



# San Diego Promise Program

## Data Briefing – December 12, 2019

### Context

In October 2019, the San Diego Community College District Office of Institutional Research published “[A Comprehensive Evaluation of the San Diego Promise Program: Helping Students Achieve their Educational Objectives.](#)” This comprehensive report utilized data from a wide variety of sources (surveys, focus groups, outcomes research, and interviews) to evaluate the success of the first three years of the San Diego Promise Program (2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19) and covered the following key topics:

1. How the San Diego Promise Program evolved in response to program growth and student needs;
2. Experiences and outcomes of students who participated in the San Diego Promise Program; and
3. Research conclusions, implications, and next steps for program improvement.

This brief summarizes the main findings of the comprehensive report.

### Overview of the San Diego Promise Program

The San Diego Promise Program was initiated by the San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) in 2016 as a [small pilot program to increase student educational access and support students in achieving their educational objectives through financial assistance and student support services.](#) Since then, legislative action has suffused the San Diego Promise Program with additional funding to expand the number and type of students served as well as the length of time for which they receive support.

**2016**

SDCCD started the San Diego Promise Program to provide financial assistance and student services to support first-time, full-time students during their first year in college.

**2017**

Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill 19, providing free tuition for full-time students during their first year in California’s community college system. This infusion of support from the state, and the generosity of donors, enabled SDCCD to extend the San Diego Promise Program to serve students in their second year.

**2019**

Assembly Bill 2 expanded state funding to support first-time full-time students in their second year. As a result, SDCCD was able to extend donor funds to support student groups who were likely to benefit from the San Diego Promise Program but who did not meet the eligibility requirements of AB19 and AB2.

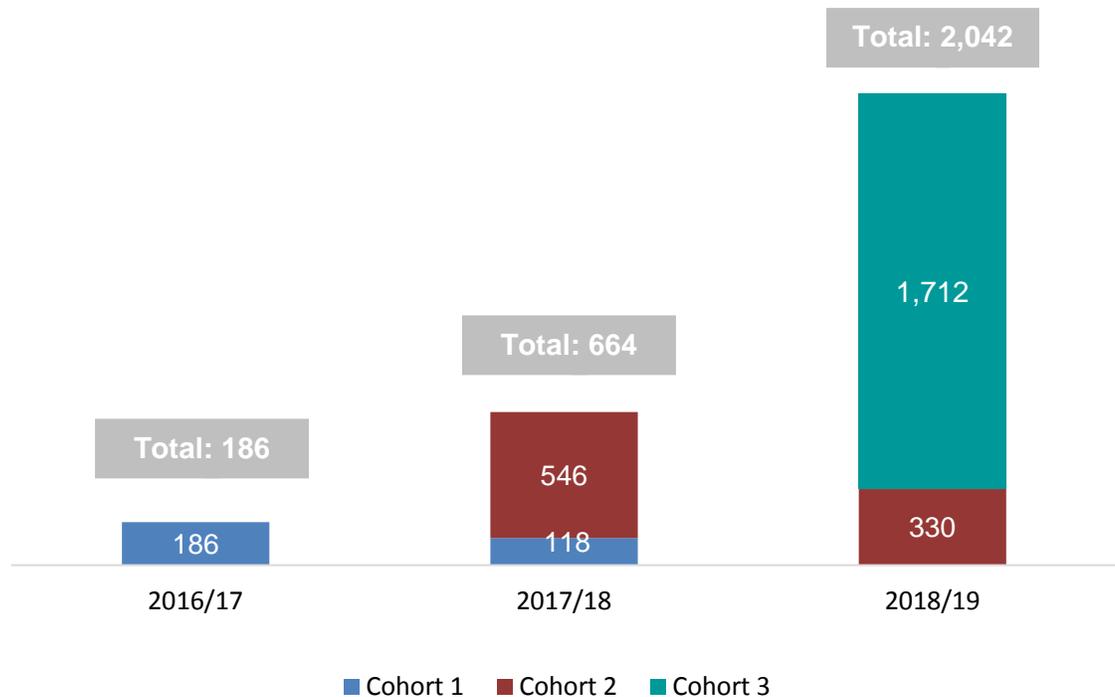
The San Diego Promise program has evolved over time in response to student feedback and program growth. However, key components of the San Diego Promise Program have remained unchanged. These key components include:

