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Fulfilling The Pittsburgh Promise®

Early Progress of Pittsburgh’s Postsecondary Scholarship Program

GABRIELLA C. GONZALEZ • ROBERT BOZICK • SHANNAH THARP-TAYLOR • ANDREA PHILLIPS

Sponsored by The Pittsburgh Promise
This research was conducted by RAND Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation. The research was sponsored by The Pittsburgh Promise®.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Fulfilling the Pittsburgh promise : early progress of Pittsburgh’s postsecondary scholarship program / Gabriella C. Gonzalez ... [et al.].
   p. cm.
   Includes bibliographical references.
   ISBN 978-0-8330-5832-4
   LB2338.F85 2011
   378.309748’86—dc23
   2011030895

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Published 2011 by the RAND Corporation
1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665
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In December 2006, the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, announced The Pittsburgh Promise®, a postsecondary education scholarship intended to remedy the area's population decline, foster high school completion and college readiness among Pittsburgh students, and prepare a capable and energetic workforce for the city. Students who have attended a Pittsburgh traditional public or charter school continuously since 9th grade, maintained a grade point average of 2.5 and an attendance record of 90 percent throughout high school, and achieved specified scores on the Pennsylvania student assessments or on the SAT® exam may earn a scholarship of up to $40,000 to attend any accredited postsecondary institution in the state. Members of the graduating class of 2008 were the first recipients of Promise funding.

In 2010, the Board and Executive Director of The Pittsburgh Promise asked the RAND Corporation to assess the extent to which the program has met its goals to date and to develop recommendations for improving the program’s short- and long-term effectiveness. The study was funded by The Pittsburgh Promise.

This monograph should be of value to the stakeholders directly involved with The Pittsburgh Promise and to policymakers across the nation who are interested in similar academic scholarship programs, as well as those interested in the role incentives play in changing students’ behaviors and attitudes.

This research was conducted within RAND Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation.
Contents

Preface ................................................................. iii
Figures ................................................................. ix
Tables ................................................................. xi
Summary ............................................................. xiii
Acknowledgments .................................................... xxiii
Abbreviations ......................................................... xv

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction ....................................................... 1
Background .......................................................... 1
The Pittsburgh Promise is Born ................................. 4
The Pittsburgh Promise's Vision of Change ................... 5
Characteristics of The Pittsburgh Promise ...................... 8
Eligibility Requirements ............................................ 8
Funding Amounts .................................................. 9
Application and Payment Process ............................... 9
Characteristics of Promise Scholars from PPS Traditional Public High Schools ................................................ 11
The Use of Student-Centered Incentives to Motivate Students and to Promote Economic Development ....................... 14
purposes of This Study and Research Questions .................. 16
Organization of This Report ...................................... 17
### CHAPTER TWO

**Study Framework, Data Sources, and Analytic Approach**

- Study Framework .......................................................... 19
- Data Sources ..................................................................... 20
  - PPS Public Documentation of Education Policies and Initiatives ..... 20
  - PPS District Enrollment Data ........................................... 21
  - Surveys of Parents of 6th Through 9th Grade Students Who Are Newly Enrolled in a District Traditional or Charter School .......... 21
  - Focus Groups with District Traditional and Charter School Students in 8th Through 12th Grades ........................................ 22
  - National Student Clearinghouse Data ................................ 23
- Analytic Approach ............................................................ 24
- Limitations of the Study .................................................... 28

### CHAPTER THREE


- Early Strategies to Improve Academic Performance in the District (2006–2007) ................................................................. 31
- Curriculum and Instruction .................................................. 33
- Excel.9-12: The Plan for High School Excellence ....................... 34
- Supporting the Transition to High School ................................. 35
- Improving the District’s Infrastructure .................................... 36
- Pathways to the Promise (2007–2010) ........................................... 37
- Supporting Effective Teaching ............................................... 37
- Strong Leadership ................................................................ 39
- Consistent Assessments and Data-Driven Decisionmaking .......... 40
- Counseling and Social Work ............................................... 40
- Out-of-School-Time Activities .............................................. 40
- Other Initiatives Undertaken Since the Inception of The Pittsburgh Promise .......................................................... 41
- Providing Secondary Learning Options ................................... 41
- Instituting Career and Technical Education (CTE) .................... 41
- Expectations for Student Conduct ........................................... 42
- Summary .......................................................................... 42
CHAPTER EIGHT
Looking to the Future ............................................................. 95
A Model to Guide The Pittsburgh Promise Program in Meeting Its Goals ................................................................. 95
Inputs: Activities and Services Provided by The Promise .......... 96
Processes: Linking the Inputs with The Promise’s Goals ............ 98
Outputs: Measuring Success by How Well the Program Meets Immediate Outcomes ...................................................... 99
Recommendations for Future Research .................................... 99

APPENDIXES
A. Promise-Type Scholarship Programs Across the United States ................................................................. 107
B. Description of PPS Enrollment Data ................................. 115
C. Parent Survey Technical Notes ......................................... 119
D. Student Focus Group Technical Notes ............................. 123
E. Methodology and Elaborated Results for PPS District Enrollment and Parent Survey Analyses ....................... 129
F. Data Used, Methodology, and Elaborated Findings of Postsecondary Education Analyses ................................. 139

Bibliography ................................................................. 149
**Figures**

1.1. Pittsburgh City Population, Total and 5 to 17 Years of Age (2000–2009) ................................................................. 3
1.2. Growth Rate of Traditional Public and Charter School Enrollment in Pittsburgh and Comparable Cities in the Region ......................................................... 4
1.3. Pittsburgh Promise Impact Theory ........................................ 6
2.1. Analytic Framework Guiding This Study .............................. 20
3.1. PPS Promise-Readiness Theory of Action .......................... 38
4.1. School-Aged Youth Living Within PPS District Boundaries Enrolled in a District Traditional Public or Charter School .................................................... 46
4.2. Students Persisting in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools ........................................................................ 48
4.3. New Enrollees in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools .................................................................................. 49
4.4. Mean Responses of Importance of Reasons for Enrolling Children in a District Traditional Public or Charter School ... 51
4.5. Mean Response of Importance of The Promise in Decision to Enroll Children in District Traditional Public or Charter School, by Parents’ Education Level, Student Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches, and Student Race .......... 53
6.1. PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions ...................................................... 74
6.2. PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Four-Year Schools in Pennsylvania .................................. 76
6.3. PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Two-Year Schools in Pennsylvania ............................ 76
6.4. PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Outside of Pennsylvania ........ 77
6.5. Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions, by Race ................................................................. 78
6.6. Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions, by Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches ................... 79
6.7. PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year ......................................................... 80
6.8. Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year, by Race ......................... 82
6.9. Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year, by Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches .................. 82
8.1. RAND Model to Guide Future Evaluations of The Pittsburgh Promise ................................................................. 97
E.1. Mean Responses on Importance of Reason for Enrolling Children in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools ................................................................. 135
E.2. Mean Responses on Importance of Pittsburgh Promise in Decision to Enroll Children in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools by Parents’ Education Level, Student’s Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches, and Student’s Race ......................................................... 136
## Tables

