College Promise Announces 425 Promise Programs Across All 50 States

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COLLEGE PROMISE

In the summer of 2022, College Promise released a comprehensive, interactive database of Promise programs known as the MyPromise Tool. As of July 2023, the number of Promise programs in the Tool has increased to 425 - an exciting milestone. The steady nationwide growth of College Promise programs is a benchmark to be celebrated by all. Also notable is the quality of many of the new programs, several of which are designed to serve particular student groups and meet specific student needs, such as adult-serving programs and support-focused programs, which afford opportunities and benefits beyond the traditional Promise program.

Growth of College Promise Programs

The primary goal of College Promise is for every American's education to continue beyond high school, whether the student pursues a career/technical field through a community college or a four-year degree. The ultimate goal is for everyone to have an opportunity to advance. In order for a program to be considered a College Promise program and therefore included in the MyPromise Tool, it must meet the following criteria:

- Supports college attendance at an accredited college or university as defined by the U.S. Department of Education;
- Has a public-facing website;
- Covers tuition for a career-technical education (CTE) certificate, a two-year degree, a four-year degree; or provides dual credit classes or early college programming that leads to a certificate and/or degree in an accredited K-12 school, college, or university.

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At the end of 2015, the number of College Promise programs in the nation stood at 53. Within just a few years, our team of researchers documented nearly 300 additional Promise programs, and by mid-year 2022, over 350 programs were identified. Presently, the number of Promise programs stands at 425, across all 50 states, which is a tremendous achievement for students and stakeholders nationwide. And while the steady increase in programs suggests that the Promise movement continues to gain traction, most programs are designed to benefit traditional-aged students. They have designated “Last-Dollar” programs, meaning that funds are awarded after other federal financial aid and/or other grant monies, which closes the tuition gap. However, some of the more recent programs have expanded their student population and are designed to benefit adult students, while others are striving for “gold-standard” status by offering additional financial support and services beyond closing the tuition gap, such as childcare, transportation, or mentoring services.

My Promise Tool showing locations with College Promise Programs.

**Adult-Serving Programs**

In order to benefit the workforce pipeline, some states are shifting their focus to adult learners and gearing state-funded higher education initiatives to those learners. The American Council on Education offers the following definition of the adult learner population:

"Post-traditional learners are adult learners—students over the age of 25 who work while enrolled and are financially independent, and those with a connection to the military. The majority of adult learners (53 percent) attend a public two-year institution, allowing for increased flexibility as they balance a college education with their family and professional lives. Most adult learners (70 percent) work while attending college, and slightly less than half (45 percent) work full-time. Many are returning learners who already hold a previous degree (41 percent)."
In 2018, Tennessee Reconnect launched as an expansion of Tennessee Promise, specifically created to enable adults in the workplace to develop new skills, retrain and earn new credentials for the workforce, or simply finish a degree. Since then, other states have adopted similar adult-focused Promise programs, primarily geared toward workforce development. In 2022, the MJ Foster Promise was launched in Louisiana for state residents 21 and older in an effort to meet Louisiana’s workforce demands. This last-dollar program can be used at any of Louisiana’s Community and Technical Colleges toward a credential in a high-demand industry, such as transportation and logistics, healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. Similarly, Vermont launched 802 Opportunity in 2022 to enable state residents with a family income of $75,000 or less to attend the Community College of Vermont tuition-free, regardless of age. Students may choose from 33 programs of study, which will lead to high-demand, high-paying jobs in Vermont.

As nationwide workforce demands persist, it’s clear that states are finding ways to bring adult learners back into the classroom. Kentucky’s Council on Postsecondary Education recently shared a plan to increase the number of residents with a college credential to 60% by 2030. It has a targeted goal of enrolling more students between the ages of 25 and 39, as well as expanding opportunities for earning credit for prior learning. The demand for adult learners suggests that we will continue to see the development of adult-serving Promise programs.

**Support-Focused Programs**

The tuition coverage offered by Promise programs is essential, but “gold-standard” programs go beyond tuition and fees to offer support regarded as key to student success. A recent study conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) on the Detroit Promise program revealed that “well-designed, well-implemented student support services in College Promise programs can enhance students’ experience, improve their semester-to-semester persistence in college and potentially increase the percentage of them who graduate.” Supports for some programs might include counseling and mentoring services, funds for textbooks, transportation, and meals - needs that, if provided, will increase the likelihood of student success.

In 2022, Arizona, Florida, and Illinois each launched Promise programs embedded with robust support services. In Arizona, the Phoenix Promise Program, a last-dollar plus program serving all of the 10 Maricopa Community Colleges, includes a stipend to cover the additional costs associated with attending college, such as food, transportation, fees, textbooks, and childcare. Similarly, Osceola Prosper in Florida is a last-dollar plus program with services such as tutoring,
advising, career services, transportation, and food bank access for students. High school graduates in Osceola County enrolling at Valencia College and Osceola Technical College are eligible to participate in the program. Finally, Hope Chicago is another last-dollar plus program, which can be used at all public four-year universities in Illinois, and select private schools and 2-year institutions. It boasts a unique set of supports, such as books, housing, fees, and a laptop. Wraparound services are also provided, such as academic support, transition support, social/economic support, career counseling, and lessons in civic responsibility. Promise programs nationwide recognize that students need more than just tuition coverage, and the development of robust supports will help students succeed.

Looking to the Future – Continuing to Grow College Promise

With the recent addition of programs from Idaho and Mississippi, we are pleased to announce that all 50 states and Washington D.C. offer at least one Promise program. The Mississippi State Promise Program, which began in 2021, is a Last-Dollar program for recent high school graduates meeting the GPA and income requirements. In 2022, the Idaho Board of Education launched the Idaho Opportunity Scholarship, which offers a $3,500 annual, renewable scholarship to recent high school graduates. Another version of the scholarship was developed to serve adults, the Idaho Opportunity Scholarship for Adult Learners, in recognition of the need to expand Promise opportunities to more than just traditional populations.

The College Promise movement is about more than just money – it’s about evidence-based practices in the realm of higher education and helping potential students realize that college is for them. Rising costs of college and student debt burdens have led elected officials, organizations, institutions, and other stakeholders to develop initiatives that reduce the cost of higher education. College Promise is more than just “free college for all” because it is designed to inspire students - traditionally aged and working adults - to attend college who might otherwise not enroll or qualify for aid but be unaware of available resources. Our goal is that through the increased awareness and utilization of the MyPromise Tool, all potential students will pursue the programs available to them.
References

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11. Mississippi State. https://www.promise.mstate.edu/