first group of Promise students are included in the state's attainment rate. The attainment rate measures the percentage of students who earn a postsecondary credential.

The increase in Tennessee's attainment rate attributable to Tennessee Promise students is likely to slow after 2022, however. Comptroller researchers point out that the college-going rate did not continue to rise after the initial implementation of Tennessee Promise. Four years after the program's implementation, the college-going rate had declined from 64.4 percent to 61.8 percent. In addition, the most recent data available shows fewer students remain on track to graduate compared to the first group of program participants.

Meeting Tennessee's Drive to 55 goal will likely not be possible without increasing the number of students who enter and remain in the program. Tennessee Promise is part of the state's Drive to 55 initiative to increase the percentage of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential to 55 percent by 2025.

The Comptroller's Office has developed several policy options for the General Assembly to consider relative to the decrease in enrollment and retention since the start of the program. These include possible changes to the program's community service or full-time enrollment requirement, as well as extending program funding to cover books and fees for students who meet certain criteria. The policy options can be found in the extensive evaluation of the program published in July 2020.

To read the update or full evaluation, please visit the Comptroller's website at: tncot.cc/orea.

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