1.1. Pittsburgh Promise Eligibility Criteria and Funding Amounts ............................................................. 10

1.2. Pittsburgh Promise Additional Funding Amounts for Eligible Students in the Classes of 2012 and 2013 ............... 10

1.3. Use of Promise Scholarships by PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates, 2008–2010 ............................ 12

2.1. Research Questions and Data Sources .......................................................... 25

4.1. OLS Regression of Importance of Promise in Parents’ Decision to Enroll Children in PPS Traditional Public or Charter School ................................................................................ 54

6.1. Graduates from PPS Traditional Public High Schools Meeting Promise Scholarship Eligibility Criteria, 2006–2010 ........................................................................ 73

B.1. School-Aged Youth Living Within PPS District’s Boundaries ........................................................................... 116

B.2. PPS End-of-Year Enrollment Codes, Number of Students, and Percentage of Total ....................................... 117

C.1. Parent Survey Administration and Follow-Up Dates, with Response Rates ..................................................... 121

C.2. Differences in Student Characteristics Between the Population Mean and the Sample Whose Parents Responded ........................................................................................................ 121

D.1. Numbers of Participants in Focus Group Discussions ........ 127

E.1. Total Enrollment in District Traditional Public and Charter Schools ............................................................. 130

E.2. Total Enrollment in District Traditional Public Schools ... 130

E.3. Total Enrollment in District Charter Schools ................. 131
E.4. Percentage of School-Aged Youth Living Within District Boundaries Enrolled in Traditional Public or Charter Schools ............................................................. 131
E.5. Percentage of Students Persisting in a Traditional Public or Charter School .................................................... 132
E.6. New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools ......................................................................... 133
E.7. New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools Who Were Previously Enrolled in Non-Public Schools Within District Boundaries ........................................... 133
E.8. New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools Who Were Previously Enrolled in Schools Outside District Boundaries ............................................................ 134
E.9. OLS Regression on Importance of The Promise and Parents’ and Students’ Characteristics ............................................................. 138
F.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of PPS District Graduates .......................................................................................... 141
F.2. Coefficients and Marginal Effects from Difference-in-Differences Probit Regression Models Predicting College Enrollment .............................................................................................. 144
F.3. Coefficients and Marginal Effects from Difference-in-Differences Probit Regression Models Predicting Persistence Among College Enrollees .......................................................... 147
F.4. Coefficients and Marginal Effects Corresponding to the Promise Available x Promise-Eligible Interaction Term from a Series of Probit Regression Models Predicting College Enrollment .............................................................. 148
F.5. Coefficients and Marginal Effects Corresponding to the Promise Available x Promise-Eligible Interaction Term from a Series of Probit Regression Models Predicting Persistence Among College Enrollees .......................................................... 148
Summary

In December 2006, the mayor of Pittsburgh and the superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) partnered to announce The Pittsburgh Promise® (The Promise) as part of a citywide commitment to economic, intellectual, and social revitalization of the region. The Promise provides funds for graduates of Pittsburgh traditional public and charter schools to help defray tuition costs at accredited postsecondary education institutions in Pennsylvania. Scholarship funds are provided by donations from local private funders, nonprofit foundations, and businesses. The Promise founders expected that offering a cash incentive for students who met minimum eligibility criteria would motivate students to perform better in school, attend college, and attract residents to Pittsburgh to send their children to PPS district schools. Over time, it was hoped, The Promise could serve as a key driver in the region’s resurgence.

The Promise has three long-term goals (The Pittsburgh Promise, 2009):

1. To mitigate and reverse the population declines in the city of Pittsburgh and the enrollment declines in Pittsburgh public schools
2. To grow the high school completion rates, college readiness, and post–high school success of all students in Pittsburgh public schools
3. To deploy a well-prepared and energized workforce and an eager core of community volunteers.
The first funding for The Promise arrived in January 2007, when the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers contributed $10,000. Then, in December 2007, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) announced that it would pledge $1 for every $1.50 the Pittsburgh community raised for the initiative, up to $10 million a year, for the next ten years—a potential grant of $100 million. A board of directors was formed in March 2008, and the program’s executive director was hired in June 2008. Members of the high school class of 2008 were the first recipients of Promise funds.

The study reported in this monograph assesses early efforts and outcomes of the program’s first three years and provides various policy options that may help ensure the program’s success in the future.

**Purposes of This Study and Research Questions**

In 2010, the executive director and members of the Board of Trustees of The Pittsburgh Promise asked RAND to conduct a study that would assess the progress the program has made in its first three years (2007–2008 through 2009–2010). The study had the following objectives:

1. To describe the efforts put in place by PPS to ensure that students are interested in and able to pursue postsecondary education
2. To assess the progress The Promise has made to date in reaching the first two of its strategic goals
3. To provide The Promise administrators with feedback on how to improve the program.

To meet these study objectives, RAND researchers asked the following six research questions:

- What policies and efforts are under way in the PPS district to support The Promise?

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1. Given the short time in which The Promise has been in existence, the extent to which the program has achieved its third goal cannot be evaluated at this time.
Summary

• Has enrollment in PPS’s traditional and charter schools changed since The Promise’s inception? In what ways?
• To what extent are newly arriving families choosing to send their children to traditional public and charter schools within the district because of The Promise?
• To what extent is The Promise a factor in students’ attitudes toward completing high school or attending postsecondary education institutions?
• Have rates of enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education institutions of graduates from Pittsburgh’s traditional public high schools changed since The Promise’s inception?
• What can be learned about The Promise’s progress to date to inform future improvements?

Data and Analytic Approach

We employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods to help answer these questions. We spoke with officials at the PPS district central office and reviewed public documentation to catalog PPS education initiatives that the district implemented from 2005–2006 through 2009–2010. We analyzed data from PPS district enrollment records for students in five consecutive school years: 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. We developed and administered a survey in December 2010 to parents of middle-school students who were new to PPS traditional and charter schools in 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. We analyzed these data as well as data we collected from focus groups we conducted in December 2010 and January 2011 with students in grades 8 through 10 who were on the cusp of meeting The Promise’s 2.5 grade point average (GPA) eligibility requirement and with students in grades 11 and 12 who met the GPA requirement. In addition, we analyzed data on postsecondary institution enrollment and persistence rates of students who graduated

We synthesized the results of our analyses to develop a conceptual model that The Promise administrators can use to ensure continual improvements and to evaluate the extent to which the program is meeting its goals in the coming years.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that are important to consider when interpreting the results. First, as is the case with other education initiatives that have broad goals and impacts that take many years to materialize, it will take some years to definitively measure the impact of The Promise, and such measurement is beyond the capacity of a study conducted in the first years of The Promise’s existence. Furthermore, a different kind of study will be needed to make that assessment: either a true experiment where eligible students are randomly chosen to receive or not receive The Promise scholarships, or a study that includes a comparison group of students who would meet eligibility requirements but do not have access to The Promise funds. The present study should therefore be treated as an evaluation of certain aspects of the initial implementation of the scholarship program. It was designed to explore what was feasible given the early stage of the program’s implementation and available data: early signs of progress and emerging trends.

