

How Seattle Colleges Is Closing the Racial Equity Gap and Boosting Postsecondary Enrollment, Retention, and Completion in Seattle



Seattle Promise has become not just a national model for free community college, but a new model for higher education and a pathway to living-wage careers.

Students now know they have the funding and personal support to succeed in college, thanks to the investment of our citizens and the commitment of our partners.

I'm proud of what we have accomplished together.



– *Shouan Pan*
Seattle Colleges Chancellor

SUMMARY

Since its inception in 2018, the Seattle Promise program has assisted nearly 7,500 Seattle public high school graduates, as more than fifty percent of all eligible graduates in the last four years have applied to the program.

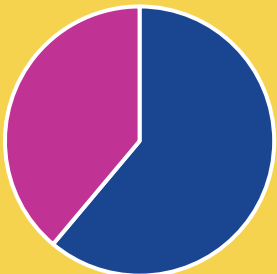
Of these applicants, 2,555 have chosen Seattle Colleges to help them in reaching their higher education goals through participation in the Seattle Promise program. Promise has helped them achieve their goals by providing up to 90 credits of college courses tuition-free to all eligible students, and by offering comprehensive wraparound services to support their educational needs before, during, and after their time at Seattle Colleges.

Seattle Promise is having a tangible impact on student enrollment, success, and degree program completion, particularly in lower-income and historically underserved communities.

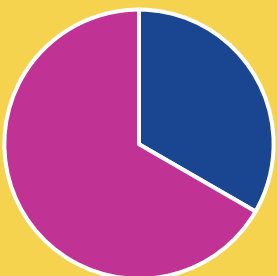
Seattle Promise serves lower-income and historically underserved students.



2/3 students of color



1/3 first generation



60 percent from families making less than \$75K/year⁷

APPROACH

Seattle Promise uses a two-pronged approach to improve student access, success, and degree completion, combining tuition support with comprehensive wraparound services for students from their junior year of high school until the completion of their first credential.

College Funding

The last-dollar model of the tuition funding means that after a student's federal and state grants and scholarships are accounted for, Seattle Promise pays the remaining cost of the student's college education. The program pays tuition for up to 90 credits, which is sufficient to fully cover the cost of many two-year degree or transfer programs at Seattle Colleges.

In addition to tuition support, equity scholarships for college costs beyond tuition, such as books, transportation, housing, etc., are awarded to students with financial need.

Wraparound Support

Beyond financial support, the program's wraparound services ensure students receive consistently high-touch and high-quality onboarding and advising throughout their time with Seattle Colleges. Promise staff assist students beginning in their junior year of high school and through the completion of their first degree, certificate, 90 credits, or transfer to a four-year university.

With a ratio of one specialist to 300 student applicants, Seattle Promise outreach specialists are placed in each high school, where they work with students and families one-on-one to complete applications, including Seattle Promise, Seattle Colleges admissions, FAFSA/WASFA financial aid completion, and transition to college.

Academic bridge programs such as Readiness Academy and Summer Bridge assist students during the summer between their senior year of high school and their freshman year of college as they determine their desired area of study and register for their first college classes.

The program also pairs students with a Seattle Promise retention specialist during their time in college, with a ratio of one specialist to 100 students. These advisors work with students one-on-one to register for their first classes, set academic goals, create an education plan, and then connect them with needed resources that will help ensure they stay in school and complete their academic programs.

“ We don't just hand students money for college and say 'good luck.' We help them from application through graduation. ”

– Francisco Ramos
Seattle Promise Outreach Specialist

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Community Commitment to Youth

With the support of the citizens of Seattle through the [Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise levy](#), and through strategic partnerships with the City of Seattle, Seattle Public Schools, and the University of Washington and other university transfer partners, Seattle Promise provides a guaranteed pathway to higher education and living-wage jobs for Seattle public high school graduates regardless of GPA, income, ability, or country of birth.

A New Model for Higher Education

This new model for higher education is bridging gaps and creating a seamless transition to post-secondary access and support for all students, especially low-income, first-generation (i.e., students who are first in their family to attend college), and/or African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, underserved Asian populations, other students of color, refugee and immigrant, homeless, English language learners, and LGBTQ students.

Creating a Workforce Ready for Our Region's Careers

In turn, students are succeeding to their next destination, whether that be a transfer to a four-year college or university, completion of a certificate or professional training program to enter the workforce, or a skilled trade apprenticeship. The program is also earning more community interest, investment, and support, fostering even more opportunity.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Application and Enrollment

Since its launch in 2018, Seattle Promise has experienced explosive growth in the number of students enrolling in the program. In its first year, approximately 230 students enrolled in the program, a number that rose to approximately 380 in 2019.¹

In 2020, when the Promise program opened to all 17 high schools in the Seattle Public Schools District, approximately 50 percent of all graduating seniors applied to the Promise program.² Enrollment more than doubled from 2019, with approximately 845 students enrolled. Enrollment surged again in 2021, despite remaining pandemic conditions, to more than 1,100 students.³

Completion

Among students who began college in Fall 2018, 29 percent graduated within two years. Among the 2019 cohort, 23 percent of students also graduated within two years. Across both cohorts, Seattle Promise scholars complete their degrees within two years at a rate that is twice the national average of 13 percent. These early successes bring us closer to creating a workforce ready for our region's careers.⁴

Demographics

The Seattle Promise program serves a racially and ethnically diverse group of scholars. As a body, scholars reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of our city.