1. **Financial Assistance** (e.g., assistance for enrollment fees and books)
2. **Supports to place students on a pathway to completion** (e.g., educational planning, orientation and assessment, Enrollment in 12 or more units per term)
3. **Accountability measures** (e.g., San Diego Promise Program commitment contract)
4. **Supports to connect students to peers, faculty, and staff and increase sense of belonging and support** (e.g., peer mentors, 8-hour community service requirement)

### Highlights

1. **Since its inception as a small pilot program in 2016, the San Diego Promise Program has expanded rapidly to meet student demand.**
  - 186 students were served by the San Diego Promise Program in its pilot year (2016/17). By 2018/19, the program served 2,042 students across two cohorts. **During this time, the program grew more than ten fold.**

Number of students enrolled in the San Diego Promise Program at the start of each academic year



- By the 2018/19 academic year, the San Diego Promise Program supported roughly half of all first time, full-time students at City, Mesa, and Miramar Colleges.
- 3,317 students signed up to participate in Promise for the 2019/20 academic year. Outcomes for these students are not included as the fall term was still in progress as of the writing of this report.

**2. The San Diego Promise Program serves students who have been historically underrepresented and/or marginalized in institutions of higher education.**

- Promise students are more likely than their first time, full-time peers to identify as Latinx, female, and first generation to college. They are also more to receive financial aid and to utilize Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS).
- Below is an overview of the three cohorts of San Diego Promise Program participants.

*Overview of San Diego Promise Participants*

	Cohort 1 - Pilot	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
<b>Number of students</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>1,712</b>
City College	59	186	522
Mesa College	88	246	695
Miramar College	39	114	495
<b>Ethnicity (Main)</b>			
African American	4%	8%	5%
American Indian	1%	<1%	<1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	14%	10%	11%
Filipino	6%	7%	6%
Latinx	60%	57%	56%
White	10%	12%	16%
% Female	65%	57%	54%
Age 18-24	92%	92%	99%
First Generation	38%	47%	36%
Financial Aid	88%	81%	72%
Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS)	26%	24%	16%
Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS)	4%	8%	7%
Prior Continuing Education Student	14%	12%	<1%
Foster Youth	2%	2%	2%
Percent seeking an Associate or Bachelor's degree	77%	74%	73%
SDUSD enrollment	88%	87%	51%

**3. Outcomes research suggests that the San Diego Promise Program has a positive impact on student success, as measured by the percent of students meeting program requirements, campus engagement, and educational/progress indicators.**

Correlational methods were used to compare the outcomes of Promise students in Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 to their first-time-to-college peers who started college in the same term. At the time of the study, Cohorts 1 and 2 had completed two years of the program, while students in Cohort 3 had completed one full year of the program. Study limitations included the chance of overestimating program benefits due to omitted variable bias, underestimating program benefits through the choice of comparison group (full-time students who did not seek program support), and lack of data on the amount and quality of student interaction with program components.