Second, although the program has been in existence for three years (for the graduating classes of 2008, 2009, and 2010), funding amounts, student eligibility criteria, and the types of schools for which the funds could be used transitioned over time by design. (For example, in 2008, the minimum GPA requirement was 2.0; it was gradually increased over three years to 2.5.) Evaluators advise that to measure the cumulative effects of exposure to a program, services need to be consis-

² These data were from the student-tracker system of the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). We were able to analyze data only on graduates from the traditional public schools in Pittsburgh and not on those from the district’s charter schools.
tently applied over the time frame of the evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). Our findings can therefore serve as a baseline against which future research data can be compared as the program grows and evolves.

Third, the student selection criteria for focus groups differed, depending on grade and whether the student was Promise-ready at the time of the discussion sessions. We were therefore not able to compare responses across groups or attribute any differences in responses across the grade groups to the grade or to where the students stood in terms of being Promise-ready.

Finally, a number of research questions were outside the scope of this study given the program’s short time in existence. For example, we could not examine changes in high school graduation rates, because students who were in the 8th or 9th grade in spring 2008 will be graduating from high school in 2011 and 2012. Furthermore, there are potential inadequacies in PPS student data to differentiate students who leave the district (transfers) from those who drop out of school altogether.

**Progress to Date of the Promise Initiative**

Overall, we found that The Promise is off to a solid start, and in its initial stages the program is showing positive results in a number of indicators.

*Student enrollment in PPS traditional public and charter schools has been stabilizing, rather than continuing to decline, since the inception of The Promise.* A comparison of enrollments in the years immediately before The Promise was made available (2005–2006, 2006–2007) with the years since it was made available (2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010) shows that the percentage of school-age youth in grades 5 through 12 living in Pittsburgh and enrolled in PPS traditional public or charter schools remained constant, as did the percentage of students remaining in PPS traditional public or charter schools from one year to the next, rather than continuing to decline.
There was no consistent pattern of new transfers into PPS traditional or charter schools.

**The Promise is reported to be a very important factor in parents’ decisions to enroll their children in public or charter schools within the district.** Responses to our survey of parents of 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students who were new to PPS traditional or charter schools in the 2007–2009 school years indicate that The Promise was a factor motivating parents to move their children into PPS traditional public or charter schools. On a scale of 1 to 5, parents on average rated The Promise highest in importance (3.9) of 11 possible factors that influenced their decision to move their children. This was particularly the case for parents of African-American students and parents with lower levels of education.

**Results from focus group discussions suggest that The Promise motivates students to achieve.** Focus group students consistently reported that Promise funds motivated them to strive for a 2.5 GPA, attend school regularly, and seek postsecondary education. In addition, they reported that their parents pushed them to attend school and meet the 2.5 GPA requirement that would make them Promise-ready. Although these findings cannot be generalized to the broader student population, they indicate that The Promise motivates students to achieve.

**Since The Promise began, an increasing number of PPS students meeting Promise eligibility requirements are enrolling in postsecondary education.** From 2006 through 2010, the enrollment of PPS traditional public high school graduates who would be eligible for The Promise in postsecondary education institutions increased steadily. This is true for both white and non-white students, as well as for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and regular-price-lunch students. Although we cannot attribute this increase specifically to The Promise, it does suggest that in the early years of the program, more and more students who meet The Promise’s eligibility requirements are deciding to continue their education after high school.

**For PPS district graduates enrolled in postsecondary education, The Promise may have helped students eligible for funds stay in school.** Persistence rates for PPS traditional high school students
(graduating in 2006–2010) declined slightly from the fall of freshman year in college to the fall of sophomore year, while persistence rates of PPS traditional public high school graduates who would be eligible for The Promise remained constant over this time frame. This suggests that The Promise may be providing support to students at a time when a number of their peers are withdrawing from college. This was the case primarily for eligible white and regular-price-lunch students; persistence rates for non-white students and those eligible for free or reduced-price lunches declined slightly through the years. Additional support may be needed for the latter groups, because they appear to be most at risk for leaving college early.

**Some focus group students do not fully understand program eligibility and benefits.** Focus group students lacked clarity on the program’s eligibility requirements, the funding amounts available, and the postsecondary education institutions where Promise funds could be used. This suggests that the program’s communication and outreach could be improved.

### Recommendations to Improve The Promise Program

The recommendations presented below are intended to assist The Promise program in meeting its intended goals. Given the limited scope of the study, the recommendations focus on specific areas in which The Promise can help motivate change in the community’s and students’ attitudes and behaviors.

**Use multiple methods to provide information to students about the college and federal financial-aid application process, particularly younger students.**

Promise funding can provide financial support to students who intend to go to college, but this funding alone cannot erase skills gaps or ensure that students know how to navigate the college and financial-aid application system. Focus group students reported relying on a variety of sources for information on how to apply to college or for financial aid, including peers, family members, and guidance counselors in the
Fulfilling The Pittsburgh Promise: Early Progress

schools, and had varied results. Research suggests that communication with students about how to prepare for college should start in 9th grade or earlier (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). We recommend that the district provide information to students about the college and federal financial-aid application processes early and often in their education to ensure that they are preparing themselves adequately to attend postsecondary education institutions.

Coordinate district attendance policies to align with The Promise eligibility requirements.

Our focus group participants noted that one way to get personalized attendance records was through an excessive absences (EA) notification. However, the guidelines for allowable numbers of absences in the district are not as stringent as The Promise eligibility requirements. Nevertheless, the EA notice was reportedly the only non-solicited notice of attendance status that could potentially assist with mid-period corrections. If EA policy were aligned with The Promise attendance requirement, there might be less confusion among students. Furthermore, EA notifications could be used to alert students of the status of their Promise eligibility.

Improve students’ knowledge about The Promise scholarship system’s characteristics.

Student focus group participants were unclear about Promise eligibility requirements and funding amounts. One possible reason for this was that The Promise program’s characteristics and eligibility requirements changed by design so that more rigorous requirements were phased in over time. This may have made it difficult for teachers, school leaders, and students to understand eligibility and benefits of the program and to sort out which requirements apply to each cohort of students. This lack of clarity may negatively impact students’ motivation to make the effort to be Promise-ready. Thus, we suggest that The Promise disseminate information about its scholarship system’s characteristics in small venues and in personal letters to students. Alternatively, school counselors can carry out small-group information sessions or meet with individual students to provide clear instructions on how to apply
for Promise scholarships and what they need to achieve in order to be eligible.

Regularly provide students and parents with personalized information about whether students are Promise-ready.

While holding large-scale assemblies would appear to be an efficient way to provide information about The Promise, our focus group analyses suggested that these efforts were not effective in disseminating information. To encourage students to maintain specified GPAs or attendance records to be eligible for a Promise scholarship, students and their parents or guardians could be given access to individualized reports on whether they are Promise-ready through a portal on the PPS website. This portal could be accessed to check on students’ status at regular points in time, such as monthly or at the end of each semester. This type of information could encourage students to become more responsible for their grades and attendance and might clear up any misunderstandings about whether they are Promise-ready.

Continue to leverage parents’ knowledge of and support for The Promise.

