



Seattle Department of
Education & Early Learning

Seattle Promise Scholar Persistence & Advising Support

2022-2023 Process Evaluation Report Executive Summary

Conducted by:
The Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning

Evaluation Team

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Introduction

This report is intended to serve as a brief overview of the 2022-23 Process Evaluation Report of Seattle Promise Scholar Persistence & Advising Support.

Seattle Promise is a universal access program that provides graduates of Seattle Public Schools (SPS) with up to three years (or 90-free college-level credits) of financial assistance and support services at any Seattle College campuses—North, Central, or South. Funded by the City of Seattle through the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy, enrollment continues to grow steadily. By Fall 2022, the program expanded eligibility to all 17 SPS high schools and Seattle charter schools. While cohort 2019 Seattle Promise scholars graduated within three years and are on track with the national average for full-time community-college students (30%¹), equity enhancements were implemented to address racial opportunity gaps in persistence and completion.

During the 2022-23 school year, the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) conducted a second process evaluation to understand how Seattle Promise can monitor and encourage progress toward equitable postsecondary outcomes. This study used a mixed-methods approach drawing from quantitative program implementation data, and qualitative data from student and staff feedback, to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent did persistence rates and completion rates change for students enrolled in 2021-22? How does this vary among 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 cohorts?
2. What do Promise scholars attribute to their persistence and completion? What do Promise staff attribute to student persistence and completion?

¹ Source: National Center for Student Education Statistics, 2021

Key Findings

Persistence & Completion

- Cohort 2020 experienced an upward trend in Year 1 (first Fall to second Fall) and Year 2 (second Fall to second Spring) retention rates compared to previous cohorts, while cohort 2021 experienced a 4-point percentage decrease in Year 1 retention.
- Re-entry is positively impacting racial opportunity gaps. Over 70% of students who re-entered Fall 2021 identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

Student-Identified Motivators

- Tuition support, personal or career goals, and family, friends or community were cited by students as top student motivators to continue with Seattle Promise.
- About 85% of BIPOC scholars surveyed have supportive adults in their lives to encourage them in their education, and 30% of multilingual scholars felt knowing more than one language helps them understand academic concepts.

Early Program Equity Enhancement Results & Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

- Over 70% of scholars surveyed felt the re-entry process was clear.
- Students who engaged with Path to UW were admitted to and enrolled at UW-Seattle at higher rates than Washington community colleges overall at 86% vs. 71%².
- Over half of scholars experienced difficulty maintaining a 2.0 GPA in one or more classes.

Insights & Opportunities

Informed by student and staff feedback, the following were identified for the City of Seattle and Seattle Colleges to consider as opportunities to promote progress toward equitable postsecondary outcomes for students furthest from educational justice.

- **Ensure Quarterly Check-Ins Include Internship, Career Exploration and Goal Setting Discussions.** Suggested recommendations include extending length and/or frequency of quarterly check-ins and encouraging check-ins to cover internship and career exploration.
- **Maintain the Re-Entry Pathway for All Cohorts.** Potential strategies include retaining re-entry staffing roles and wrap around supports for all eligible scholars.

² Malik, L. (Jun 2023). Path to UW program: 2021-22 [Unpublished report]. Seattle Promise, Seattle Colleges.

- **Streamline the Equity Scholarship Application & Increase the Equity Scholarship Amount.** Recommendations include automating the equity scholarship application for students who qualify, increase the equity scholarship amount, or create a Promise-specific rapid emergency fund.
- **Identify ways to mitigate or prevent students needing to submit SAP appeals.** Potential policy and program solutions include identifying ways to support students on SAP "warning" or prior to submitting appeals, increase student awareness of SAP, and explore ways to avoid mandatory scholarship repayment.
- **Continue Building Connections to Mental Health Supports & Referral Resources.** Approaches include create formal partnerships with campus or community-based organizations focused on trauma-informed mental wellness and referral supports; create staff roles dedicated to building, monitoring, and updating connections to mental health, basic needs, and other referral supports.