

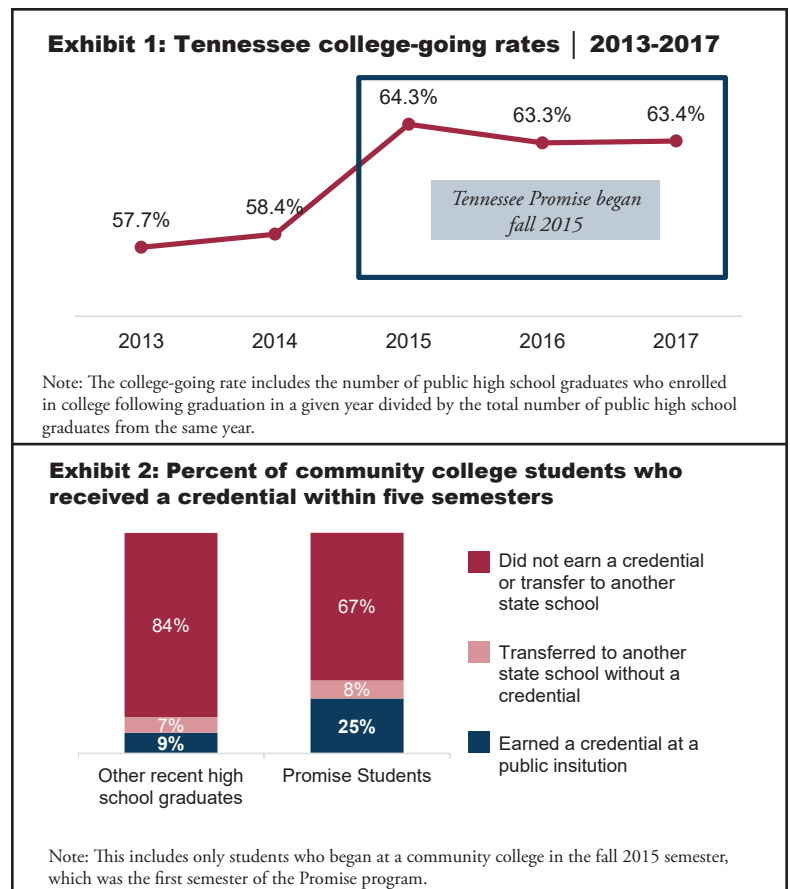
The Tennessee Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) completed an evaluation of the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Program, which was created by the General Assembly in 2014 as part of the Drive to 55 initiative. The main goals of the program were increasing access to college for recent high school graduates and increasing the number of students who earn two-year credentials (e.g., associate degrees, technical diplomas, and industry certifications).

Key Points

Based on OREA's analysis, Tennessee Promise has increased college access and completion.

Analysis by OREA showed that a higher percentage of recent high school graduates attended college after the implementation of Tennessee Promise. The state's college-going rate, which measures the percent of high school graduates who attend college, increased from 58.4 percent to 64.3 percent in the first year of the program.

Additionally, once enrolled in college, Tennessee Promise students accumulated more credits, stayed enrolled longer, and earned credentials at higher rates than their peers. OREA completed an analysis of credential attainment that accounted for several factors, including ACT score, family income, first-generation college student status, and inclusion in an underrepresented minority group. Based on this analysis, Promise students at community colleges and Tennessee colleges of applied technology (TCATs) were twice as likely to earn a credential when compared to other recent high school graduates.



Not all Promise students receive funding because Promise is a last-dollar scholarship.

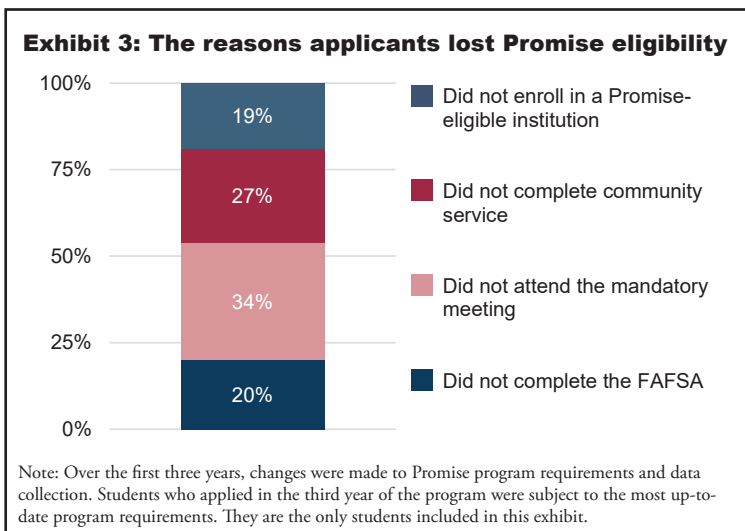
About 60 percent of Promise funds went to students from households with annual incomes over \$80,000. Students from lower-income households were more likely to qualify for the Pell grant or other need-based scholarships, which paid for their tuition and mandatory fees instead of Promise.

OREA identified challenges that make it difficult for some students to enter the program, stay in the program, and ultimately earn a credential.

Of all public high school graduates from 2015 to 2017, 24 percent became Promise students. Although 49,500 became Promise students in those years, OREA found that graduates with low ACT scores (under 15), minority applicants, and those from low-income households were less likely to become Promise students.

Of those students who applied to the program during their senior year, but did not become Promise students, the majority missed either the mandatory mentor meeting or failed to complete the required eight hours of community service. Evidence suggests some students would have gone to college as Promise students if missing these requirements had not made them ineligible.

Once enrolled in college, some Promise students lose their eligibility for the program. Community college administrators explained, through surveys and interviews, that these students are often unable to comply with the program's mandatory community service and full-time enrollment requirements. Other public scholarships in Tennessee, such as Tennessee Reconnect, do not include such requirements. Tennessee Promise does not cover the costs of books, supplies, tools, or non-mandatory fees. Based on a survey sent to financial aid officials at community colleges, OREA estimated that community college Promise students pay an average of \$1,150 each year for these items. Three-quarters of community college administrators surveyed indicated that these costs impeded the academic success of Promise students.



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.

Progress toward the Drive to 55 goal is measured using the statewide attainment rate. This rate measures the percent of Tennesseans ages 25-64 who have a postsecondary credential (e.g., certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree, etc.). OREA's analysis shows that the inclusion of the first Promise cohort (i.e., those who applied to the program during the 2014-15 school year) will likely increase the statewide 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. Increasing Tennessee's postsecondary attainment rate will likely not be possible without increasing participation among students from these groups.

The Comptroller's Office has included several policy options for the General Assembly in its report. These include changes that could be made to increase the number of students who apply for scholarships, become Promise students, remain in the program, and earn a credential.

To read the report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at <http://comptroller.tn.gov/orea/>.