Responses from the surveys of parents indicated that The Promise is an important factor in their decision to send their children to a PPS traditional public or charter school. It is therefore important to continue holding sessions with parents that impart information about The Promise. We recommend that large-scale information sessions be complemented with individualized tactics. For example, PPS and charter school principals could send letters home to parents that include personalized information about their children’s eligibility for scholarships and individualized, detailed instructions on how a student can become Promise-ready if he or she is not yet at that stage.

Institute a mentoring system in which Promise scholars mentor high school students.

To help Promise scholars persist in postsecondary education institutions, a mentoring system could be implemented that matches Promise scholars with high school students who are working toward becom-
ing Promise-eligible or are preparing college applications. A mentoring system could have a number of benefits for both the program and the scholars. It could help disseminate information on the college application process and what mentees might expect once in college, and it could encourage Promise scholars to become engaged citizens. The mentoring system could take the form of online mentoring (much like PAmentor.com does), which is a cost-effective and time-efficient way to connect mentors and mentees.

Looking to the Future

The extent to which The Promise is able to meet its goals and ultimately contribute to Pittsburgh’s economic development is contingent on how well program officials and the district promote changes in the community’s and students’ behaviors and attitudes. To ensure that The Promise continues on a road to success, future evaluations must take into consideration the dynamic flow of the relationships among these different actors. Understanding the connections among them and the program processes will strengthen the program, allow for rigorous evaluations, and ensure its continued success.
Many people assisted in performing this study and in producing this monograph. We would first like to thank the staff at The Pittsburgh Promise, particularly its executive director, Saleem Ghubril, who provided valuable guidance in the early stages of the study, supported our data-collection efforts, and provided important feedback on our findings. We would also like to thank Shawn Butler, the scholarship manager, who supplied us with data on Promise scholars.

A number of people at PPS were invaluable in providing data on students and parents that enabled us to conduct this study. These include Edward (Eddy) Jones, Paulette Poncelet, Tina Still, Joseph Carnock, and Michael Minter. Superintendent Linda Lane and Lisa Fischetti provided important information about the PPS district’s efforts to support The Promise. We are also grateful for the time and availability of staff from Pittsburgh’s charter high schools. These include Richard Wertheimer, Shelley Armstrong, and Waynica Staples from City Charter High School; Linda Clautti and Patrick Boyle of Northside Urban Pathways Charter School; and Brian White of Career Connections Charter School.

We are particularly grateful for the time given to us by the students in our focus groups and the parents who completed the survey. Their first-person experiences and perspectives provided us with a deeper understanding of how The Promise is making a difference in their lives. We also wish to thank the principals of the schools at which we conducted student focus groups for providing us access.

Sarah Hauer and Melanie Rote supported this project by coordinating the parent survey, inputting data, and assisting with for-
matting the draft manuscript. Christopher McLaren provided helpful research assistance. John Engberg and Trey Miller provided statistical consulting.

The monograph itself was greatly improved through the efforts of reviewers and editors. Laura Hamilton and Catherine Augustine served as quality-assurance reviewers and provided very useful feedback on document drafts. Peer reviewers Jennifer Russell and Francisco Martorell provided helpful comments that improved this document. Kate Giglio shaped the final draft manuscript and offered much appreciated good cheer and enthusiasm for the project.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>PSCC</td>
<td>Parent School Community Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTO</td>
<td>Parent-Teacher Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PULSE</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System for Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QOP</td>
<td>Quantum Opportunity Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISE</td>
<td>Research-Based Inclusive System of Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPMC</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh Medical Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2006, Pittsburgh government and school officials announced the idea of a scholarship program, called The Pittsburgh Promise® (or simply The Promise), which they hoped would initiate and sustain change in local schools and the city. Although scholarship amounts and funding sources have changed during the first years of the program, its goals—to strengthen Pittsburgh’s community through an educated citizenry, to increase the Pittsburgh population, and to contribute to the economic development of the region—remain intact.

This chapter describes the rationale for the establishment of The Promise, the goals and characteristics of the program, characteristics of recipients of Promise funds, and the purpose and aims of the present study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the monograph.

Background

The City of Pittsburgh has faced severe population declines over the past 30 years. These declines correspond with the loss in the 1970s and 1980s of jobs in steel and manufacturing, which had been the core industries of the city. In January 1983, the unemployment rate in Pittsburgh peaked at 18.2 percent (Briem, 2008). With diminishing opportunities for stable work, many young people left the city upon graduating from high school in search of jobs, leaving behind an aging population. In recent years, however, Pittsburgh has experienced an economic revitalization, with growth in the education, technology, and medical sectors. A 2005 study found that jobs in the science, engi-
neering, and healthcare fields in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area increased by more than 12 percent between 1999 and 2004 (70 percent faster than the 7-percent growth in the overall United States) (Pittsburgh’s Future, 2006). As of December 2010, the unemployment rate in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area was 7.1 percent, 2 percentage points lower than the U.S. average of 9.1 percent at that time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, undated). For the young people who remain in the city, continuing on to college after high school has become increasingly important to adapt to a local economy that now values technological know-how and communication skills over manual labor (Autor, Levy, and Murnane, 2003).

Despite these signs of progress, Pittsburgh’s population has been in decline for a number of decades and has only recently inched back up to its level in 2000. However, the number of school-age youth in Pittsburgh has not kept up with overall numbers. Figure 1.1 illustrates the population trends in Pittsburgh for children 5 to 17 years of age and the total population from 2000 to 2009, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). According to ACS estimates, the population in Pittsburgh hit its lowest level in 2003 and since then has been moving back up toward the 2000 level. In 2000, there were about 59,300 children 5 through 17 years of age in the city, 19 percent of the total population. This number steadily decreased through the years, except for a slight bump in 2004, hitting its lowest point in 2009, at about 35,200—11 percent of the total population.

With the population changes and the decreases in the number of school-age youth in the city, the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) district experienced a decrease in enrollment. Figure 1.2 compares the growth rate in K–12 enrollment since 2000–2001 for PPS with that of other mid-sized urban centers in geographic proximity. In the 2001–2002 school year, PPS student enrollment was 2 percent lower than it was in 2000–2001. In the subsequent years, enrollment continued to decline, reaching 32 percent fewer students in 2007–2008 than in 2000–2001. Enrollment in PPS remained at about the 2007–2008 level in 2008–2009 and 2009–2010. The change in student population for PPS is not all that different from enrollment in other mid-size
urban districts, and in fact it is less drastic than the drops in enrollment in Cleveland public schools and Detroit public schools, as shown in Figure 1.2.

Over the course of the past decade, questions about the quality of the education system in PPS arose. A 2006 RAND study found that about 35 percent of students dropped out of Pittsburgh’s high schools, with a high of 53 percent for African-American boys in one high school (Engberg and Gill, 2006). A 2006 report by A+ Schools noted that in 2005–2006, 50.9 percent of 11th graders were “proficient” or “advanced” in reading on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. Forty-two percent of 11th graders were “proficient” or “advanced” in mathematics. These percentages were lower than the state averages of 65 percent and 52 percent, respectively. Furthermore, the percentages varied widely depending on which high school a student attended, as well as the race and income level of the student body (A+ Schools, 2006). The declines in population, coupled with the
The relatively low, and variable, academic performance of the students in the district challenged PPS to develop the workforce that could sustain the evolving economic needs of the city.

