



RESEARCH UPDATE: Increasing college access, affordability, and success among Dallas County Promise participants

FEBRUARY 2021

In May 2020, Research for Action (RFA) partnered with Commit Partnership to conduct a 14-month study of the Dallas County Promise. This overview provides summary findings from [RFA's preliminary exploratory analysis](#) of outcomes associated with Dallas County Promise. We focus specifically on Dallas County Promise participants who first enrolled in Dallas College in Fall 2018 or Fall 2019. These analyses of Dallas College Promise students are one component of a multi-phase research study examining the implementation of Dallas County Promise and its early and perceived effects on students and institutions. Future research will assess the extent to which Dallas County Promise has influenced the increases in college access, affordability, and student success highlighted below.

Is Dallas County Promise Increasing Access? For whom?

RFA examined whether college access has changed for students since their high schools partnered with Dallas County Promise using two key measures of college access: FAFSA completion and college enrollment. In addition, when looking at college enrollment we consider whether access has increased particularly for students of color and students from lower-income households. Notable findings related to increasing access are as follows:

1

FAFSA completion has increased across partnering high schools since Dallas County Promise was introduced. High schools that first joined Dallas County Promise in 2018 increased FAFSA completion by 4-percentage points over three years (from 62% to 66%). The FAFSA completion rates for high schools that joined in 2019 jumped 14 percentage points over two years (from 55% to 69%). Notably, the average FAFSA completion rates among Dallas County Promise partner high school students are substantially higher than both statewide and national completion rates, 55% and 57% respectively, as of 2020.

2

As Dallas County Promise expanded, the number of Dallas County Promise students enrolling in college also increased. For example, from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, the enrollment of Promise students in Dallas College doubled from 2,523 students to 5,076 students. This 100% increase in Promise participant enrollment at Dallas College between 2018 and 2019 far outpaced the general increase in first-time enrollment at the college (31%).

3

Further, increased college enrollment among Dallas County Promise participants reflected high percentages of both Hispanic/Latinx students and students from lower-income households. Most of the Promise participants who enrolled at Dallas College in 2018 and 2019 are students of color, a majority of whom are Hispanic/Latinx, and more than half are Pell Grant recipients. The number of Hispanic/Latinx students enrolling in Dallas College through Dallas County Promise is proportionately greater than the Hispanic/Latinx population at the college-, county-, and state-levels.

Is Dallas County Promise Increasing Affordability? For Whom?

To assess whether college affordability increased since the inception of Dallas County Promise, RFA analyzed the degree to which Dallas County Promise participants enrolling at Dallas College secured student financial aid to cover the costs of college. For this analysis we examined availability of federal and state grant aid as well as last-dollar scholarships awarded by Dallas College through Dallas County Promise. In addition, we examined whether affordability has increased particularly for students of color and students from lower-income households. Notable findings related to affordability are as follows:

1

Most Dallas County Promise students (84%) enrolling in Dallas College in 2018 and 2019 successfully garnered federal and state grant aid to cover their tuition costs.

This is a promising indicator of increased affordability for students participating in Dallas County Promise given that nationally only about 38% of students who enrolled in public 2-year institutions, like Dallas College, in 2017-18 received federal and/or state grant aid.

2

Across academic years 2018-19 and 2019-20, last-dollar scholarships awarded through Dallas County Promise helped cover tuition costs for 1,318 students whose tuition was not fully covered by other federal and state grant aid. Most

last-dollar scholarship recipients were Black or Hispanic/Latinx. In 2018-19, 86% of recipients were either Black or Hispanic/Latinx students and in 2019-20, 76% of recipients were either Black or Hispanic/Latinx students.

Is Dallas County Promise Increasing Success? For Whom?

RFA also examined the relationship between student participation in Dallas County Promise and success in college, particularly for students of color and students from lower-income households. An early indicator of college success is student persistence (i.e., continued full-time enrollment), particularly from fall to fall. Notable findings related to persistence are as follows:

1

Nearly 67% of Dallas County Promise students who enrolled in Fall 2018 continued enrolling full-time at Dallas College in their second year of college.

Students who received a scholarship through Dallas County Promise persisted at an even higher rate (70%). Persistence rates for Dallas County Promise participants overall and those receiving scholarships through the programming surpassed the persistence rate for the college's overall first-time, full-time cohort in Fall 2018 (64%).

2

About 70% of Hispanic/Latinx students participating in Dallas County Promise maintained their full-time enrollment at Dallas College into their second year. This

level of persistence suggests that Dallas County Promise participants who are Hispanic/Latinx students have persisted with greater success than the overall first-time, full-time student population at Dallas College (64%). In contrast, Black students participating in Dallas County Promise had a relatively lower persistence rate (55%).