




This research brief summarizes the 2020 Oregon Promise report with findings about the program's impact on access to postsecondary education and training, college affordability, and completion of a certificate or degree.

The Oregon Promise

Implemented in 2015, the Oregon Promise (OPG) provides grants to most recent Oregon high school and GED® test graduates to attend community college. The program covers the average cost of 12 credits of tuition at any of the 17 community colleges in Oregon, up to a total of 90 college credits for eligible students.

Student Eligibility

 Recent Oregon high school graduate or GED® test graduate	2.5+ GPA at HS graduation or 145 on all GED® tests	 Oregon resident for at least 12 months prior to college attendance
90 credit limit, completed or attempted, including accelerated learning	 Enroll for 6+ credits at an Oregon community college within 6 mo. of graduation	Apply File a FAFSA/ORSA File an Oregon Promise Application Contribute a \$50 co-pay each term

Expected family contribution (EFC) may also be used as needed to control program costs

in 2020-21, OPG grants range from \$1,000 to \$4,005 per year for full-time students, less a \$50 student co-pay per term. The award amount depend on a student's remaining financial need to cover average tuition costs after other state and federal grants have been applied. If a student's tuition is covered in full by other public grants, the student receives the minimum \$1,000 award. When combined with the Oregon Opportunity Grant, OPG students from the lowest-income families receive a total of \$3,778 from these two State grants, compared with \$4,005 for OPG students from middle- and higher-income families.

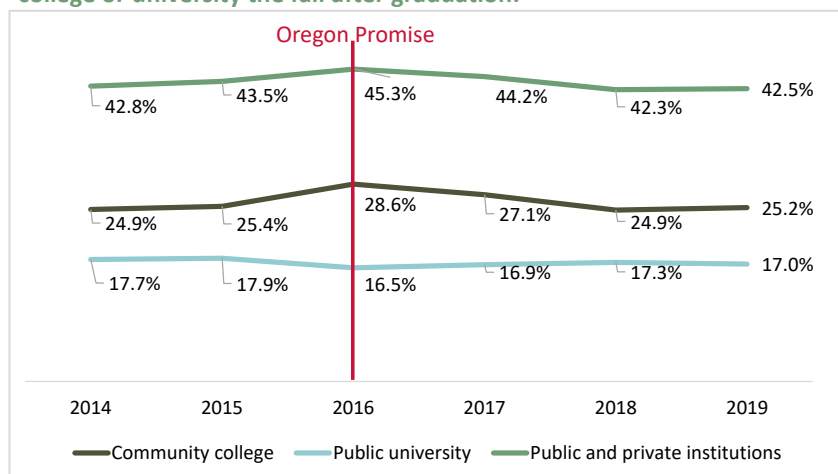
Has the Oregon Promise increased college-going?

No, not in a sustained way.

In its first two years, the Oregon Promise appeared to draw relatively more high school graduates to college, but recent data show this growth was not sustained. After four years, high school graduates are about as likely to enroll in college as they were before the program. In addition, the

racial/ethnic gap in college-going has closed only slightly since the program began (from a gap of 26.4 percentage points to a gap of 24.6 percentage points), and the rural/urban gap has widened (from 3.4

Percentage of Oregon high school graduates attending an Oregon college or university the fall after graduation.



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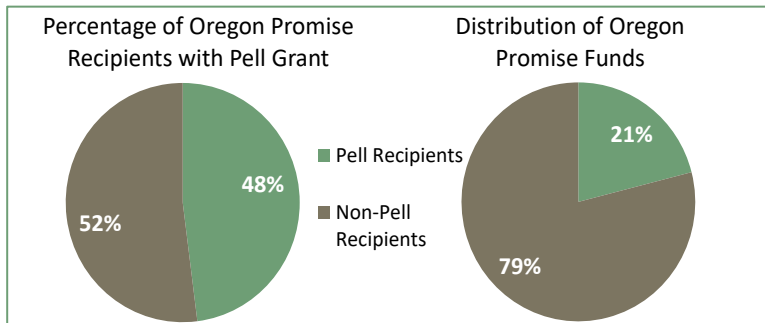
percentage points to 5.6 percentage points). Several trends parallel these changes, including uneven media attention, instability in program funding, and the State’s strong economy that drew high school seniors into the workforce, which makes teasing out causes difficult.

The Oregon Promise helps make college more affordable for students

Most college students face considerable affordability challenges today. Among students in OPG, 34 percent face unaffordable college costs (the published cost of attendance is greater than their grants and scholarships, expected family contribution, and estimated earnings).

34% of OPG students still face unaffordable college costs, but 44% would face unaffordable costs without the grant

However, without the grant, this share would be even greater, 44 percent. Among OPG students from underserved racial/ethnic groups, 48 percent to 59 percent would have unaffordable costs without the grant.