The Pittsburgh Promise is Born

In an effort to stem the declines in population and public school enrollment, as well as to promote Pittsburgh’s economic development by bolstering the academic performance, high school completion rate, and college-going rate of its students—particularly minority and lower-income students—the mayor of Pittsburgh and the superintendent of
the PPS district created The Pittsburgh Promise in December 2006. The Promise provides scholarships that eligible high school graduates from the PPS traditional public and charter schools within the district can use for postsecondary education expenses. In December 2007, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) announced that it would match each $1.50 the Pittsburgh community contributed with $1.00 up to $10 million dollars a year for the next ten years, providing a potential grant of $100 million for the initiative. A number of private donors and local nonprofit foundations, including R. K. Mellon and The Heinz Endowments, also support The Promise. Members of the high school class of 2008 were the first recipients of Promise funds.

The Promise has three long-term goals (The Pittsburgh Promise, 2009):

1. To mitigate and reverse the population declines in the city of Pittsburgh and the enrollment declines in PPS
2. To grow the high school completion rates, college readiness, and post–high school success of all students in PPS
3. To deploy a well-prepared and energized workforce and an eager core of community volunteers.

**The Pittsburgh Promise’s Vision of Change**

The Promise intends to meet its three overarching goals by “(1) preparing students for success in higher education by fueling the reform of our public education system; (2) helping students plan for the pursuit of higher education; and (3) equipping students to pay for higher education without excessive debt through scholarship awards” (The Pittsburgh Promise, 2011). This is referred to as the Prepare, Plan, and Pay policy: the PPS district will prepare students and help them plan; the Promise scholarship will help students pay for higher education.

Figure 1.3 illustrates The Promise’s implicit “impact theory.” The framework articulates how the program is currently expected to propel

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1 See Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004, for more information on the concept of an impact theory, also known as a logic chain or theory of action.
Figure 1.3
Pittsburgh Promise Impact Theory

Pittsburgh Promise Scholarship System
- Funding amount
- Student eligibility criteria
- Secondary school eligibility criteria
- Postsecondary institution eligibility criteria
- Need for applicant to apply for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other scholarships

Goal 1
Mitigate and reverse the population declines in the city of Pittsburgh and the enrollment declines in Pittsburgh public schools

Community Attitudes and Behaviors
- Support Promise financially
- Send children to traditional public and charter schools in Pittsburgh district
- Encourage children to stay in school

Goal 2
Grow the high school completion rates, college readiness, and post–high school success of all students in Pittsburgh public schools

Goal 3
Deploy a well-prepared and energized workforce and an eager core of volunteers

Students' Attitudes and Behaviors
- Achieving a minimum grade point average
- Attending school for a minimum percentage of days
- Completing high school
- Continuing education after high school
- Understanding college application process

PPS Initiatives

Promote economic development of Pittsburgh region
change in the community to promote Pittsburgh’s economic development. RAND deduced this framework from conversations with Promise officials, a review of Promise press releases and annual reports to the community, and a review of the literature on providing incentives to promote schooling success and academic achievement of youth.

The Promise’s impact theory suggests that the availability of funds will make a college education possible for those students who have the ability to go to college but lack the means. Furthermore, according to this theory, the funds will provide an incentive for parents to send their school-age children to a traditional public or charter school in the district and to encourage them to succeed in school and pursue postsecondary education. Also implicit is the idea that the scholarships will motivate all students, but particularly at-risk or lower-performing students, to strive to get better grades, to stay in school, and to pursue postsecondary education.

The criteria for obtaining the funding are key levers in promoting change. They include student eligibility requirements, a requirement that the secondary school a student graduates from be a PPS traditional public or charter school, postsecondary school eligibility requirements, and a requirement that applicants use the funds as a “last dollar” resource (Promise funds may be used only after federal and state grants and institutional or private scholarships have been exhausted, but before loans or work-study funds are used). The expectation is that by allowing students to use the funds only for postsecondary education institutions in Pennsylvania, graduating students will be more likely to return to the Pittsburgh region, thus promoting goals 1 and 3. Moreover, the funding, the student eligibility criteria, and the secondary school eligibility criteria will produce positive changes in community attitudes and behaviors, resulting in parents’ sending their children to PPS traditional public or charter schools and encouraging them to stay in school. Likewise, all of The Promise scholarship system’s components will motivate students to improve their grades or continue to achieve good grades, attend school regularly, complete high school, pursue schooling after high school, and understand how to navigate the complicated scholarship application process (and therefore the college application process).
The behaviors and attitudes of the community and students, in turn, will help The Promise attain its three explicit goals in the following ways:

- Parents will start sending their children to district schools because only students who attend PPS traditional and charter schools are eligible to receive the scholarship, therefore increasing enrollment in PPS.
- Parents of school-age children will start moving to Pittsburgh because of the availability of the postsecondary scholarship, thereby increasing the population of the city of Pittsburgh.
- Recognizing that they must obtain good grades and have good attendance records to receive a scholarship, students will work harder in school and will aspire to achieve some kind of postsecondary education, therefore improving the high school completion rate in PPS and the college-going rate of PPS high school graduates.
- Ultimately, students will be well equipped to meet the demands of the labor market and will be engaged in the community as volunteers because of their experience as Promise scholars.

The scholarship system does not work alone. It depends on the PPS district to ensure that students receive a quality education that adequately prepares them for postsecondary education. The expectation is that a strong education system will make the city an attractive place for families to move into (goal 1), enable students to stay in school and have success after high school (goal 2), and develop a student population that has the skills needed in the labor market (goal 3).

Program administrators hope that all these efforts will, over time, improve the economic development of the city.

**Characteristics of The Pittsburgh Promise**

**Eligibility Requirements**
High school graduates are eligible for a Promise scholarship if they (1) graduate from a Pittsburgh public traditional or charter high school;
(2) live in the district and have been residents of Pittsburgh continuously since at least 9th grade; (3) graduate from high school with a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5; (4) maintain a minimum of 90 percent attendance over the course of high school; and (5) qualify for entrance to any accredited two- or four-year public or private postsecondary degree program in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (The Pittsburgh Promise, 2009).

Funding Amounts
For students in the graduating classes of 2008 through 2011, the maximum scholarship amount was $5,000 per year for up to four years of postsecondary schooling, for a possible total of $20,000. Promise funds can be used for tuition, fees, books, and room and board. Because Promise provides “last dollar” funding, students are required to apply for federal and state financial aid. They have five years to use the four years of Promise funding and must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA while in postsecondary school to continue to receive funds.

In February 2011, The Promise’s board of directors announced that the fund will increase for students in the class of 2012 and 2013 by as much as an additional $20,000 for up to four years of postsecondary schooling, depending on the student’s PSSA examination results from 11th grade or SAT® exam score (The Pittsburgh Promise, 2011).

Table 1.1 summarizes the requirements and funding amounts for each year since The Promise’s inception. Details of the funding amounts for students in the graduating classes of 2012 and 2013 are presented in Table 1.2.

