



# SNAPSHOT

## TENNESSEE PROMISE EVALUATION

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In 2014, the General Assembly passed the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act to provide recent high school graduates the opportunity to earn an associate degree, credential, or diploma free of tuition and mandatory fees. Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that pays for tuition and mandatory fees after all other gift aid is applied, but it does not cover other costs such as textbooks, supplies, tools, lab fees, and program-specific fees. Public Chapter 900 (2014) requires the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tennessee Promise scholarship program.

To conduct the evaluation, OREA obtained quantitative data from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) for all Promise applicants, including those who did and did not become Promise students. OREA conducted interviews with all 13 of Tennessee's community colleges, faculty and staff at four Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs), high school counselors and district personnel, and leadership at THEC, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), tnAchieves, and the Ayers Foundation Trust. At the conclusion of the interview process, OREA crafted one survey for postsecondary employees and another for K-12 faculty and staff.

### Conclusions

Promise students earn more credits, are retained, and earn awards at higher rates than students who enroll at the same schools but are not Promise-eligible.

A Promise student at a community college may pay at least \$1,000 per year in out-of-pocket expenses. At TCATs, out-of-pocket expenses per year may reach \$3,100.

While the Promise program is effective overall, enrollment, retention, and attainment gaps exist among students.

Most Promise students at community colleges do not complete a terminating degree within the program's five-semester limit. This is especially the case for nursing students.

The most common reason applicants are not eligible for Promise is a failure to meet the initial community service deadline.

Additional conclusions are included in the full report.

### Policy options

To make the application process more efficient, the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation and TBR should explore ways to combine the Promise and college applications.

To improve affordability, the General Assembly could expand the reach of Tennessee Promise dollars or guarantee a minimum Promise payment.

To increase community college credential attainment, the General Assembly could extend Tennessee Promise eligibility for some or all community college students.

To increase the number of applicants who become Promise students, the General Assembly could eliminate the initial community service requirement.

To improve retention and completion for Promise students, the General Assembly could adjust the continuous, full-time enrollment requirement.

Tennessee Promise partnering organizations should consider providing more training to volunteer Promise mentors.

To read the full report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at [tncot.cc/orea](http://tncot.cc/orea).