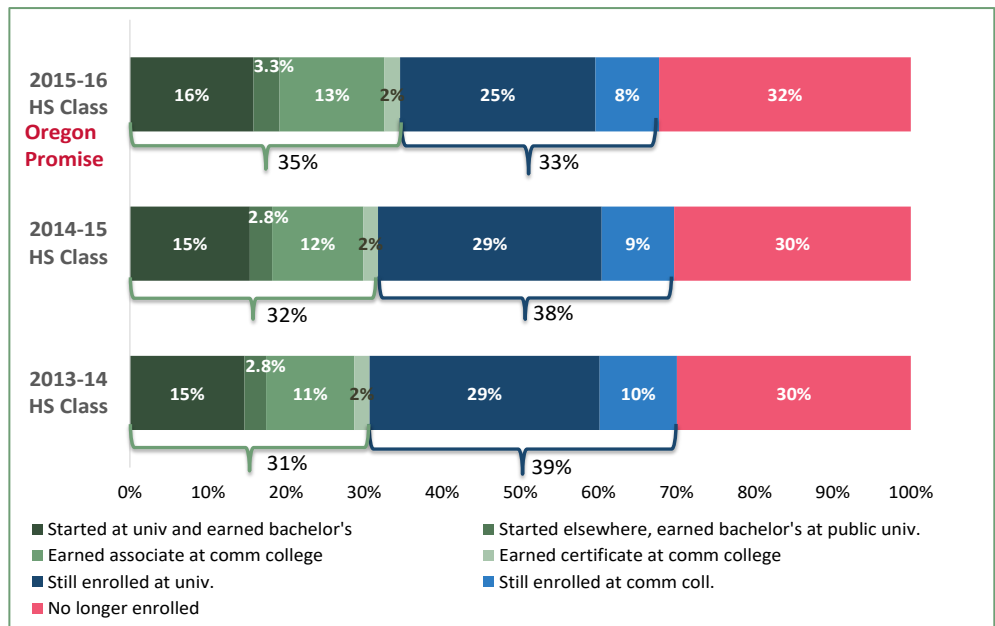
At the same time, the program’s design devotes most funds to students without the highest need. About half of OPG recipients receive the Pell grant, but because it also helps cover the tuition costs, only 21 percent of OPG funds go to these students. The minimum OPG grant size exacerbates this inequity; it is fixed in statute and does not

grow with rising college costs. Low-income families are thus left with a bigger affordability gap today than when the program began.

The Oregon Promise supports continued enrollment and completion

OPG students show strong outcomes of continued enrollment and certificate/degree completion. Most students in the program earn a credential or are still enrolled at a community college or public university in their second, third, and fourth years after graduating from high

College enrollment and completion four years after high school graduation, among graduates who attended an Oregon public college or university the fall after graduation.



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school. In addition, the program may have led to faster college and university completion. Since the program began, slightly more high school graduates overall have earned a certificate or degree by four years after high school graduation, and fewer remained enrolled in college or university. At the same time, slightly more high school graduates have stopped out of college and university without earning a credential since the program began. Additional years of data will clarify whether the program does indeed facilitate faster or greater completion, particularly for underserved student groups, and whether the higher rate of stopping out continues. If the increased completion associated with the program continues, it may well be because of the State's investment, as nationally, state grants have been shown to increase graduation.

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Together these findings suggest two major policy implications: (1) Increasing the number of high school graduates who continue their education and training—at least in the face of a strong economy—requires greater investment than the Oregon Promise alone. (2) There is a strong need for State grants that support students in the educational pipeline, especially those facing equity gaps. These grants are a strong investment for the State. The Oregon Promise has improved affordability and potentially completion, and a growing body of research finds that state grants increase the likelihood that students will complete their certificate/degree program. Students who earn a postsecondary certificate or degree enter a future with greater financial stability for themselves, a higher chance of upward mobility for their families, and more economic stability for their communities and the State. However, these public benefits can only be fully realized when the financial pathway to earning postsecondary credentials is greater and is levelled across race/ethnicity, income, geography, and other educational equity gaps.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM YEAR 5 REPORT

Has the OP led more high school graduates to enroll in college?

- Enrollment rates rose in the first two years of the program but declined in the second two years. The early increases in college attendance do not appear sustained and the program has not closed equity gaps.

Who are the students who receive the OPG?

- OPG recipients tend to be representative of their high school graduating class, though they are somewhat more likely to be women and Hispanic/Latinx.
- More than half of students are lower-income, but nearly 80% of program dollars go to students from higher-incomes

What are the financial impacts of the OPG?

- The program's design capitalizes on federal aid available for OPG recipients, who receive millions of dollars in federal Pell grants.
- The OPG has consistently helped reduce the number of students facing unaffordable college costs, but its purchasing power has declined, particularly for the lowest-income students.

What are the outcomes of students who receive the OPG?

- Though most first-year students in the program complete program requirements, one-fourth do not re-enroll for a second year. Most students remaining in the program earn credentials or continue their enrollment.
- The first high school graduating class since the OPG became available appears to have earned college credentials somewhat faster than high school graduates did before the OPG.