Application and Payment Process
Students may submit applications for Promise scholarships at any time during their senior year in high school, and they may also apply any time after they graduate. When a student submits an application in his or her senior year of high school, Promise administrators respond with a letter that confirms receipt and informs the student whether he or she is eligible for Promise funds, contingent upon graduation from high school and final grades. The letter also informs the student of the possible maximum amount of funds available, based on the year in which
### Table 1.1
Pittsburgh Promise Eligibility Criteria and Funding Amounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligibility criterion</th>
<th>High School Graduating Class</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2012 and 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum attendance&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary institution admission</td>
<td>Public universities in Pennsylvania, private schools in Allegheny County</td>
<td>All two- and four-year post-secondary institutions in Pennsylvania</td>
<td>All two- and four-year post-secondary institutions in Pennsylvania</td>
<td>All two- and four-year post-secondary institutions in Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maximum funding amount ($/year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students enrolled since</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>1st grade</th>
<th>6th grade</th>
<th>9th grade</th>
<th>Minimum:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4,750</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4,750</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4,750</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4,750</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** The Pittsburgh Promise, 2009, pp. 18, 22.

<sup>a</sup> Cumulative since 9th grade.

### Table 1.2
Pittsburgh Promise Additional Funding Amounts for Eligible Students in the Classes of 2012 and 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Additional Funding ($)</th>
<th>Students with 11th Grade PSSA Score of Proficient</th>
<th>Students with 11th Grade PSSA Score of Advanced or SAT Score of 600 or Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** The Pittsburgh Promise, 2011.
he or she started school in the district. In July of each year, Promise administrators receive students’ final grades and confirmation of graduation from the PPS district. Promise administrators then submit the names of Promise scholars to the postsecondary institutions listed on students’ Promise application. This cues the postsecondary institutions to update each student’s financial-aid package to include the availability of Promise funds.

When a Promise scholar enrolls in a postsecondary institution, the financial-aid office calculates her or his tuition, fees, room and board (at schools providing residency), and books, then subtracts all grants. This amount is reported to Promise administrators and The Promise pays the institution the balance up to the student’s maximum allowable Promise award amount. The maximum allowable amount is based on the year the student entered PPS and is always one of the following amounts: $5,000, $4,750, $4,250, or $3,750. If the balance due is $1,000 or less, including a credit balance, The Promise awards a minimum annual award of $1,000. Thus, all eligible students receive some funding.

Promise administrators receive a bill each semester from the postsecondary institutions at which Promise scholars are enrolled. The bills arrive at the conclusion of each school’s add/drop period. Processing bills and making payment to postsecondary education institutions typically occur in late November of each year for fall awards and in March for spring awards. Applications for Promise funds made after students graduate from high school are processed as quickly as possible so that the postsecondary education institutions in which the students are enrolled will receive payment promptly.

**Characteristics of Promise Scholars from PPS Traditional Public High Schools**

Table 1.3 presents information about the use of Promise scholarships by students in the PPS traditional public high school graduating classes of
### Table 1.3
Use of Promise Scholarships by PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates, 2008–2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Graduates</th>
<th>Total Eligible for The Promise</th>
<th>Percent Eligible for The Promise</th>
<th>Number Who Used Promise Funds</th>
<th>Percent of Eligible Graduates Who Used Promise Funds</th>
<th>Eligible Graduates Who Used Promise Funds for On-Time Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent of Eligible Graduates Who Used Promise Funds for On-Time Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent of On-Time First-Year Promise Scholars Persisting to Second Year of College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,869</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,754</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African-American females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African-American males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>105.5</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>105.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>83.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regular-lunch students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Pittsburgh Promise administration data, PPS student enrollment data, and National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Student Tracker data.

**Notes:** GPA and attendance requirements for eligibility changed each year (see Table 1.1). NA = not available.

- a As of the time of this study. These numbers may increase, as students have five years to use the four years of funding.
- b Number of graduates who ever used the Promise may be greater than the number eligible for funding because students are able to petition on an individual basis for acceptance into the program.
2008, 2009, and 2010.² The percentage of PPS traditional high school graduates eligible for Promise funds decreased slightly, from about 69 percent in 2008 to about 47 percent in 2010, primarily because stricter GPA and attendance requirements were instituted for the classes of 2009 and 2010. Of those eligible for funds, the proportion that used them increased by 10 percent from 2008 to 2010 (68.1 percent to 78.3 percent). This suggests that in 2010, more students who were eligible for Promise funds applied for and used them. On-time enrollment (by the fall immediately after high school graduation) also increased from 2008 through 2010: 78.3 percent of students eligible for Promise funds used the scholarship to enroll on time in 2010, compared with 58 percent in 2008.

Use of Promise funds differs by race, gender, and economic status: rates of use by African-American students have increased since 2008, have dropped slightly for white females, have stayed constant for white males, and have increased slightly for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. In 2010, almost all of the African-American females eligible for Promise funds used them (91.3 percent), and all of the eligible African-American males used them (116 percent);³ about 64 percent of eligible African-American females and 60 percent of eligible African-American males used Promise funds in 2008. Sixty-seven percent of eligible white females used Promise funds in 2010, compared with about 74 percent in 2008, and about 67 percent of eligible white males used Promise funds in both 2008 and 2010. Almost 88 percent of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches who

² Although students in PPS charter schools are eligible for Promise funds, their GPA and attendance records are not compiled by the district. Therefore, we were unable to include them in calculations of the number of students eligible for scholarships each year, nor were we able to track charter school students’ enrollment or persistence in postsecondary education institutions.

³ More African-American male students used Promise funds than were technically eligible. This could be because students are allowed to petition Promise administrators for acceptance into the program. According to the administrators, a student can petition into the program if he or she moved into and out of the district multiple times and therefore technically did not meet the residency requirement.
were also eligible for Promise funds used them in 2010, compared with 64 percent in 2008.

**The Use of Student-Centered Incentives to Motivate Students and to Promote Economic Development**

The Pittsburgh Promise is one of a handful of scholarship programs across the nation in which students are eligible for postsecondary education funding based on attending school in a particular location (i.e., place-based scholarships). The Kalamazoo Promise, created in 2005 for students attending Kalamazoo, Michigan, public schools, launched a movement throughout the nation. At the time of our study, there were 14 recognized Promise-type scholarship programs based on membership in PromiseNet, a network of communities investing in education and economic development through place-based scholarship programs established in 2008 (Western Michigan University, 2010). Each program promises financial support for postsecondary education, but requirements differ, as detailed in Appendix A.4

Although Promise-type initiatives around the United States vary in structure and eligibility requirements, the intended outcome is the same for each: to improve the economic development of the surrounding community by improving college-going rates and by attracting residents. There is some evidence that higher educational attainment in a community brings about better-paying jobs and that a more educated labor force brings about a stronger economy. Research conducted by CEOs for Cities (a group of urban leaders catalyzing a movement to advance the next generation of great American cities) showed that a 1-percentage-point increase in an area’s population having a four-

