

SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



**SAN DIEGO
PROMISE**

CITY COLLEGE • MESA COLLEGE
MIRAMAR COLLEGE

A comprehensive evaluation of the San Diego Promise Program

**Helping students achieve
their educational objectives**

October 2019

Prepared by the SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
OVERVIEW OF THE SAN DIEGO PROMISE PROGRAM.....	2
What is the San Diego Promise Program?	2
What are the requirements for participating in the San Diego Promise Program?	3
Chart 1. Evolving participation requirements.....	3
What is the structure of the San Diego Promise Program, how has it evolved, and why?	4
Chart 2. The evolution of the San Diego Promise Program	5
Chart 3. Campus variations in the structure of the San Diego Promise Program.....	6
Who are the recipients of the San Diego Promise?	7
Table 1. Promise cohorts	8
How can SDCCD increase the number of students participating in the San Diego Promise Program?....	9
SAN DIEGO PROMISE PROGRAM OUTCOMES	10
What are the outcomes of Promise students compared to their non-Promise peers?	10
Table 2. Reported outcomes for San Diego Promise Program students	12
Table 3. Number of students in each cohort of the San Diego Promise Program at start of academic year	12
Units Attempted and Earned: Overview of Findings	13
Table 4. Units attempted and earned for all cohorts in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program.....	13
Table 5. Units attempted and earned for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 in their second year of the San Diego Promise Program (Persisters who remained in the Promise Program only).....	14
Overview of key findings for cohorts in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program.....	15
Table 6. Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students in their first year of the Promise Program to their peers.....	16
Bar Chart 1. Key Outcomes for Cohort 1 in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program....	17
Bar Chart 2. Key Outcomes for Cohort 2 in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program....	18
Bar Chart 3. Key Outcomes for Cohort 3 in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program....	19
Overview of key findings for cohorts in their <i>second year</i> of the San Diego Promise Program.....	20
Second year outcomes for students in Cohort 1	20
Second year outcomes for students in Cohort 2	20

Table 7. Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students in their second year of the Promise Program to their peers.....	21
Degrees and Awards	22
Bar Chart 4. Awards earned in two years: Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students and their peers.....	22
What is the impact of the San Diego Promise Program on students, and how does this impact vary by important characteristics such as gender and ethnicity?	23
THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND STUDENT FEEDBACK	24
What are the benefits of the San Diego Promise Program from the student perspective?.....	24
How can the San Diego Promise Program improve based on the student perspective?	28
Why do students exit the San Diego Promise Program?	31
RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS.....	32
CONCLUSION.....	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
APPENDIX.....	37
Appendix 1. Overview of Data Sources.....	37
Appendix 2. 2019-2020 San Diego Promise Contract	38

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 that time the program has served 2,444 unique students across three cohorts.**

This comprehensive report gathers data from a wide variety of sources (surveys, focus groups, outcomes research, and interviews) to demonstrate how the San Diego Promise Program has evolved, what the program—with the help of donor support and buy-in—has achieved, and next steps for ensuring the program lives up to its “promise.”

Main findings

- ❖ **The San Diego Promise Program is evolving.** Throughout the program, program leads and SDCCD leadership have consistently sought to gather and incorporate student feedback into the San Diego Promise Program.
- ❖ **The San Diego Promise Program has grown rapidly.** Today, it serves roughly half of all first-time full-time students at City, Mesa and Miramar Colleges.
- ❖ **The San Diego Promise Program serves students who have been historically underrepresented and marginalized in institutions of higher education.** In general, San Diego Promise Program students are more likely than their non-Promise first-time full-time peers to identify as Latinx, female, and/or first-generation students. They are also more likely than their peers to receive financial aid and to utilize Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS).
- ❖ **The San Diego Promise Program supports student success.** Students report that the program makes them feel more directed, focused, nurtured, and connected. When compared to peers who *were not* in the San Diego Promise Program, students were more likely to attempt 12 units or more per term, with some evidence that they were able to translate larger course loads into more earned units. They were also likely to be engaged on campus, as evidenced by participation in program engagement activities and tutoring. Less impact was found on educational/progress indicators, though there was some suggestion students who stayed enrolled in Promise for the full two-year commitment were more likely to receive awards than their peers.
- ❖ **Rapid program expansion has introduced new challenges to maintaining the early successes of the San Diego Promise Program.** A more than ten-fold increase in the number of program participants has made it difficult to maintain the same high level of service and support experienced by students in the pilot year.
- ❖ **SDCCD is committed to improving the San Diego Promise Program.** Next steps include seeking additional funding to build a stronger program infrastructure to support the needs of a rapidly growing program; working with constituents to examine potential changes to the program’s student funding model and eligibility requirements; and expanding the program to students earlier in their educational trajectory.

...the program demonstrates a number of benefits to students including supporting students to feel more directed & focused,

OVERVIEW OF THE SAN DIEGO PROMISE PROGRAM

What is the San Diego Promise Program?

During its first three years, the San Diego Promise Program provided tuition-free education and additional benefits for first-time, full-time students¹ at San Diego Community College District's (SDCCD) three credit colleges: City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College.

Promise Programs have been established across the nation under the premise that through reducing financial pressures on students and increasing comprehensive student support services, institutions of higher education can accomplish two main goals:

- (1) increase access to higher education, especially among populations that have been traditionally underserved, and
- (2) increase the number of students who achieve successful outcomes, such as earning an AA/AS, earning a certificate of achievement, transferring to a four-year college or university, and/or achieving gainful employment.

At the production of this report, there were more than 300 College Promise Programs underway in 44 states (College Promise Campaign 2019). California alone is home to 42 Promise Programs (California College Promise Project 2018).

San Diego Community College District launched its Promise Program as a small pilot in 2016. The program has recently completed its third year. In October 2017, Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill 19, providing free tuition for full-time students for 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 funding to students in their second year.

In 2019, Assembly Bill 2 expanded state funding to support first-time full-time students in their second year, enabling SDCCD to consider expanding funding to other groups who may benefit from the free tuition and student services provided by the San Diego Promise Program during the 2019-20 academic year but who do not meet the eligibility requirements for AB19/AB2.

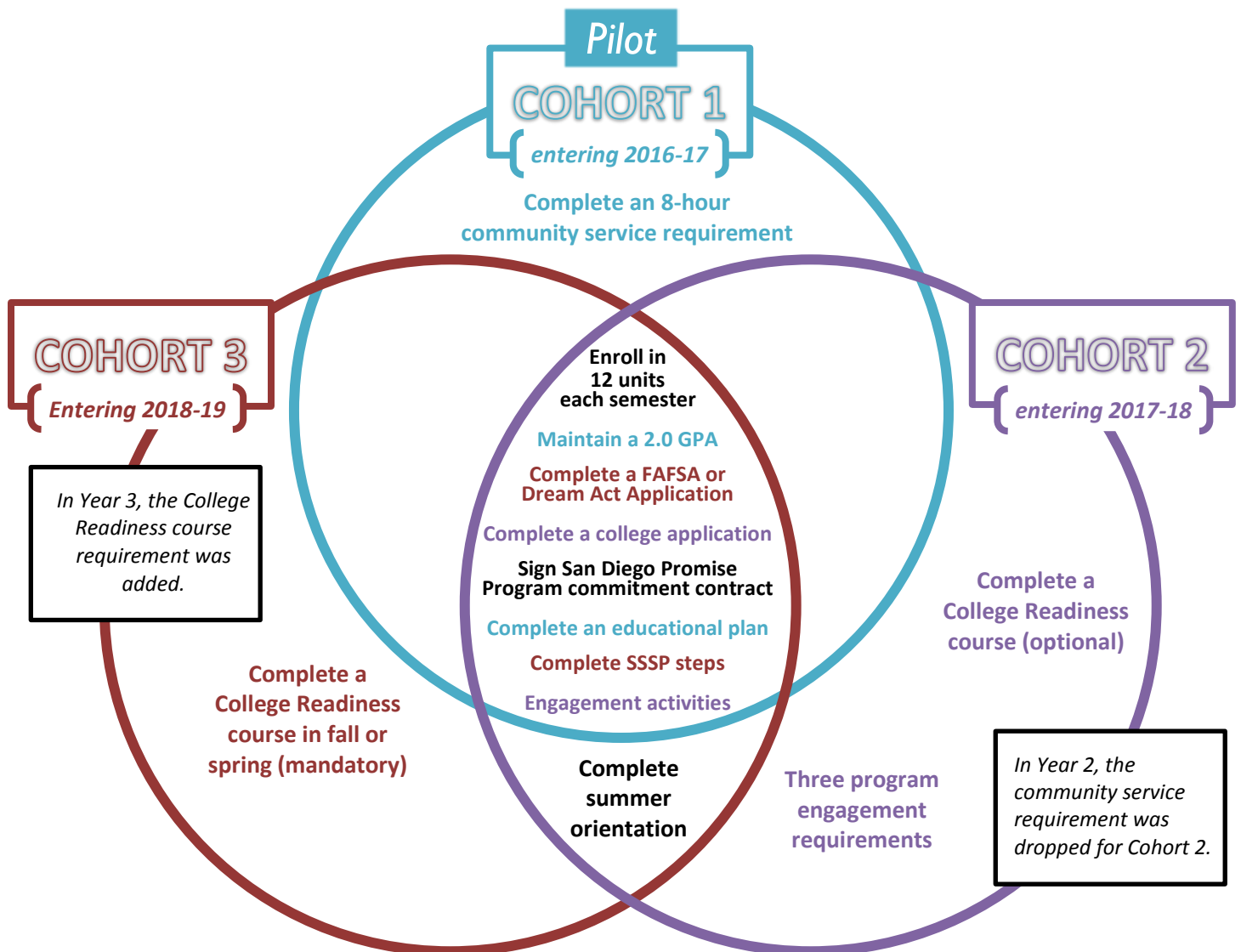
This report, produced by the SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, explores the history and evolution of the San Diego Promise Program, student perceptions and outcomes, and the future of SDCCD's promise to support the community through the delivery of high quality educational experiences and holistic student services.