Two-thirds of our scholars are students of color, one-third are first-generation college students, and 60 percent come from families making less than \$70,000 a year.⁵

Seattle Promise is designed with their unique needs in mind and is working to listen and refine the program as those needs change.

Several program elements have been added to address specific needs, including the equity scholarship to assist with college costs beyond tuition for those with financial need, peer mentors available to relate to and help students, and translated application and financial aid workshops for families, to name a few.⁶

More than a Scholarship — A Partnership

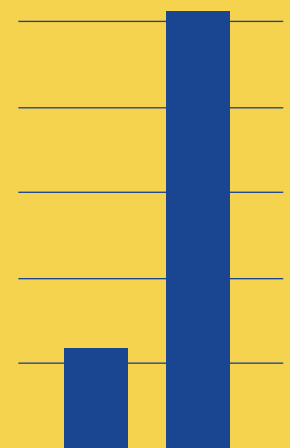


Seattle Department of
Education & Early Learning



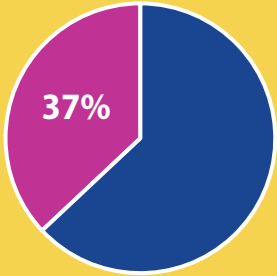
SEATTLE COLLEGES
North • Central • South

Seattle Promise
is meeting
student needs.

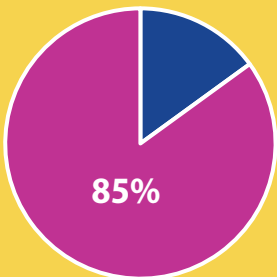


230 students enrolled
in Fall 2018, and
more than 1,100
enrolled in Fall 2021
(467 percent growth)⁸

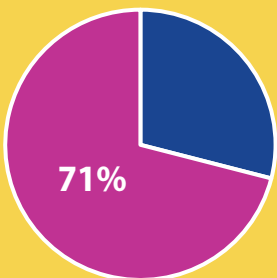
Seattle Promise students are staying and completing their degrees, exceeding local, regional, and national averages.



The 2018 cohort achieved a 37 percent three-year completion rate, exceeding the national three-year average of 28 percent



85 percent of Promise students continued from Fall 2018 to Winter 2019, compared with 72 percent of all Seattle Colleges students in the same time period



71 percent of Promise students continued from Fall 2018 with Spring 2019, compared to 58 percent of all Seattle Colleges students in the same time period⁹

CONCLUSION

Seattle Promise has become a [national model](#) for free community college.

Seattle Promise application and enrollment numbers have continuously surpassed projections, and student retention and graduation rates for Seattle Promise students have been consistently higher than regional and national averages. This evidence confirms the effectiveness of the Promise program's combination of tuition support and comprehensive wraparound services.

Seattle citizens made an investment in Seattle youth that has [proven even in the most uncertain times](#) it will deliver on its promise. And now, a [culture shift](#) is occurring. Students know that they have a way to college—not just money to attend, but also people to support their success.

But, perhaps the greatest or most thrilling achievement is what is emerging: not just a model for free community college, but a new model for higher education.

With our K-12 and college/university partners, we are bridging gaps and creating a seamless transition to post-secondary access and success. We are also establishing a clear pathway to living-wage careers for all students, especially historically underserved populations, such as students of color, low-income families, and first-generation college students.

More students are seeing that a college education is attainable and achievable. This is leading to both self-confidence and success for students; building a local workforce ready for our region's careers; and, in turn, strengthening families, communities, and industry.

As other districts and states look for role models, these successes provide a road map for similar programs to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates among historically underserved populations across the nation.



1 [Seattle Promise Facts and Figures](#)

2 [Seattle Promise 2020-2021 Fall to Summer Report](#)

3 [Seattle Promise Fall 2021-2022 Report](#)

4 [Seattle Promise 2021-2022 Fall to Summer Report](#)

5 [Seattle Promise Facts and Figures](#)

6 [Seattle Promise 2020-2021 Fall to Summer Report](#)

7 [Seattle Promise Facts and Figures](#)

8 The Seattle Times, November 12, 2021, "How

Seattle plans to scale up its free community

college program and help more students" [Link](#)

9 [Seattle Promise 2020-2021 Fall to Summer Report](#)

seattlecolleges.edu/promise



SEATTLE COLLEGES
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PROMISE