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4 Eligibility for scholarships can be limited to students graduating from specific high schools, public schools within a district, or all schools within a district or geographic area. Some scholarships are limited to students who graduate with a particular GPA and/or meet other academic or non-academic requirements. Nearly all programs limit where postsecondary scholarship dollars may be used. The majority of programs allow students to use the dollars at in-state postsecondary institutions. Funds may be first-dollar, last-dollar, or set at a maximum.
year college degree is associated with a $763 increase in per capita income. Other research notes that the quality of the education received is an important factor in determining the return on that education (Hanushek and Wobmann, 2010). Economic growth of a region is also contingent upon whether the region has a large enough supply of jobs to absorb new labor market entrants (Pritchett, 2001, 2006). However, these initiatives are relatively new, and how well they are meeting these intended goals is as yet unknown.5

Similarly, there is no definitive answer yet to the question of whether any cash-based incentives are viable strategies for improving student performance or intention to enter college. Such policy levers are growing in popularity,6 however, and research is finding some evidence that cash-based incentives can improve test scores (Bettinger, 2008), Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollments, SAT scores, and college matriculation of underprivileged youth (Jackson, 2010). Fryer (2010) found that offering cash-based incentives for behaviors and actions such as attendance, turning in homework, and increasing the amount of time spent on reading was a cost-effective strategy to raise achievement, as opposed to providing cash for “outputs,” such as test performance or grades. Maxfield, Schirm, and Rodriguez-Planas (2003) evaluated the Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP)

5 Some early studies have shown that enrollment has increased in the Kalamazoo public school district (which includes the city of Kalamazoo and neighboring suburban areas in Kalamazoo Township, Oshtemo Township and Texas Township) since the inception of the Kalamazoo Promise program (Miller-Adams, 2009) and that the program has increased the likelihood that students from Kalamazoo public schools will consider attending public post-secondary education institutions in Michigan, particularly students from families that earn less than $50,000 a year (Andrews, DesJardins, and Rachhod, 2010). A study of the Cal-Grant program, which provides grant money for college expenses based on students’ family income and assets and students’ GPA, found a positive impact of grant eligibility on college enrollment among financial-aid applicants, with larger impacts on the choice of private four-year colleges in California (Kane, 2003).

6 For example, New York City is providing as much as $500 a year for doing well on standardized tests and showing up for class (Medina, 2007), and the Baltimore City Public School District began to pay a bonus of up to $110 to students who improve their scores on state graduation exams (Ash, 2008).
that was implemented from 1995 to 2001 in a number of cities. The program targeted youth with low grades entering high schools with high dropout rates. QOP provided supportive services and provided youth with three types of financial incentives to attend program activities, one of which was a stipend of $1.25 for every hour devoted to educational activities. The study found that QOP increased the likelihood of high school graduation and of enrolling in postsecondary education or training. However, it did not improve grades or achievement test scores, nor did it reduce risky behaviors. A school-based randomized trial in Israel by Angrist and Lavy (2009) found that offering cash awards to students who passed their matriculation certificate exam led to an increase in certification rates for girls but had no effect on boys.

Because Promise-type programs provide incentives for behaviors and actions, as well as for outputs, little is known about how these programs’ use of incentives will propel change.

**Purposes of This Study and Research Questions**

This study, requested by the executive director and members of the Board of Trustees of The Pittsburgh Promise, had the following objectives:

1. To describe the efforts put in place by PPS to ensure that students are interested in and able to pursue postsecondary education
2. To understand progress The Promise has made to date in reaching the first two of its strategic goals 
3. To provide Promise administrators with feedback on ways to improve the program.

To meet the first objective, we examined the policies and efforts in the PPS district that support The Promise.

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7 Given the short time The Promise has been in existence, the extent to which it has achieved goal 3 could not be evaluated.
To understand the progress The Promise had made to date in its first goal, we focused on the extent to which enrollment declines in the PPS district have reversed or been mitigated. We asked the following research questions:

- Has enrollment in PPS traditional public and charter schools changed since The Promise’s inception? If so, in what ways?
- To what extent are newly arriving families choosing to send their children to traditional public and charter schools within the district because of The Promise?

To understand the progress The Promise has made to date toward its second goal, we asked the following research questions:

- To what extent is The Promise a factor in students’ attitudes toward completing high school or attending postsecondary education institutions?
- Have enrollment and persistence rates in postsecondary education institutions of graduates from Pittsburgh’s traditional public high schools changed since The Promise’s inception?

To meet the study’s third objective, we asked

- What can be learned about The Promise’s progress to date to inform future improvements?

**Organization of This Report**

In Chapter Two, we describe the data sources and research methods used in the study. Chapter Three explains the education reforms and activities undertaken by PPS to improve students’ high school graduation and postsecondary education institution entrance rates. Chapter Four provides the results of our analysis of enrollment trends at PPS traditional public and charter schools and whether newly arrived parents considered The Promise in their decision to enroll their children in those schools. Chapter Five reports the results of the analyses of
whether students factor The Promise into their attitudes toward completing high school or continuing their education beyond high school. Chapter Six reports the results of our analysis of the extent to which The Promise is improving the college-going and persistence rates of graduates from PPS traditional public high schools. Chapter Seven summarizes the findings of this study and offers recommendations for improving The Promise program. Chapter Eight provides a new conceptual model The Promise can use to evaluate how well it is meeting its goals in the coming years and suggests topics for future research. Details of methodology and findings of the study are given in Appendices A through F.
In this chapter, we present the methods and data used in our study. First, we explain how the study was shaped by The Pittsburgh Promise’s impact theory, discussed in Chapter One. Next, we detail the data and methods we used to answer the study’s research questions. Finally, we present the limitations of the study, which should be considered before interpreting any results.

**Study Framework**

To answer the study questions introduced in Chapter One, we based our study design, data collection, and analysis around The Promise’s impact theory (illustrated in Figure 1.3). The shaded boxes in Figure 2.1 show the relationships that our study explores.

We first explore the links between The Promise scholarship system and

- Whether parents send their children to district traditional and charter schools
- Students’ attitudes and behaviors
- Whether there are shifts in enrollment in PPS (goal 1) and in enrollments and persistence rates of graduates from PPS traditional high schools in postsecondary education institutions (goal 2).
Figure 2.1
Analytic Framework Guiding This Study

Pittsburgh Promise Scholarship System
- Funding amount
- Student eligibility criteria
- Secondary school eligibility criteria
- Postsecondary institution eligibility criteria
- Need for applicant to apply for FAFSA and other scholarships

Community Attitudes and Behaviors
- Support Promise financially
- Send children to traditional public and charter schools in Pittsburgh district
- Encourage children to stay in school

Goal 1
Mitigate and reverse the population declines in the city of Pittsburgh and the enrollment declines in Pittsburgh public schools

Goal 2
Grow the high school completion rates, college readiness, and post–high school success of all students in Pittsburgh public schools

Students’ Attitudes and Behaviors
- Achieving a minimum grade point average
- Attending school for a minimum percentage of days
- Completing high school
- Continuing education after high school
- Understanding college application process