¹ During its first three years, the program also admitted a select group of students transitioning from the Continuing Education noncredit program to credit courses.

What are the requirements for participating in the San Diego Promise Program?

The San Diego Promise Program is designed to increase access and facilitate student completion for first-time-to-college students and other priority groups in the SDCCD service area. Program requirements were selected to enhance the student experience and facilitate student success and completion. Requirements have been adjusted over time as program leads have gained additional insights into what works best for retaining and supporting San Diego Promise Program students. Chart 1 displays the evolving requirements for participation in the San Diego Promise Program, while the next section explores the evolution of the program more generally and the reasons for these changes.

Chart 1. Evolving participation requirements



What is the structure of the San Diego Promise Program, how has it evolved, and why?

The structure of the San Diego Promise Program has evolved over time. The major drivers of change have been two-fold:

- There has been a concerted effort by the San Diego Promise Program staff and SDCCD leadership to incorporate student feedback into the structure of the program.

Our thought process in developing the program has been to develop services and programs that are value-added and meaningful to the students, not additional barriers and not just busy work for the students, shared one program lead.

Throughout the program's evolution, program leads have worked with the SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning to collect data on student outcomes and perceptions to inform continuous program improvement efforts.

- The program has grown rapidly. The program began with a small pilot of 186 students, and expanded to serve a total of 2,042 students just two years later.² The rapid growth of the program demonstrates the depth of the need that SDCCD, in partnership with donors and community partners, is addressing. However, increasing the number of students served through the San Diego Promise Program by a more than ten-fold within a three-year period also comes with challenges, as explored in this report.

Chart 2 maps how the program has grown and changed over time, and the impetus behind these changes. All SDCCD credit colleges have implemented the San Diego Promise Program.

To help ensure a smooth and consistent experience across the District's San Diego Promise Program at each of the three credit colleges, major programmatic decisions were established districtwide. However, each college had an opportunity to help shape the provision of services to conform to localized conditions and student needs. Chart 3 examines localized differences in the structure of the program at City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College.

² The San Diego Promise Program has served 2,444 unique students over three years. 2,042 students is the highest number of students served in any single academic year thus far (2018-19). This total includes students from Cohort 2 in their second year of the program and students from Cohort 3 in their first year of the program.

Chart 2. The evolution of the San Diego Promise Program

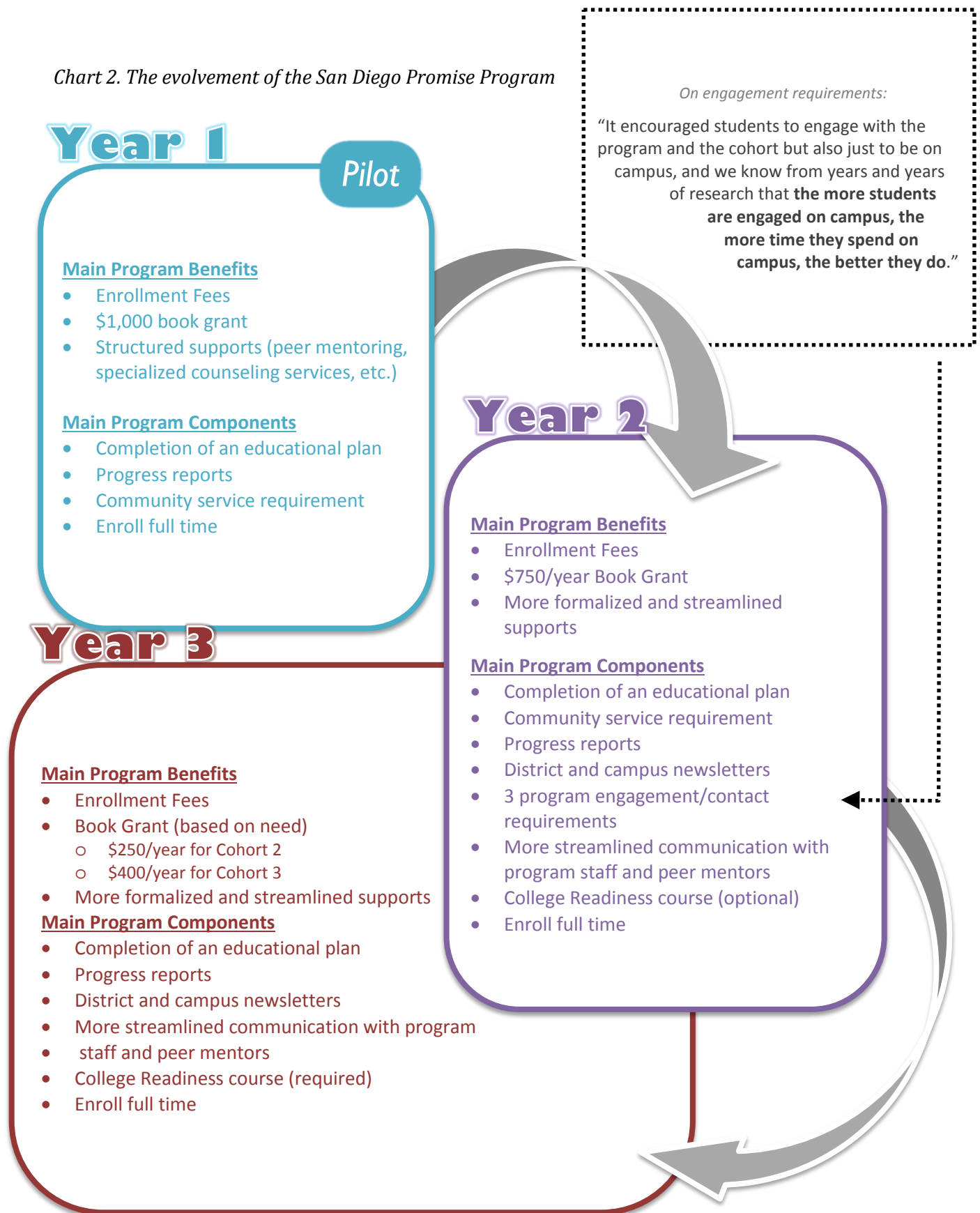


Chart 3. Campus variations in the structure of the San Diego Promise Program

	City	Mesa	Miramar
Department	First Year Services	Outreach	Outreach
Program Coordination	1 Program Technician; <i>also oversees other first year experience programs</i>	1 Outreach staff member; <i>specialization in outreach and onboarding</i>	1 Outreach staff member; <i>specialization in outreach and onboarding</i>
Peer Mentoring?	Yes	Yes; partnered with another division	Yes
Designated Promise Counselor?	Yes (Recent)	Yes	Yes

Program Elements Consistent Across the District			
Outreach & Communication	Application Process /On-boarding/Pre-Enrollment Services	Eligibility Requirements (cohort-based)	Appeals

Who are the recipients of the San Diego Promise?

Between Fall 2016 and Fall 2018, the San Diego Promise Program grew from serving 186 students from one cohort to more than 2,000 students from across two cohorts.

The San Diego Promise Program has now served three cohorts of students. In 2016-17—the pilot year of the San Diego Promise Program—186 students made the San Diego “promise.” In its second year, the program expanded to include an additional 546 students. In Fall 2018, SDCCD invited 1,712 new Promise Program students to its three credit colleges: City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College.

spaces to accommodate select students seeking to transition from the Continuing Education noncredit program to credit courses.

While the majority of students were first-time to college, the San Diego Promise program also reserved

Table 1 examines the composition of the three cohorts of Promise students.

In general, San Diego Promise students are more likely than their peers to identify as Latinx, female, and first-generation students. They are also more likely than their peers to receive financial aid and to utilize Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS).

Latinx students comprise well over half of each San Diego Promise Program cohort. Latinx students comprise roughly 39% of all students in SDCCD (2018 San Diego Community College District Enrollment Almanac).

In the most recent cohort, only slightly more than half of students in the San Diego Promise Program graduated from the San Diego Unified School District. This suggests that as the program has grown, so has its reach, with the program drawing students from outside SDCCD’s service area.

In 2017-18, the first year that the program was open to the public, 46% of students in the entering cohort self-reported a high school GPA of 3.1 or more. In 2018-19, 55% of students in the entering cohort self-reported the same. This is an important change in the population of the Promise student body. As we discuss further in the “Research Conclusions & Implications” section of this report, determining how to direct support to Promise students who are high-need is an important next step in the program’s expansion.

The San Diego Promise Program has a history of providing access and support to students who have been historically underrepresented in institutions of higher education and who have been less likely than their peers to experience positive educational outcomes, such as degree attainment.

Table 1. Promise cohorts

	Cohort 1 - Pilot	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Number of students	186	546	1,712
City College	59	186	522
Mesa College	88	246	695
Miramar College	39	114	495
Ethnicity (Main)			
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%

How can SDCCD increase the number of students participating in the San Diego Promise Program?

The requirements for participation in the San Diego Promise Program are minimal. So why don't all eligible students participate? To answer this question, Promise Program staff worked with the San Diego Community College Office of Institutional Research and Planning to conduct a survey of first-time to college students who were enrolled in 12 units or more in Fall 2018—thus meeting one of the central requirements for program eligibility—but who did not enroll in the San Diego Promise Program. The survey generated responses from 263 students who met the specified criteria, for an 18% response rate (survey invitations = 1,478 students).