**Key findings from outcomes research:**

**Promise students attempted and earned more units.**

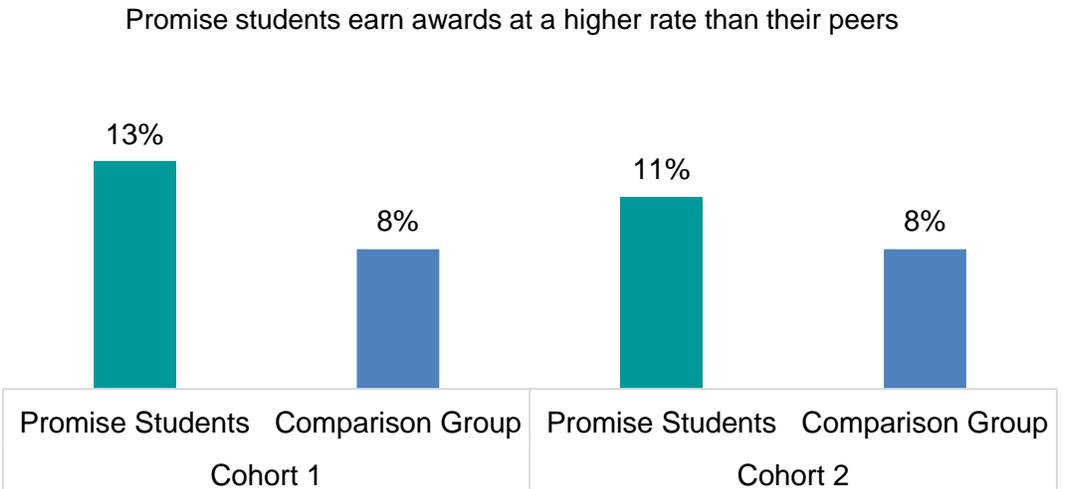
Across cohorts, San Diego Promise Program students attempted more units than their first-time full-time peers in their first year at SDCCD. They also earned more units on average. These findings held true for students tracked into their second year (Cohort 1 and Cohort 2) at SDCCD.

**Promise students showed evidence of higher campus engagement.**

Across cohorts, San Diego Promise Program students were more likely than their peers to participate in tutoring. This is suggestive that participation in the San Diego Promise Program facilitates higher on-campus engagement, which is a key predictor of student success and completion (Booth et al. 2013; Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson 1997; Kuh et al. 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Tinto 1987).

**Promise students were more likely to earn a degree or certificate.**

San Diego Promise students were more likely to earn a degree or certificate than their non-Promise peers when tracked for two years, though the overall number of students receiving awards was low. Notably, when we tracked Cohort 1 for three years (through 2018/19), 40% had received awards compared to 23% of their peer group. This is especially promising evidence of program success.



**Outcomes research also revealed other “promising” evidence that the program supported student success.**

There was moderate evidence that the program supported students through higher course success, course retention, likelihood of passing transfer-level math and English, term and annual persistence, and GPA.

**Outcomes were stronger for students in Cohorts 1 and 3.**

Students in Cohorts 1 and 3 experienced stronger outcomes than students in Cohort 2 did. Limited supports for Cohort 2 as a result of rapid program growth that outpaced the program’s infrastructure may be one reason for these findings. Additionally, there is some evidence that students in Cohort 1 and 3 had higher levels of academic preparation than students in Cohort 2 upon entry to SDCCD.

**4. Further research highlights the benefits of the program for marginalized groups and further delineates the value-add of the San Diego Promise Program.**

- Doctoral research found evidence that the program supported student outcomes for low-income, first generation, and students of color (Latinx and black) in particular when matched to similar comparison groups of first-time full-time students.
  - Similar to the larger group of Promise students, evidence of potential program impact was stronger for Cohorts 1 and 3.
- This research further suggests that within the San Diego Promise Program participation in specific engagement activities (e.g., onboarding, peer mentoring) was correlated with stronger educational outcomes, with some evidence of a causal relationship.
  - Participating in orientation, for example, was associated with an increased likelihood of persistence and completing a degree or certificate.
  - Counselor meetings were associated with an increased likelihood of persistence.

**5. In focus groups conducted by the SDCCD Office of Institutional Planning and Research, students reported numerous benefits to participating in the San Diego Promise Program.**

SDCCD compiled and analyzed focus group data from 59 students from Cohorts 1 and 2 of the San Diego Promise Program (including students from City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College). **Students reported several key ways participation in the San Diego Promise Program supported their educational trajectory.** In addition to the [financial assistance](#) they received through their participation in the program, student feedback suggested that the San Diego Promise Program supported four out of the six pillars of the student success factors identified by the RP Group.

**Four pillars of the Success Factors Framework from the RP Group supported by the San Diego Promise Program**

**Directed: students have a goal and know how to achieve it**

The San Diego Promise Program encourages students to seek a degree or certificate within two years of entry, and provides students with the information they need to meet this goal.

