

Oregon's Promise to Cover the Cost of Community College Tuition

A college education is important, and financial aid is essential for expanding college access.¹ In 2015 Oregon implemented Oregon Promise, the nation's second statewide promise program—a type of place-based financial aid program that covers all or nearly all college tuition costs.² REL Northwest conducted a study to explore which 2016 and 2017 public high school seniors Oregon Promise served in its first two years and what impact the program had on the postsecondary outcomes of public high school graduates. This infographic spotlights the study findings and their implications for the future evolution of Oregon Promise and similar financial aid programs.



Who were Oregon Promise applicants and recipients?

- One quarter of Oregon public high school seniors applied.
- Applicants reflected the demographic composition of Oregon public high school seniors although they were more likely to be female and less likely to have received special education services.
- Most recipients, regardless of their award amount, were from low-income households.

How Oregon Promise works

After students received any other federal or state aid, Oregon Promise awards cover the average cost of community college tuition for students who:



Earned a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher



Graduated from high school*

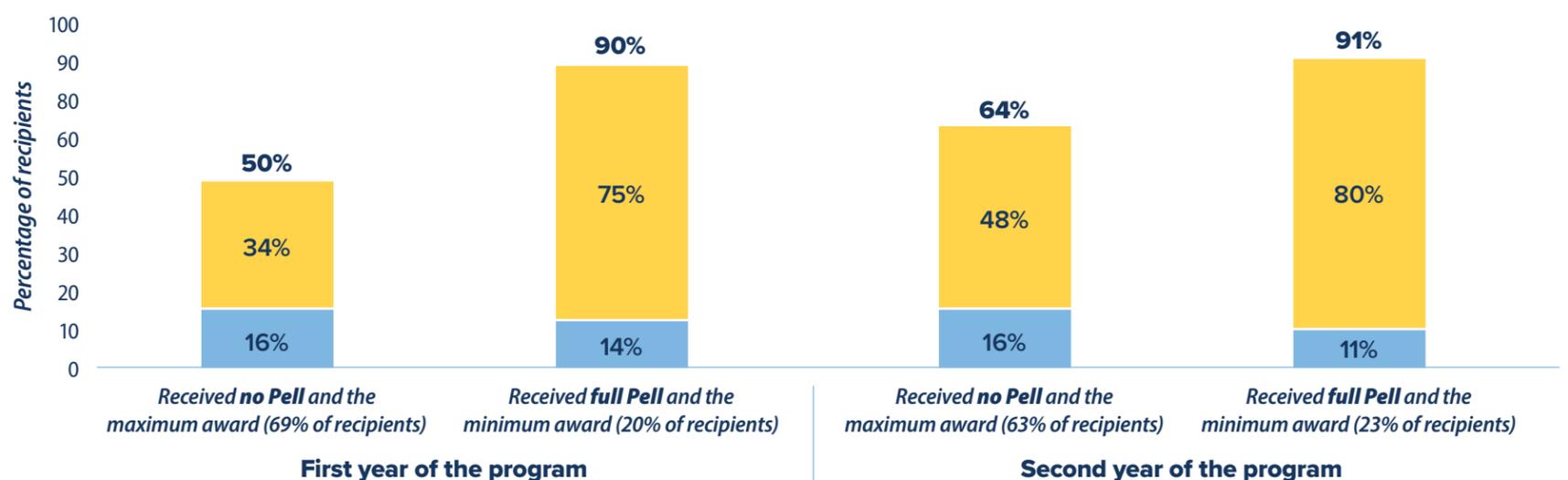


Enrolled in an Oregon community college within six months of completing high school

* Students with a GED are also eligible, but the REL Northwest study focused on public high school graduates only.

Most recipients were from low-income households

- Persistently eligible for free or reduced-price lunch three years in a row
- Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch for at least one year



The Pell Grant is federal financial aid for low-income students.

Full Pell Grant means the student was awarded the maximum Pell Grant.

No Pell Grant means the student was not eligible for the Pell Grant.

Did students renew their award for a second year?

Recipients can renew their Oregon Promise award for subsequent years, and the award covers up to 90 credits. In the first year of Oregon Promise:

54% Just over half of recipients renewed their award

46% Almost half of recipients did not renew

49% About half of recipients who did not renew were not enrolled in college two years later

All recipients had similar high school academic achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, but students who renewed their award had better high school attendance and higher participation in dual credit than students who did not renew.

What were Oregon Promise's impacts?

The REL Northwest study used a rigorous quasi-experimental design to compare the outcomes of very similar 2016 Portland metro area graduates with GPAs just above and below the eligibility requirement. Students with a GPA just above the 2.5 eligibility requirement who were offered an Oregon Promise award were more likely to:

-  **Still be enrolled in college at the end of their first year**
-  **Still be enrolled in or have completed college by 2019/20**

These results were verified with a statewide sample comparing all 2016 and 2017 high school graduates who did not apply for Oregon Promise to similar high school graduates who applied and were offered an award. Students who were offered an Oregon Promise award were more likely to:

-  **Enroll in college**
-  **Still be enrolled in college at the end of their first year**
-  **Still be enrolled in or have completed college by 2019/20**

What are the implications of the study?

- The program's positive impacts provide policymakers with evidence to continue to invest in Oregon Promise.** The increases in the likelihood of college enrollment, persistence, and completion for program participants suggest Oregon Promise should continue.
- Students with GPAs below 2.5 may also benefit from the program and lowering the GPA requirement may further diversify the applicant pool.** Portland metro area evidence suggests that lowering the GPA requirement may increase the percentage of eligible students who come from low-income households, are students of color, are male, and received special education services.
- Program recipients may need more support beyond financial aid to persist in college.** Recent evidence shows that comprehensive programs that include financial aid along with supports focused on nonacademic needs have a larger impact than financial aid programs alone.^{3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9}



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