Key Traits of Survey Respondents

- Mesa students comprised the majority of the sample (44%), which is proportionate to the overall headcount of Mesa students at SDCCD.
- The majority of survey respondents (74%) had applied for financial aid (City College, 83%; Mesa College, 72%; and Miramar College, 69%). This means that the majority of survey respondents met at least two central criteria for applying to participate in San Diego Promise: completing the FAFSA and enrolling in 12 or more units.
- 51% percent of survey respondents said that they received financial aid, and 9% responded that they did not remember.

Key Findings

- 61% percent of students reported that they had heard of San Diego Promise (City College, 50%; Mesa College, 59%; and Miramar College, 76%). This is larger than the percentage of students who had heard of EOPS, First Year Experience, DSPS, CALWORKS, or STAR/TRIO.
 - However, some students may have confused the San Diego Promise Program with the California College Promise Grant (the new name for the State Board of Governor's Waiver, or BOG). For example, 15% of respondents incorrectly reported that they were in the San Diego Promise Program when asked. **This suggests additional outreach efforts to clarify the differences between the San Diego Promise Program and the California Promise Grant are needed.**
- When a short explanation of the San Diego Promise Program was given, 70% of students responded that they would have considered participating in the San Diego Promise Program (City College, 67%; Mesa College, 67%; and Miramar College, 77%). Notably, this is a higher percentage of students than those who reported that they had heard of the San Diego Promise Program.
- The top reasons students provided for why they didn't sign up for San Diego Promise were:
 - (1) finding out about the program too late (54%);
 - (2) uncertainty they would be accepted (18%);
 - (3) not meeting the requirements (9%);
 - (4) and applying but not being accepted (9%).

These findings suggest the need for more effective communication about the benefits and the requirements of the San Diego Promise Program.

- 53% of students reported that they were interested in receiving more information about the San Diego Promise Program.

Highlight: These survey results informed new business practices. Starting in Fall 2018, new first-time to college students received a notification that they might be eligible for the San Diego Promise Program.

SAN DIEGO PROMISE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

What are the outcomes of Promise students compared to their non-Promise peers?

The San Diego Promise Program was introduced to increase educational access and facilitate student success and completion of educational objectives. The overview of San Diego Promise Program participants on page 8 demonstrates that the San Diego Promise Program supports a wide variety of students, especially low income students and students of color who are traditionally underserved in higher education settings. How did participation in the Promise Program shape these students' outcomes?

In the scientific community, experimental methods are considered the gold standard of measuring impact because they isolate the cause of change. In institutional research, the use of experimental methods is rarely plausible or desirable because it would mean denying some students a program or service they might benefit from in order to test its effectiveness on a comparable group of students. Thus, correlational methods are generally utilized. Differences in outcomes between students enrolled in a program and students not enrolled in a program may be *suggestive* of impact, especially when a proper comparison group is chosen. **To study the impact of the San Diego Promise Program, correlational methods were used to compare the outcomes of students enrolled in the San Diego Promise Program to first-time, full-time students not enrolled in the San Diego Promise Program.**

The analyses were limited to key outcomes for which, given the intention and design of the program, we may expect to find differences suggestive of program impact. We examine first and second year program outcomes separately, as is standard in program evaluation research. First year students in college have fundamentally different experiences than second year college students, as they are adjusting to a new environment. In addition, students who persist in a program are likely to have different attributes, experiences, and outcomes than students who start a program and do not complete it. Both are important reasons for investigating first and second year program outcomes separately.

The outcomes of each cohort of Promise students are compared against the outcomes of first-time full-time students who started in Summer and Fall. The strength of this comparison group is that it includes students with a similar enrollment profile as Promise students. **However, first-time, full-time students who do not enlist institutional supports may be more prepared for college than the students who do, which may result in an underestimation of the San Diego Promise Program's impact.** While we call out all differences between Promise students and their peers in graphs and charts, we narratively focus on the differences which are suggestive of practical significance.

The San Diego Promise Program furthers the San Diego Community College District's mission to "provide accessible, high-quality learning experiences, and undergraduate education at an affordable price to meet the educational needs of the San Diego community and the state."

Notably, regardless of the outcomes found in the comprehensive report, supporting students through tuition support and book grants on its own is a noteworthy achievement. In 2019, there was nearly 1.5 trillion dollars of outstanding student debt (Federal Reserve Bank of New York 2019), and 40% of adults ages 18 to 29 report owing student debt (Cilluffo 2017). While community colleges have always served as an affordable alternative to other institutions of higher education, the San Diego Promise Program further supports the San Diego Community College District's mission to "provide accessible, high-quality learning experiences, and undergraduate education at an affordable price to meet the educational needs of the San Diego community and the state."

Tables 2 and 3 on the next page provide an overview of the reported outcomes for Promise student cohorts and the size of each cohort in both the first and second year of Promise funding.

Table 2. Reported outcomes for San Diego Promise Program students

Cohort	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cohort 1	Year 1	Year 2		
Cohort 2		Year 1	Year 2	
Cohort 3			Year 1	Year 2*

*In progress as of the production of this report.

Table 3. Number of students in each cohort of the San Diego Promise Program at start of academic year

Cohort	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cohort 1	186	118	No longer eligible for Promise funds	
Cohort 2		546	330 *	No longer eligible for Promise funds
Cohort 3			1,712	Data not yet available
Number of Students Served through Promise in Academic Year	186	664	2,042	Data not yet available

*Includes 13 students who started the program after Fall 2017. Thus, the persistence rate for the San Diego Promise Program for this cohort would be calculated as 317/546, or 58%.

Units Attempted and Earned: Overview of Findings

The San Diego Promise Program is designed to support students to attend college full-time and earn degrees and awards at a faster rate than they would without additional financial and/or other forms of support. Tables 4 and 5 show how Promise students compare against other first-time full-time students in the number of units attempted and earned in their first and second years (among persisted students) at SDCCD, respectively.

Findings:

- The Promise program successfully encourages students to remain enrolled full-time beyond the first term. Enrolling full-time in college courses is one of the most important predictors of college completion (Turk 2017), a key goal of the San Diego Promise Program.
- We also see evidence that San Diego Promise students are more likely to earn more units than their non-Promise peers in both their first and second years of the program. For example, 82% of Cohort 1 students earned 12 or more units in their first year, compared to 79% of the comparison group. Of Cohort 1 students who persisted to a second year and remained enrolled in the San Diego Promise Program, 90% completed 12 or more units in their first year, compared to 73% of the comparison group.

*Table 4. Units attempted and earned for all cohorts in their **first year** of the San Diego Promise Program*

Units	Cohort 1 (Pilot Year of Program)				Cohort 2				Cohort 3			
	Attempted		Earned		Attempted		Earned		Attempted		Earned	
	P	CG	P	CG	P*	CG	P	CG	P	CG	P	CG
0	1%	0%	4%	5%	0%	0%	7%	5%	0%	0%	5%	7%
0.1 - 5.9	0%	0%	4%	5%	1%	0%	5%	5%	1%	0%	6%	5%
6.0 - 11.9	2%	0%	10%	11%	2%	0%	9%	11%	1%	0%	10%	13%
12.0 - 17.9	6%	12%	9%	15%	8%	12%	12%	14%	8%	15%	12%	15%
18.0 - 23.9	9%	13%	18%	21%	8%	12%	20%	19%	8%	14%	20%	20%
24.0+	82%	74%	55%	43%	82%	76%	47%	46%	82%	70%	48%	40%

*Results for this group were modified 7/19 in response to the discovery of a coding error which inflated units attempted (through the inclusion of drops and never attends). Nonetheless, the trend and magnitude of the trend remain the same as previously reported.

Note: P = San Diego Promise Students, CG = Comparison Group

Table 5. Units attempted and earned for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 in their **second year** of the San Diego Promise Program (Persisters who remained in the Promise Program only)

Units	Cohort 1 students who persisted				Cohort 2 students who persisted			
	Attempted		Earned		Attempted		Earned	
	P	CG	P	CG	P	CG	P	CG
0 Units	0%	0%	1%	8%	0%	0%	4%	9%
0.1 - 5.9	0%	2%	3%	7%	2%	3%	3%	8%
6.0 - 11.9	1%	10%	6%	12%	2%	12%	9%	14%
12.0 - 17.9	3%	12%	9%	15%	10%	13%	15%	14%
18.0 - 23.9	8%	17%	25%	20%	13%	17%	21%	18%
24.0+	88%	59%	56%	38%	73%	55%	48%	37%

Note 1: P = San Diego Promise Students, CG = Comparison Group

Note 2: Cohort 3 will not enter their second year of the Promise program until 2019-20.

Overview of key findings for cohorts in their first year of the San Diego Promise Program

In this section, we examine key findings for cohorts in their first year of the San Diego Promise. We start with an overview before examining each cohort's first year separately.

- As identified previously, we found clear evidence that San Diego Promise Program students were more likely to **attempt** more units than their peers in their first year. We find evidence that Promise students also **earned** more units than their non-San Diego Promise peers.
- 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 may facilitate 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).
- Importantly, the San Diego Promise Program itself facilitates campus engagement. Although the requirements for participating in the Promise Program have varied across cohorts and years of participation (see Page 5), encouraging students to interact with faculty, staff, and peers has played a consistent role in the structure of the San Diego Promise.
- Cohort 1 Promise students were more likely to outperform their first-time full-time non-Promise peers on educational/progress indicators than Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 Promise students. We hypothesize the following reasons for this finding:
 - 1) Faculty and staff at San Diego Unified School District and San Diego Community College Continuing Education nominated students to participate in the program's pilot year. Based on an analysis of self-reported high school GPAs, there is some evidence that these students may have been more academically prepared, on average, than their first-time, full-time peers and Promise students in Cohort 2.
 - 2) Most importantly, Cohort 1 of Promise (186 students) was a smaller group than Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 (546 and 1,712 students, respectively). This enabled Promise staff to provide greater hands-on support to students in this cohort – facilitating stronger educational/progress outcomes.