*“Having an educational plan helps sort out my priorities in the next years. So it makes the goal seem more reachable. Because you have a goal written out on a piece of paper so it kind of gives you motivation to keep going in school and stuff.”*—Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

**Focused: students stay on track –keeping their eyes on the prize**

In focus groups, students shared that the San Diego Promise Program helped increase their accountability, and in doing so, supported their pathway to college completion. Requirements to create an education plan, submit a progress report, and meet with a counselor, for example, helped students develop and keep track of progress toward goals.

*“Helps me stay on track, if I didn’t have them I feel like I would slack a little bit like not be a full time student. The progress report, it kind of pushes you to do better.”*—City College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

**Nurtured: students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed**

Students reported that it was motivating to know that program staff, Promise counselors, peer mentors, and donors were invested in their success in college.

*“I had the opportunity to attend the Promise donor social. I actually had to talk to most of the donors that were helping us. A lot of them were actually interested in what we wanted to do in life. They were actually more than happy to help us or they were more than happy to donate to this program. So honestly I just feel like you know and also interacting with other people in the Promise program it just felt so rewarding. It motivates you more to do well in school honestly that you have people that actually care about you and are actually giving you money you know.”*—SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

**Connected: students feel like they are part of the college community**

The San Diego Promise Program helps students feel they are connected to the college and District through programs and services like Orientation, a Personal Growth course and three engagement requirements.

*“Great program it pushed me to be involved in this school. At first, like in high school I didn’t go to any events. Not even football games. Here it actually pushes me to do that. It pushes me to be better and I like that it gives me the opportunity to be a better person, not only school wise but personality wise.”*—Mesa College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

**6. Students offered several key suggestions for improving the San Diego Promise Program. This feedback was incorporated into program implementation.**

 Higher levels of communication about what the San Diego Promise Program is, program eligibility requirements, and program expectations.

 More opportunities to create a closer connection to their peers in the San Diego Promise Program

 Dedicated spaces on campus for student support services and creating closer connections with Promise Program staff and other Promise students

 More dedicated staff members to support San Diego Promise Program students

 Additional training to improve the quality of peer mentorship received by program participants

 Greater targeting of support to meet student need level

**7. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) continues to work closely with San Diego Promise Program leads to collect research to support continuous improvement.**

Recently, OIRP surveyed students who signed up for Promise in the last two academic years, but were not enrolled as of Fall 2019 census. The survey was sent to 176 students and was returned by 44, for a response rate of 25%. 19 of these students had previously participated in Promise.

**Key findings:**

- 18 out of 19 students reported a positive experience with Promise.
- Family obligations and work were key reasons students did not continue in Promise. A quarter of respondents attended another institution besides SDCCD for higher education.
- Students reported an interest in additional financial support, including for books, tuition, living expenses, and transportation. A top need identified by students was a desire for greater support choosing classes.

## Conclusion

“A Comprehensive Evaluation of the San Diego Promise Program: Helping Students Achieve their Educational Objectives” identified several ways that the San Diego Promise Program benefits students and the community.

### Benefits to students include:

- Tuition-free two-year college education
- Additional financial supports such as book grants
- Supports to guide students during their journey to college completion
- Increased sense of feeling directed, focused, nurtured, and connected
- Evidence of increased engagement and improved outcomes

### Community benefits include:

- A culture of college-going
- A more educated and career-prepared workforce
- Tighter connection between the community and the district

## Summary

1. The San Diego Promise Program has grown significantly since it started as a small pilot program of 186 students, thanks to new California legislation and the generosity of donors.
2. San Diego Promise students are more likely than their first time, full-time peers to identify as Latinx, female, and first generation to college as well as to receive financial aid and to utilize Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS).
3. Outcomes research suggests that the San Diego Promise Program has a positive impact on student success, as measured by the percent of students meeting program requirements, campus engagement, and educational progress indicators. Key findings include higher unit taking and earning, higher campus engagement as measured through tutoring, and higher degree and award earning rates. Additional research suggests these findings hold true for students of color and first generation and low-income students, and suggests that engagement with program components matters to student success.
4. Students report that the San Diego Promise program makes them feel more directed, focused, nurtured, and connected.
5. There is an ongoing effort to incorporate student feedback and research findings into improving the San Diego Promise Program, including recent efforts to understand why students do not continue in Promise.
6. The San Diego Promise Program benefits both students and the community.

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