Notably, students in Cohort 2 and 3 continued to outperform their peers in attempting and earning more units – the key goals of the program.

Table 6. Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students in their **first year** of the Promise Program to their peers

Outcome type	Outcome	Cohort 1 (Pilot Cohort)		Cohort 2		Cohort 3	
		P	CG	P	CG	P	CG
Met Program Requirements	Met SD Promise GPA Requirement	80%	75%	72%	73%	72%	70%
	Met SD Promise Unit Requirement (Earn 24+ Units)	55%	43%	47%	46%	48%	40%
	Average Units Earned	20.98	19.57	19.98	20.00	22.2	20.7
	Met SD Promise GPA/Unit Requirement	55%	43%	46%	46%	48%	40%
Campus Engagement	Enrolled in tutoring	67%	56%	71%	55%	65%	54%
Educational/ Progress Indicators	Attempted 24+ units	82%	74%	82%*	76%*	82%	70%
	Average Units Attempted	26.04	25.38	25.97	25.76	28.0	26.5
	GPA 3.0-4.0	45%	35%	36%	39%	39%	36%
	Average GPA	2.78	2.57	2.56	2.64	2.69	2.60
	Annual Course Success Rate	76%	71%	71%	73%	73%	70%
	Annual Course Retention Rate	92%	90%	92%	90%	90%	89%
	Passed transfer-level math and English in the first year	25%	21%	16%	24%	26%	25%
	Term Persistence	92%	89%	91%	90%	91%	86%
	Annual Persistence	78%	73%	75%	73%	Data not yet available	Data not yet available

*Results for this group were modified 7/19 in response to the discovery of a coding error which inflated units attempted (through the inclusion of drops and never attends). Nonetheless, the trend and magnitude of the trend remain the same as previously reported.

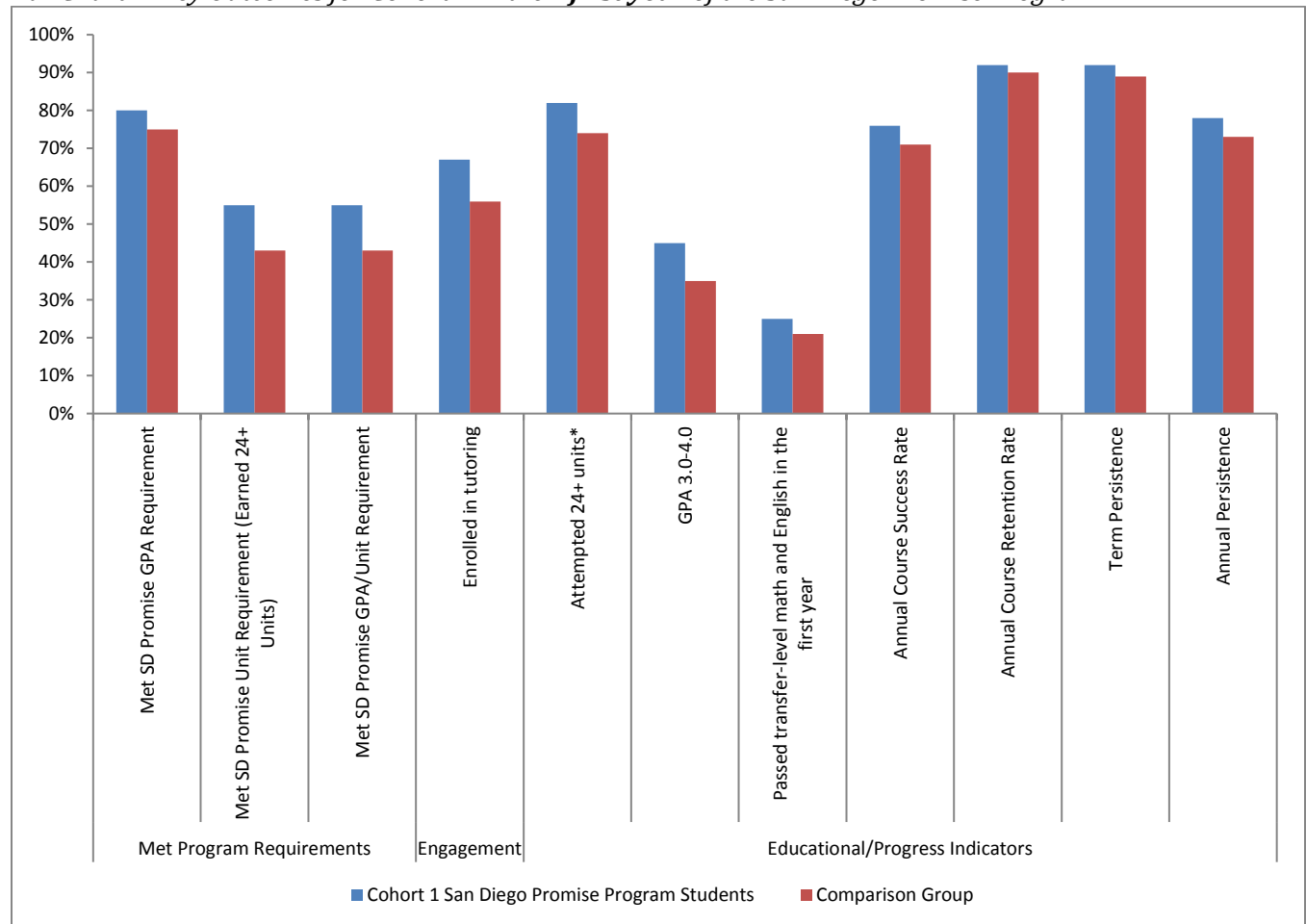
Note 1: P = San Diego Promise Students, CG = Comparison Group

Note 2: Font color indicates where San Diego Promise Program students outperformed their peers on key indicators.

First year outcomes for students in Cohort 1

Bar Chart 1 show outcomes for Cohort 1 in their first year of participation in the San Diego Promise Program compared to their peers. Students in Cohort 1 were more likely to meet San Diego Promise Requirements, including maintaining a GPA of 2.0 or greater (80% vs. 75%) and meeting the San Diego Promise 12 unit-per-term requirement (55% vs. 43%). They were also more likely to achieve a GPA of 3.0-4.0 (45% vs. 35%), were more likely to pass transfer-level English and Math (25% vs. 21%), experienced higher course success rates (76% vs. 71%), higher course retention rates (92% vs. 90%), higher term persistence (92% vs. 89%), and higher annual persistence (78% vs. 73%). This information is suggestive that the San Diego Promise Program improved outcomes for students in Cohort 1 in their first year.

*Bar Chart 1. Key Outcomes for Cohort 1 in their **first year** of the San Diego Promise Program*

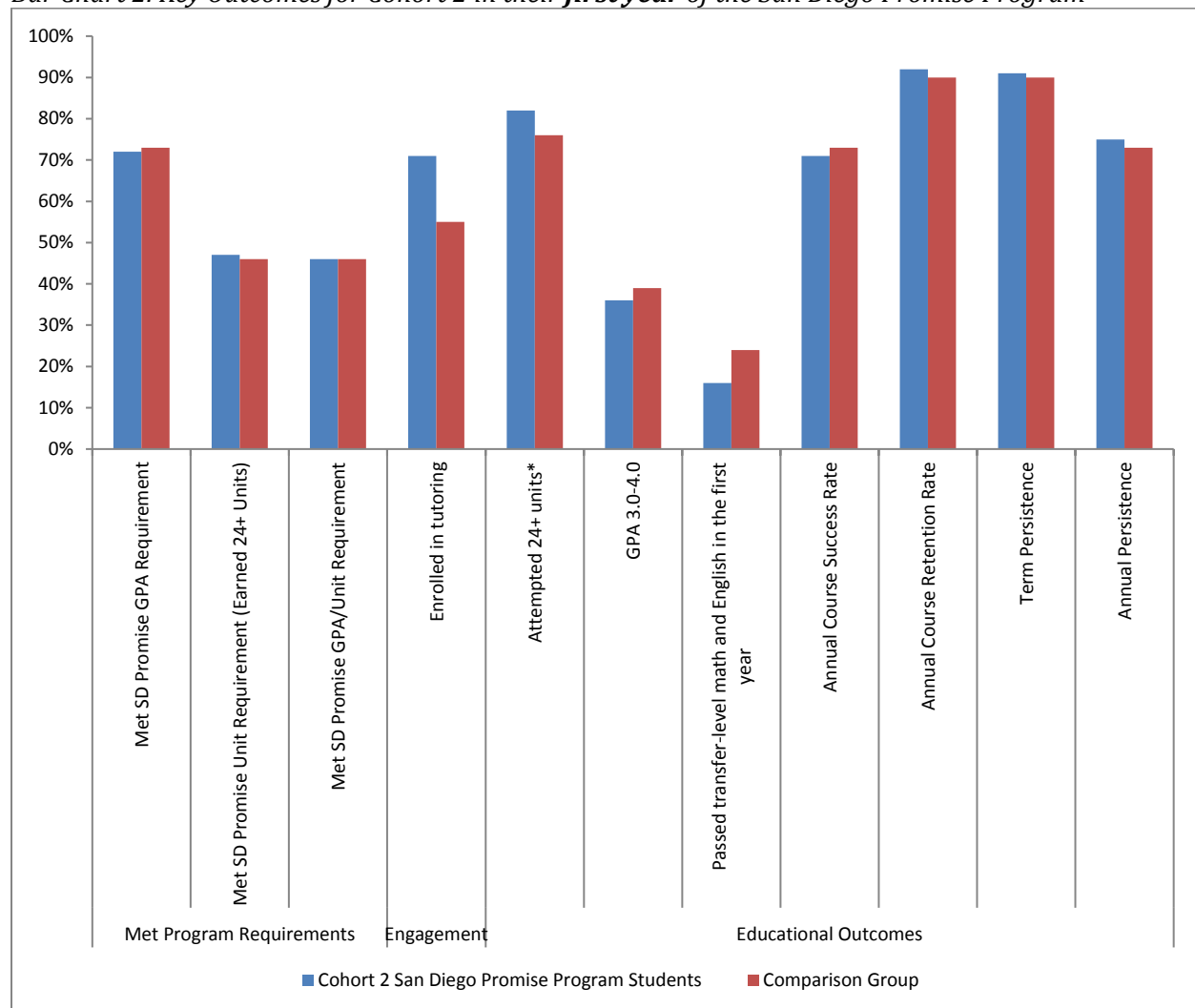


*Enrolling in 24 units is a requirement of the San Diego Promise program, though some students were granted exceptions through an appeal process based on personal educational needs.

First year outcomes for students in Cohort 2

Bar Chart 2 show outcomes for Cohort 2 in their first year of participation in the San Diego Promise Program compared to their peers. Students in Cohort 2 of the Promise Program were more likely than their non-Promise, first-time full-time peers to attempt 24 units and enroll in tutoring. They also experienced slightly higher course retention rates. However, Cohort 2 did not outperform their peers on other metrics. This could be the result of two factors: (1) rapid program expansion inhibited the program's ability to support students at the same level of support received by Cohort 1; or (2) the students in Cohort 1 had different characteristics than the students in Cohort 2. Predictive modeling would provide additional clarification regarding different results observed for Cohort 1 and 2 in their respective first years of the program.

*Bar Chart 2. Key Outcomes for Cohort 2 in their **first year** of the San Diego Promise Program*

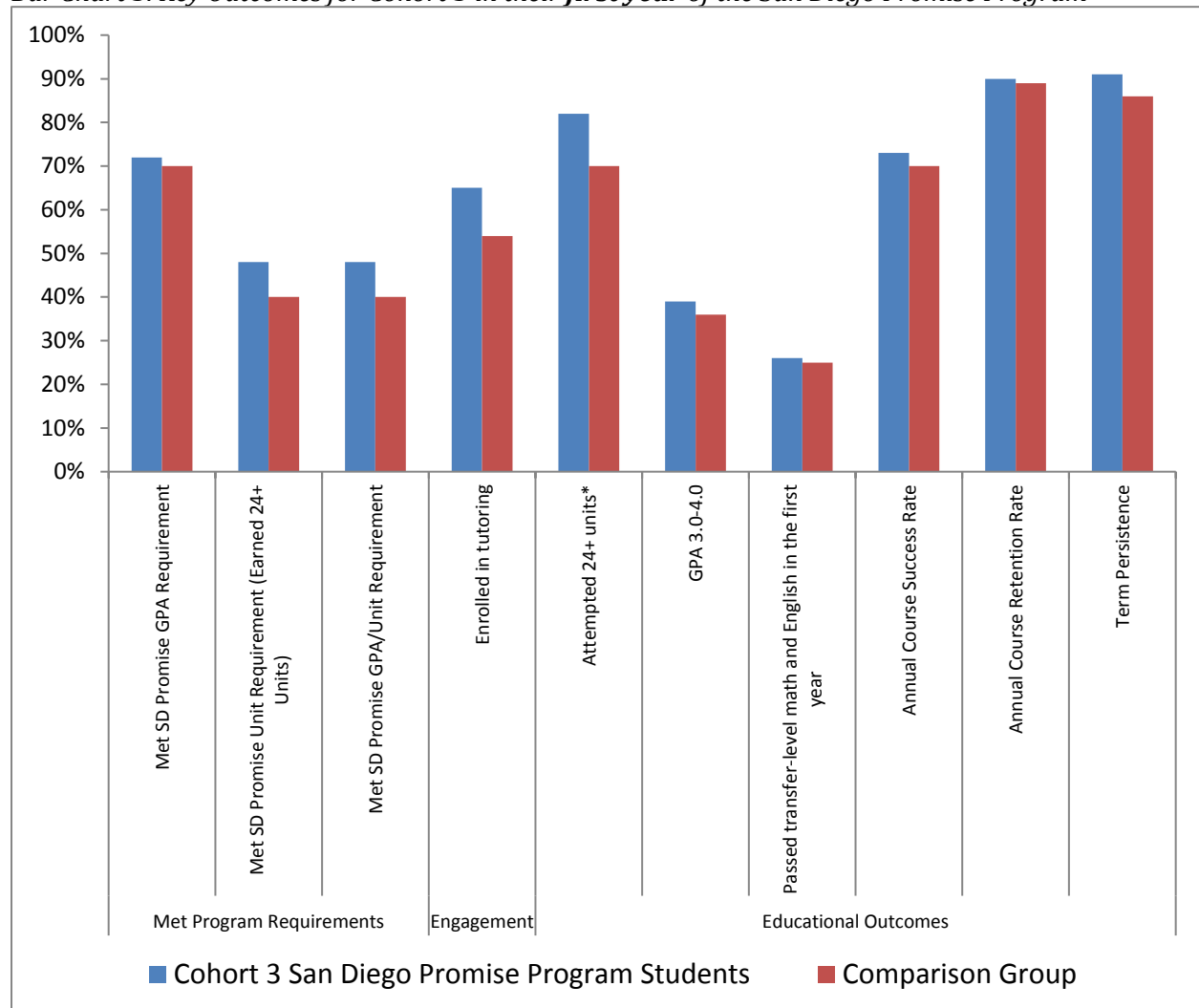


*Enrolling in 24 units is a requirement of the San Diego Promise program, though some students were granted exceptions through an appeal process based on personal educational needs.

First year outcomes for students in Cohort 3

Bar Chart 3 show outcomes for Cohort 3 in their first year of participation in the San Diego Promise Program compared to their peers. Students in Cohort 3 were more likely to attempt 24 units over the course of the year (82% vs. 70%), have higher term persistence (91% vs. 86%), meet the San Diego Promise 12 unit-per-term requirement (48% vs. 40%), and be enrolled in tutoring (65% vs. 54%). This evidence is suggestive that the program supported students. Notably, students in Cohort 3 also had better key outcomes than their Cohort 2 Promise peers. This may be explained by the fact that this cohort, on average, entered SDCCD more academically prepared than students in Cohort 2 based on self-reported high school GPA.

Bar Chart 3. Key Outcomes for Cohort 3 in their **first year** of the San Diego Promise Program



*Enrolling in 24 units is a requirement of the San Diego Promise program, though some students were granted exceptions through an appeal process based on personal educational needs.

Overview of key findings for cohorts in their *second year* of the San Diego Promise Program

The San Diego Promise Program is a two year program. In the previous section, the report discussed outcomes for students in their first year of the program for three distinct cohorts (Cohort 1, entering Fall 2016; Cohort 2, entering Fall 2017; and Cohort 3, entering Fall 2018). In this section, we examine outcomes for students in their **second year** in the San Diego Promise Program.

We found that Promise students in their second year outperformed their comparison peers on almost all key metrics, including meeting program requirements, engagement, and educational/progress indicators. We also briefly discuss the outcomes of students who left the Promise Program, examining both their performance in the first year of Promise and their second year at SDCCD if they continued their education at our institution.

Second year outcomes for students in Cohort 1

118 students³ from Cohort 1 continued in the San Diego Promise Program in their second year. The outcomes of these 118 students in their second year of the program are compared to the outcomes of peers who began their education at SDCCD in Summer or Fall 2016 as first-time full-time students and enrolled in courses in the 2017-2018 school year.⁴ We find that Promise students outperformed non-Promise students on all key indicators (see Table 7).

Notably, 30 students from Cohort 1 of Promise did not reenroll in the San Diego Promise Program a second year but remained students at SDCCD in Fall 2017. The majority were Latinx (n=19, 63%) and female (n=22, 73%). While the results are not shown here, these 30 students experienced less positive outcomes than their peers who continued in the program, including attempting and earning fewer units, lower course retention and success rates, and lower annual GPAs. Notably, these students also fared worse, on average, than their peers in the first year of the San Diego Promise Program.

Second year outcomes for students in Cohort 2

330 students from Cohort 2 continued in the San Diego Promise Program in their second year.⁵ The outcomes of these 330 students in their second year of the program were compared to the outcomes of peers who began their education at SDCCD in Summer or Fall 2017 as first-time full-time students and enrolled in courses in the 2018-2019 school year. We found that Promise students outperformed non-Promise students on nearly all key indicators (see Table 7).

The 229 students who did not remain in Promise were more likely than their Cohort at large to be Latinx (62%) and male (55%). Only 13% of this group succeeded in earning 24+ units and only 12% maintained a GPA of 3.0 to 4.0 in their first year, compared to 47% and 36%, respectively for cohort at-large. This suggests that the lowest performing students were most likely to leave the San Diego Promise Program. This appears to be supported by second year outcomes for the 109 students who enrolled in SDCCD in year 2 but did not stay in Promise.

³ This includes one student who was not included in the original roster of 186 students but was reported as a Cohort 1 Promise student in Year Two.

⁴ Two of these students who reenrolled in Promise did not have any valid enrollments in Fall 2017.

⁵ Thirteen students joined Cohort 2 after Fall 2017. Thus, the persistence rate for the initial 546 students would be calculated by 317/546.

Table 7. Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students in their **second year** of the Promise Program to their peers

Outcome type	Outcome	Cohort 1 (Pilot Cohort)		Cohort 2	
		Promise	Comparison Group	Promise	Comparison Group
Met Program Requirements	Met SD Promise GPA Requirement	98%	89%	94%	81%
	Met SD Promise Unit Requirement (Earn 24+ Units)	56%	47%	48%	37%
	Average Units Earned	23.4	18.5	22.9	21.2
	Met SD Promise GPA/Unit Requirement	56%	47%	47%	37%
Campus Engagement	Enrolled in tutoring	64%	48%	63%	58%
Educational/ Progress Indicators	Attempted 24+ units	88%	59%	73%	55%
	Average Units Attempted	27.7	23.4	27.3	26.0
	GPA 3.0-4.0	58%	40%	49%	40%
	Average GPA	3.08	2.74	2.86	2.76
	Annual Course Success Rate	82%	75%	79%	74%
	Annual Course Retention Rate	91%	90%	92%	90%
	Passed transfer-level math and English in first two years	56%	43%	42%	36%
	Term Persistence	98%	86%	66%	65%
	Annual Persistence	75%	62%	Data not yet available	Data not yet available

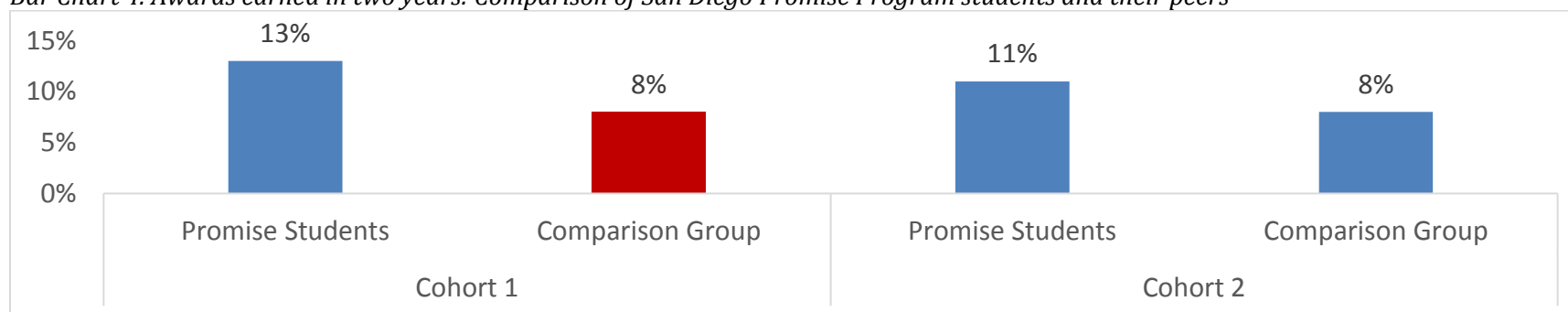
Note 1: Font color indicates where San Diego Promise Program students outperformed their peers on key indicators.

Degrees and Awards

Does Promise increase the likelihood that students will successfully receive degrees and awards? Below we examine the two-year degree and award earning rate for Promise students who persisted both at SDCCD *and* remained in the San Diego Promise Program for the full contract against their non-Promise Peers. Thus, we are comparing students who received the full-intervention of San Diego Promise (two years of enrollment in the program) against peers who started their education with a similar profile (first-time students who enrolled full-time in college in Fall of the same starting year). It is possible more students earned awards than accounted for here if they earned a degree and certificate in the first year of Promise and then left the program.

During the two-year time frame, Promise students were more likely than the comparison group to receive a degree or award (**Cohort 1:** Promise Students, 13%, Comparison group, 8%; **Cohort 2:** Promise Students: 11%, Comparison Group: 8%), providing modest evidence that the San Diego Promise Program supports student completion. Notably, when we tracked cohort 1 out three years (through 2018-19), 40% had received awards compared to 23% of their peer group. [This is especially promising evidence of program success.](#)

Bar Chart 4. Awards earned in two years: Comparison of San Diego Promise Program students and their peers



It is too early to compare differences in transfer rates between San Diego Promise Program students and their first-time full-time peers. (Data from the National Student Clearinghouse is only available through 2017-18, the same year students from Cohort 1 were enrolled in their second year of Promise). However, it may be that students are successfully transferring to a four-year institution without seeking an interim award. If Promise students are more likely to transfer than their peers it would be a strong indicator of a successful program. A follow-up briefing will examine this question once data are available.

What is the impact of the San Diego Promise Program on students, and how does this impact vary by important characteristics such as gender and ethnicity?

We looked for differences in trends within and between Promise and their non-Promise peers based on gender, ethnicity, first generation status, receipt of financial aid, participation in EOPS and/or DSPS, and prior enrollment in Continuing Education. It should be noted students do not belong to a single category. Rather, membership in one category may be highly correlated with membership in another category. For example, if first generation students are also more likely to receive financial aid, it may be that low-income status—not first generation status—is driving differences in outcomes.

In order to better isolate how participation in the San Diego Promise Program may have impacted student outcomes, a series of logistic regressions will be conducted. This will enable us to see how San Diego Promise Program impacts students, controlling for other factors shaping their outcomes. Further, through carefully chosen modeling choices (e.g., interaction effects), we can examine how program participation varies by group membership. The results from the logistic regression analysis will be reported in a follow-up report.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND STUDENT FEEDBACK

In partnership with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, multiple surveys and focus groups ([see Appendix A for a list of studies](#)) have been conducted since the program's origination to understand the benefits of the San Diego Promise Program as well as what can be done from the student perspective to improve the program. Below, key feedback from students is highlighted.

What are the benefits of the San Diego Promise Program from the student perspective?

Many students who have participated in the San Diego Promise Program have positive things to say about the program and their experiences within it.

Key to students is the financial support the San Diego Promise Program provides. The San Diego Promise Program enables students ineligible for other forms of financial aid but who may otherwise struggle to afford tuition to attend **college full-time**. Since one of the strongest predictors of earning a degree is unit load (Attewell & Monaghan 2016), encouraging and enabling students to take a full-time load can be helpful for encouraging completion—so long as students have the support they need to handle a higher unit load. Similarly, book grants ensure students are able to access the resources they need for a successful educational experience regardless of financial means.

In one survey, **over 90%** of San Diego Promise students (Cohort I) reported that the program helped them **achieve their academic goals, reduced barriers to academic success, and had a positive impact on their life.**

(Fall 2016 San Diego Promise Survey)

I really like the Promise program. I think one of the things that benefit me the most is the financial part of it because when I was about to graduate from high school I wasn't sure if I wanted to take a gap or not because I didn't have the funds to go. The Promise program literally swooped in and saved me. I probably wouldn't be at college right now if I didn't get it to be honest.

Mesa College Student

2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

Yeah, because where I come from kind of from a low income so I can't so if I would go I wouldn't be able to pay for my books or my classes. But with this program it kind of benefited me a lot cause without that I wouldn't be where I am right now. Still here.

City College Student

2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

To understand if and how the San Diego Promise Program was benefiting students, we analyzed the data using the Success Factors Framework. The Success Factors Framework is based on extensive research by the RP Group on how to support California community college students to experience educational success and achieve their educational objectives (Booth et al. 2013). The RP Group found that “[student support must be \(1\) integrated into students’ daily experience, and \(2\) included in the overall curriculum.](#)” In addition, “[students are more likely to succeed when they are directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued](#)” (RP Group n.d.). We found evidence that the San Diego Promise Program supported four out of the six success factors as identified by the RP Group.

Below, we explore how the San Diego Promise Program supports students in feeling **directed & focused**, **nurtured**, and **connected**.

Success Factors Framework from the RP Group’s Student Support (Re)defined

Directed

students have a goal and know how to achieve it

Focused

students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize

Nurtured

students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

Engaged

students actively participate in class and extracurriculars

Connected

students feel like they are part of the college community

Valued

students’ skills, talents, abilities and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated

excerpted from Student Support (Re)defined, The RP Group

Directed & Focused: 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.

“So coursework, the Promise scholarship really helps you be accountable for your classes. Because the other scholarships just drop money at you and you’re like, ‘Thanks, bye.’ For the Promise scholarship we start to follow up and make sure you are doing good and you are putting the money to good use and it still keeps you accountable. Because by the end of the semester you already have spent the money and be like oh I’m done here and I’m just going to go but you cannot do that. You can’t just give up in the middle of it and keeps you accountable. But it’s not because you are afraid

you are going to lose your money. But because you want to do good with the money you received.”
—Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

“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

“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

Students pointed out that without these supports, college could be overwhelming.

“For my first year of college it was very overwhelming so the Promise Program was like a big support system which led me to where everything is and education plan was helpful.” —City College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

Especially important is the full-time requirement which motivates students to finish their educational goals faster, increasing the likelihood they will complete.

“If it wasn’t for the full-time requirement, I wouldn’t be full-time. This has helped me stay on track and motivated.” —City College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

Nurtured: 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’d say community service as well honestly cause 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

“One of the contacts requirements is to meet your peer navigator. I am meeting them monthly now and so I am starting to make friends with my peer navigator and so after that they always give me advice and push me forward and I really love that the program made me do it. It was really a great program.” —Mesa College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

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

“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

Students reported that email reminders (79%) and counseling services (72%) were the most helpful services in the program, followed by workshops (29%).

“The connections with students and staff, I really... like [another student] said, I really like how it’s required that you need to go and see a counselor because I don’t think I would’ve ever gone to actually go see a counselor and it hasn’t help me more so than like it’s helped me so much more that I’ve done that. Like I am not struggling as oppose as my other friends who have all the time of the world but they don’t do anything with it. And like the involvement with the campus activities and stuff it has gotten me more involve with Mesa. And I kind of feel like I’m in this community now and it’s really nice. I get emails very frequently.” —Mesa College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

“The Promise events before school started actually helped. I knew how to get around in school and everything. I am also part of the EOPS program so that’s really good.” —Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

“Orientation was good, too. I was able to find out about the program and stuff. Make connections a lot of people there” —City College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

How can the San Diego Promise Program improve based on the student perspective?

- (1)** Especially early in the program's development, students called for greater—and more consistent—communication about what the San Diego Promise Program is, program eligibility requirements, and program expectations. As a result of student feedback, there have been multiple initiatives introduced to increase communication, including the introduction of campus-based and districtwide newsletters specific to the needs of Promise students (starting Year Two) and efforts to streamline communications between program staff, peer mentors, and Promise students. Efforts to ensure students are fully informed about the program, both as potential and current Promise students, are ongoing.

- According to one survey, 39% of first-time full-time students were not aware of the San Diego Promise Program (Fall 2018 First-time Full-time Students Survey).
- Some students are confused about the difference between the San Diego Promise Program and the California Promise Grant (Fall 2018 First-time Full-time Students Survey).
- Even students in the program are not necessarily aware of the program benefits.

"Letting students know that promise program is paying for classes. Until now for a whole year I did not know who was paying for it." —City College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

- Especially early on in the program's development, some students expressed disappointment regarding program expectations, sharing their perception that they had entered the program with the understanding that they had to meet certain requirements for participation, but that those requirements were changed mid-course. Others felt that the program had not delivered on its promise to provide them comprehensive support to achieve their educational goals.

"Yeah. Cause it's kind of like the first year it was all over the place like the whole program was all over the place and then this year they are grinding us super hard. Like you have to do this, this and this and I am just like dude last year you guys didn't have it together. So I am very grateful for this and I think it's a great program and scholarship but they just need to work on communication. And I think having that mass newsletter sent out is good because his mentor might be doing his job but my mentor honestly is not doing his job. And is very frustrating." —Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

- (2)** Some students indicated they wanted to develop a closer connection to fellow Promise students, expressing a desire for program staff to organize additional structured activities. Similarly, some students shared that they would appreciate a dedicated Promise space on campus to receive student support services and create closer connections with Promise Program staff and other Promise students.

"I wish they would encourage more connections between other Promise students cause they only make you come to one event and most of the time people don't really talk to

each other there. At least with my experience like I went to the distress event last week and people just kind of sat with people they were already familiar with. They didn't really encourage socialization between people you don't know." —Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

"Place more attention and focus on the student, including following up on student life, social and family life. More frequent checkups on student wellbeing. Offer more information about financial aid." —Student from San Diego Promise Program Non-Continuing Survey

(3) Some students shared it was difficult to get ahold of and/or make appointments with Promise staff and counselors.

"Hard to get in contact with Promise Program staff, had to email [staff member] five times and did not email me back." —SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

"Promise counselor doesn't have enough hours, only available two days, I was told to see her in order to make an ed plan, had to wait to speak with Promise counselor for an hour." —SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

"I felt like it was kind of hard to get in contact personally with someone. Like a lot of times I would try go to the office and nobody was there, I just would like to meet with someone personally." —SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

(4) Others shared that their peer mentors were not very communicative or helpful. Early feedback regarding variability in the quality of peer mentorship experiences led to systematic efforts to increase the level and improve the type of communication between Promise peer mentors and Promise students—an effort which is ongoing and would be further supported through the hiring of full-time program staff and discretionary funding to support a comprehensive peer mentorship training program.

"I get involved in activities but that's only because of my club. I don't get involved in activities because of the scholarship. Half of the times I don't know even know that there is stuff going on because my mentor doesn't tell me. Or like they will forward me a message a week before the actual event and I can't have that because I have work and there are other things I do outside of school involving my family. So it's kind of frustrating to try to fulfill all of your requirements when you don't know about it until a week before. And it was really easy my first year because I didn't do anything like it was my first year. I just went to class and stuff like that but as you go along like things get harder and harder. So it's important to know things maybe two weeks ahead and just like have better time management and so I have only spoke, I have only talked to my mentor once this whole semester. I didn't even know who my mentor was until this year." —SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

(5) Some students did report feeling that the San Diego Promise Program did not benefit them, while increasing their workload. Other students found the requirements and support

helpful, but overwhelming. It is likely these students differed from their peers in important characteristics, like level-of-preparedness for college—making them less likely than others in the program to feel they needed the supports the program provides.

“In terms of coursework... um... No. Because I pretty much have it figured out. Connection with students? I made like one friend during the Cruise thing and she was also a Promise student so I guess that was...that helped. And I got my counselor because I had to take his personal growth class via Promise. In terms of involvement and activities, I don’t know I felt it was more like cause I work and stuff and so when I am not in class I’m either at work or trying to get work done for school and so like trying to figure out when I was going to have time to go to a Mesa event was kind of a pain. Like kind of stressful thing. Access to support and services, not really. The times I tried emailing [program lead] I got like an automated email back because I tried to email her about my community service and I got an automated email back and I never got her actual email like I never got an email back.” —SDCCD student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

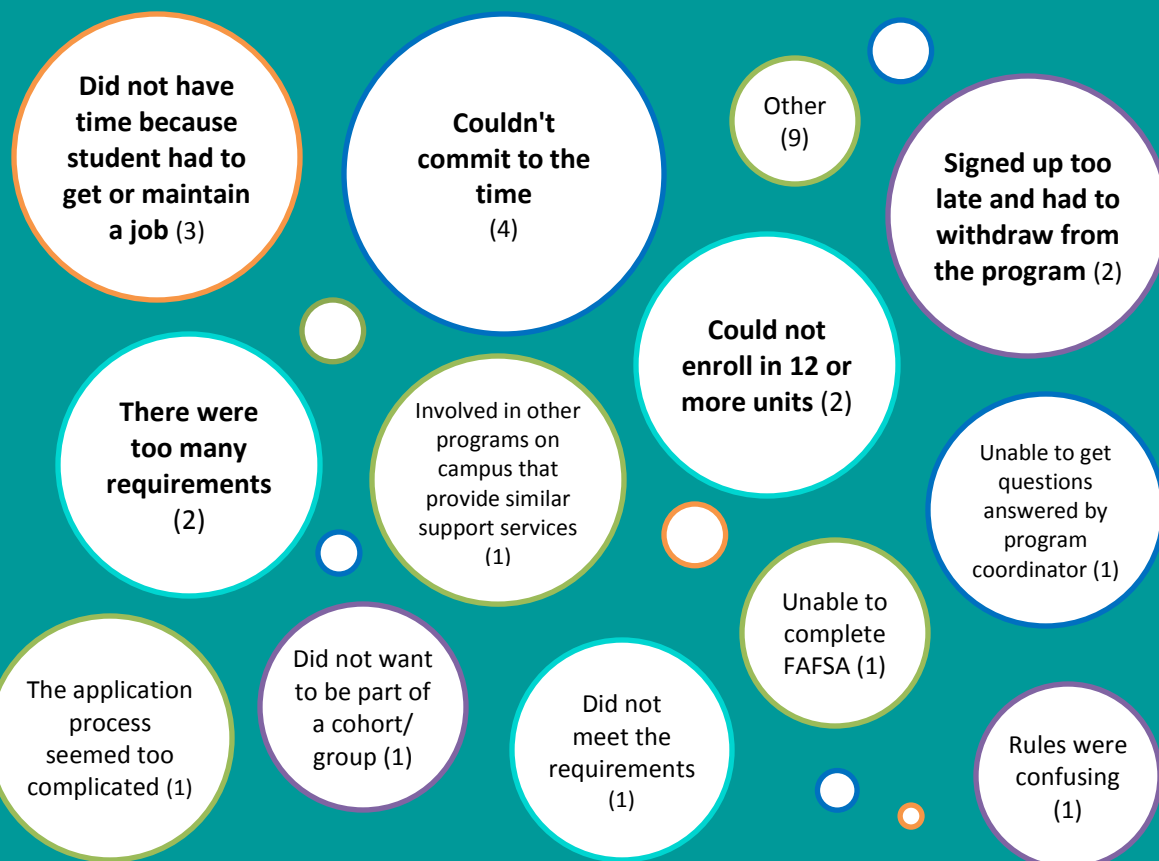
“For me meeting with my mentor has been a little bit redundant. It’s kind of the same conversation every time we meet” —Miramar College student in 2017 San Diego Promise Program Focus Group

Why do students exit the San Diego Promise Program?

The Institutional Research and Planning Office reached out to students in Cohort 2 who did not continue in the San Diego Promise Program via an online survey. The survey had a response rate of 20% (n=19), though not all leavers were contacted.

- 74% of students were no longer taking courses in the San Diego Community College District
- Of those still taking courses, 3 out of 4 students were taking a full-time unit load (12 or more units)
- The majority of students said that their experience with the San Diego Promise Program was excellent (29%, n=4), very good (14%, n=2), or good (43%, n=6). Two students, or 14% of respondents to the question, said their experiences were bad. The student who expounded that his/her experience with the program was very bad shared that the requirement to take 12 units caused physical and mental stress to participants who had a job or jobs.

Reasons students provided for exiting the San Diego Promise Program*:



*Twelve students provided 23 valid reasons for not continuing the San Diego Promise Program.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

In this section, we examine the key implications of this research. Based on the outcomes of this study and a comprehensive review of the literature on strategies to support student success and improve student educational and personal outcomes, we find the following:

The Promise Program supports students in attaining an affordable and quality higher education.

At \$46 per unit, the San Diego Community College District is already an affordable alternative to many institutions of higher education. However, attending any institution of higher education requires significant resources, especially in a region with a high cost of living like San Diego County. For a California resident living with their parents, the estimated cost of attendance at SDCCD for one semester is \$7,299 (including enrollment fees, health fees, books and supplies, food, housing, transportation, and personal expenses) (<http://www.sdmesa.edu/financial-aid/cost-of-attendance.shtml>). The San Diego Promise Program relieves a significant burden on students through providing tuition to all first-time full-time students and book grants to students in need.

Students highly benefit from readily available, high quality wraparound services provided from the San Diego Promise Program staff.

According to one program lead, the supports that the San Diego Promise Program offers are the primary reason many students to participate, especially students whose financial needs can be met through other sources like the California Promise Grant or AB 540: “We heard from the students that they want that hands-on support, and they need that hands on support, particularly when we talk about our first generation students, our low income students, our students of color who make up the majority of the program.”

The higher outcomes of Cohort 1 are suggestive that comprehensive support services are a key ingredient to supporting students in their educational trajectory, a finding that is born out in other research (Booth et al. 2013, RP Group n.d.). Although Promise Programs are relatively new and the research is thin regarding their effectiveness, emerging evidence underlines the importance of combining financial support with comprehensive student support services. For example, one program that shows early potential of increasing student success is the Detroit Promise Path. Students in this program are required to meet with a coach twice a month: Findings from the first year of the program found that 95% of students responded to their coaches’ outreach, two-thirds met with their coaches as directed, and 96% of surveyed students who had met with a coach felt that the program was “very valuable” or “valuable” (Ratledge 2017).

Developing strategies to maintain comprehensive support services will be a major endeavor as the program continues to expand to a greater number of students each year. We see, for example, that students in Cohort 2 and 3 did not experience the same outcomes as students in Cohort 1—suggestive that fast program expansion may have made it more difficult for staff to maintain the same level of connection and oversight to students originally provided by the program.

Promise staff will continue to work closely with the San Diego Community College District Office of Institutional Research and Planning to shed light on which students are most likely to benefit from high levels of intervention and which students are likely to be successful with less resource-intensive methods of intervention. As we found through focus groups with students, for example, some students desire more contact with program staff and peers, while others express a desire for a more hands off

experience, experiencing tuition and/or book relief as the key benefit of the San Diego Promise Program. Differentiating supports will help the program direct its valuable resources toward those who need them most, supporting student success for all.

The San Diego Promise Program is an important addition to other large-scale efforts to improve the educational experience of students and support them in meeting their educational goals.

While this comprehensive report examines the outcomes of students in the San Diego Promise Program, it is important to keep in mind that the program is one tool of many to improve the educational experience of students and help them earn a degree and/or award or transfer to a four-year college or university.

For example, SDCCD—in partnership with the San Diego Unified School District— has established an Early Commitment to College Program (ECCP) to strengthen the college-going pipeline by cultivating a college-going culture in elementary school. The ECP consists of the following elements:

- As early as fourth grade, students will begin receiving college and career preparation presentations.
- In middle school, students will receive exposure to college awareness and career discovery activities facilitated by a college ambassador assigned to each campus. Eighth graders will have the opportunity to visit a college campus and sign a commitment to attend college.
- In high school, students will receive information about and support in taking advantage of opportunities to earn college credit in high school, including through SDCCD's College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) program. Students who successfully complete CCAP courses will receive guaranteed acceptance into the San Diego Promise Program.
- Throughout their children's education, parents and guardians will receive outreach regarding how to support their students in becoming college ready.

In conjunction with the Early Commitment to College Program and other comprehensive student support efforts such as the Guided Pathways Initiative championed by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (California Community College Chancellor's Office 2017)— the San Diego Promise Program will serve an even greater role in facilitating student access and completion.

CONCLUSION

Introduced in 2016, the **San Diego Promise Program** focuses on serving first-time full-time students and other special populations in meeting their educational objectives through a combination of financial supports and student services. Over its first three years, the program supported a total of **2,444 unique students**. Entering its fourth year, the program now serves roughly 3,100 students across two cohorts. The San Diego Promise Program has been responsive to student needs, evolving in response to student feedback and research regarding program strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the 2019-20 academic year, the San Diego Promise Program is extending to support some student groups that struggle to attend college full-time but who are likely to benefit from free tuition and additional student services through generous private donations. While still a young program, initial findings suggest the San Diego Promise Program benefits both students and the community.

Benefits students through:

- + Tuition-free two-year college education
- + Additional financial supports such as book grants to help students shoulder the cost of receiving a college education
- + Supports to guide them during their journey to college completion
- + Increased sense of feeling directed & focused, nurtured, and connected

Benefits the community through:

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

However, in order to fully live up to its “promise,” the program needs a stronger infrastructure that enables it to provide readily available, high quality wraparound services alongside a rapid expansion in program growth. It also needs to be combined with already ongoing structural changes to support students in meeting their educational goals. This will require a sustained buy-in and financial support from the San Diego Community College District, campus leadership, faculty, classified professionals, and the community. **We can’t keep the “promise” alone. We need you.**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Attewell, P., & Monaghan, D. (2016). How many credits should an undergraduate take? *Research in Higher Education*, 57(6), 682-713. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-015-9401-z>.
- Booth, K., Cooper, D., Karandjeff, K., Large, M., Pellegrin, N., Purnell, R., Rodriguez-Kiino, D., Schiorring, E., & Willet, T. (2013). *Using student voices to redefine support: What community college students say institutions, instructors and others can do to help them succeed*. Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED548257.pdf>
- Braxton, J.M., Sullivan, A.V., & Johnson, R.M. Appraising Tinto's theory of college student departure. In J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (vol. XII) (107-164). Agathon Press: New York.
- California College Promise Project. (2018). *What is California College Promise?* Retrieved from <https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/what-is-ca-college-promise/>
- College Promise Campaign. (2019). *Support services that make Promise a reality*. Policy Brief No. 6. Retrieved from: <http://collegepromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CPSI-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>
- Cilluffo, A. (2017, August 24). *5 facts about student loans*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/24/5-facts-about-student-loans/>
- California Community College Chancellor's Office. (2017). *Why Guided Pathways? Why now?* Retrieved from <http://cccgp.cccco.edu/Guided-Pathways-Electronic-Toolkit>
- Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Research and Statistics Group. (2019). *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit*. Retrieved from https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/interactives/householdcredit/data/pdf/HHDC_2019Q1.pdf
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J.A., Bridges, B.K., & Hayek, J.C. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature*. National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/kuh_team_report.pdf
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1983). Predicting voluntary freshman year persistence/withdrawal behavior in a residential university: A path analytic validation of Tinto's model. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(2): 215-226.
- Ratlidge, A. (2017, July). *Enhancing promise programs to improve college access and success*. Retrieved from <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/DetroitPromisePath-IssueFocus.pdf>
- Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group). (n.d.). *Student support re(defined): Success factors framework*. Retrieved from <http://rpgroup.org/Our-Projects/Student-Support-Re-defined/SuccessFactorsFramework>
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turk, J.M. (2017). *Identifying predictors of credential completion among beginning community college students*. American Council on Education, Center for Policy Research and Strategy. Retrieved from <https://www.acenet.edu/newsroom/Documents/Identifying%20Predictors%20of%20Credential%20Completion%20Among%20Beginning%20Community%20College%20Students.pdf>

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Overview of Data Sources

Source	Instrument	Purpose	Sample	Respondent/ Sample	Date Collected
San Diego Promise Program Non-Continuing Survey	Survey	Understand why students did not continue their participation in the San Diego Promise Program	Students who discontinued their participation in the San Diego Promise Program Cohorts 2 and 3 (n=96)	19	Fall 2018
Focus Groups	Focus Groups	Understand strengths and weaknesses of the San Diego Promise Program from the student perspective	Convenience sample of students participating in the San Diego Promise Program from Cohorts 1 and 2	59	Spring 2018
Academic Support Survey	Survey	Understand supports that would be useful to San Diego Promise Program students struggling to meet GPA requirement	San Diego Promise Program students at risk of receiving a D or F	86	Fall 2018
Outcomes	Data Extraction; Source: SDCCD Information System	Compare how San Diego Promise Program students compare to other first-time, full-time (FTFT) Students	Promise Cohort 1, 2, and 3 and comparison groups of FTFT students	Cohort 1: 186; Cohort 2: 546; Cohort 3: 1,712	N/A
Fall 2016 San Diego Promise Survey	Survey	Understand students' perspective of program benefits and how program can improve	185 students in Cohort 1 of San Diego Promise	100	Fall 2016
First-time Full-time Students Survey	Survey	Understand why first-time, full-time students did not enroll in the San Diego Promise Program	Fall 2018 First-time Full-time Students who were not enrolled in the San Diego Promise Program	263	Fall 2018

Appendix 2. 2019-2020 San Diego Promise Contract

SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



2019-2020 San Diego Promise Contract

Congratulations on being selected to participate in the San Diego Promise program. As a Promise student you will be required to meet the following program requirements:

Program Requirements:

- Complete a minimum of 12 units **each semester** (*Fall 2019 & Spring 2020*)
- Maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0
- Enroll in a Personal Growth course **within your first year in college**
- Complete a comprehensive educational plan **by the end of the first year**
- Complete & submit a Progress Report **each semester** (*Fall 2019 & Spring 2020*) **during Progress Report Check-In Week (Fall: October 7-11, 2019 & Spring: March 23-27, 2020)**
 - Must attend Student Success Series if:
 - I have at least one D or F on my progress report and/or in my final grade(s) for the semester, or
 - Fail to submit my Progress Report during Progress Report Check-In Week
- Participate in a Student Engagement Activity **each semester**
 - Mentor Meetings and Promise Approved Activities/Events will count for this requirement

As a student in the San Diego Promise Program, I agree to:

- Enroll in and successfully complete a minimum of 12 units **each semester** (*Fall 2019 & Spring 2020*)
- Earn a minimum 2.0 GPA
- **I understand I must be enrolled in 12 units by the published add/drop deadline (August 30, 2019) or I will be responsible for paying back the student health fees and other costs covered by San Diego Promise.**