Data Sources

PPS Public Documentation of Education Policies and Initiatives
The PPS district maintains a publicly accessible website (www.pghboe.net) that provides information on district initiatives. We limited our data collection from this source to the 2005–2006 through 2009–2010 school years, since the current wave of reforms and guiding reform strategy began with the arrival of a new superintendent in 2005–2006. Public documentation that we examined included text on the website itself and links to other documents that could be downloaded from it. These downloaded files include draft and final versions of PowerPoint presentations, documents, timelines, and press releases. Officials in the PPS central office reviewed our description of initiatives and provided written feedback, which we incorporated into our final draft.
PPS District Enrollment Data
The PPS district maintains enrollment records for each student living within the boundaries of the school district, regardless of whether or not the student is enrolled in a public school under the purview of PPS. This dataset enabled us not only to document overall enrollment in the district, but also to assess movements into and out of the district’s traditional and charter schools and to track individual students through time. Additionally, enrollment data from PPS allowed us to identify students who graduated from PPS who met the eligibility criteria for Promise scholarships. For this study, we used records for all students enrolled in grades 5 through 12 living within the school district during five consecutive school years: 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. We excluded records of students in schools that serve only special populations, such as incarcerated youth, students with mental illness, and students with learning disabilities.1

Surveys of Parents of 6th Through 9th Grade Students Who Are Newly Enrolled in a District Traditional or Charter School
RAND developed a survey and administered it to the parents or guardians of all students who were new entrants to the district in grades 6, 7, 8, or 9 in 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. The survey enabled us to explore the extent to which The Promise factored into respondents’ decisions to send their children to district traditional or charter schools. The surveys were mailed in December 2010, and follow-up efforts were conducted through February 2011. In addition to questions about respondents’ reasons for enrolling their children in a district school, the survey asked about parents’ knowledge of a handful of recent PPS education reform initiatives and The Promise program; engagement in their children’s schooling (attendance at Parent-Teacher

1 Because enrollment in these schools is contingent on the special needs of the student, not every student in the district population has an equal opportunity to enroll. Consequently, classification of these students as being eligible for Promise funds could downward bias the effect of The Promise on the average student attending a public or charter school in Pittsburgh—and determining this effect is our primary analytic goal. To guard against this possible bias, we removed those records and focused on only students in the traditional and charter schools within the PPS district.
Organization [PTO] meetings, Parent School Community Council [PSCC], and parent-teacher meetings). Additionally we asked them about their educational expectations for their children. We conducted a usability test of the survey to check wording and appropriateness of questions with six parents who recently moved their middle-school children into or out of the PPS district but who were not part of the targeted survey population. We made adjustments to the survey based on the feedback from that test.

The targeted population was 495 new students’ parents or guardians. Sixteen surveys were returned to RAND because of inaccurate postal addresses. We received 267 completed surveys, for a 56 percent response rate. To adjust for potential differences due to non-response, we created weights that reflected response probabilities so that our responding sample would be representative of the targeted population. We did not replace or impute any missing data. Descriptions of the administration of the survey and weighting methodology are given in Appendix C.

Focus Groups with District Traditional and Charter School Students in 8th Through 12th Grades

In December 2010 and January 2011, RAND team members conducted hour-long focus groups with 35 Promise-ready and borderline Promise-ready students in grades 8 through 12 in nine randomly selected district traditional public and charter schools. We purposefully targeted students who were academically average—those who were fulfilling the minimum-GPA requirements or who feasibly could do so if they continued their schooling. The focus groups helped us understand these students’ attitudes toward completing high school and going on to college and the extent to which they considered Promise funds in their educational decisions. Appendix D provides details on the school and student sample selection, the characteristics of participating students, and participation rates.

The focus group students completed four activities. First, they filled out a short questionnaire that asked for demographic information, perceptions of the support they have for succeeding in school, perceptions of the control they have over learning and academic improve-
ment, and their willingness to achieve at a given level or to improve their attendance record to become eligible for Promise funds. Questionnaire items that were not directly crafted for this study had been used in a past study with PPS students at these grade levels (Tharp-Taylor et al., 2007, and Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009). Second, each student wrote answers to basic questions about The Promise scholarship amount and eligibility requirements for only the moderator to see. Third, the students participated in a group discussion in which the moderator asked them about their expectations for completing high school and for going on to postsecondary education, whether specific district or school efforts helped them consider pathways to college (for example, career counseling and instruction on course-taking or how to apply to college and fill out financial-aid forms), the extent to which access to Promise funds was affecting their postsecondary education decisions or interest in a college pathway, and factors that they perceived would facilitate or impede their efforts to graduate from high school or go on to postsecondary education. Finally, the focus group moderator provided an opportunity for participants to write any comments they wanted to share with the moderator but did not want to express in front of the group. Discussions were digitally recorded so that notes could be compared with the recordings for fact-checking and clarity.

**National Student Clearinghouse Data**

NSC is a nonprofit organization that maintains transcript files for 92 percent of college students in the United States, primarily to provide enrollment verification services to financial-aid lenders and degree verification services to prospective employers. Additionally, NSC offers a Student Tracker service that enables schools and districts to track the postsecondary enrollment histories of their graduates. PPS obtained a Student Tracker subscription and gave us access to postsecondary enrollment data for members of the graduating classes of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. As PPS does not collect attendance or GPA data on students in the four charter high schools within the district, files were obtained only for graduates of the 10 traditional public high schools. These files contain information on the names of the colleges
or universities in which the students enrolled, as well as their dates of
enrollment. NSC aggregated this information by linking the student
names and birth dates provided by PPS with enrollment data abstracted
from the approximately 3,300 postsecondary institutions that provide
their transcript files to NSC.²

These data enabled us to pinpoint whether or not each student
enrolled in college, as well as the beginning and ending dates of all
enrollments. This enrollment history allowed us to ascertain the timing
of enrollment relative to when the student graduated from high school,
as well as determine the extent to which the student persisted in col-
lege from one year to the next. Furthermore, we could identify whether
the institution in which a student enrolled was a four-year school in
Pennsylvania, a two-year school in Pennsylvania, or a school outside
of Pennsylvania.

Table 2.1 summarizes the data sources we used to answer our
research questions.

**Analytic Approach**

Our analyses of trends or changes in PPS initiatives, enrollment in
district traditional and charter schools, and enrollment and persistence
of graduates of PPS traditional public high school in postsecondary
education institutions are confined to the period between 2005–2006
and 2009–2010. We use 2005–2006 as a starting point because it cor-
responds to the arrival of a new superintendent; directly precedes the
adoption of a number of new education initiatives undertaken by the
district, including the introduction of new math, science, and English
curricula described as part of our first research question; and provides
two school years’ worth of baseline data prior to the launch of The

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² NSC maintains data for more than 92 percent of all postsecondary institutions in Penn-
sylvania. Given that coverage is not complete, it is possible that a small number of our sample
members were enrolled in college but misclassified as not enrolled. However, the schools
missing from the NCS records tend to be smaller trade schools. Therefore, any bias due
to incomplete coverage and misclassification should have minimal influence on our overall
findings.
Table 2.1  
Research Questions and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What policies and efforts are under way in the PPS district to support The Promise?</td>
<td>Public documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Has enrollment in PPS’s traditional and charter schools changed since The Promise’s inception? If so, in what ways?</td>
<td>PPS district enrollment data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent are newly arriving families choosing to send their children to traditional public and charter schools within the district because of The Promise?</td>
<td>Parent survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To what extent is The Promise a factor in students’ attitudes toward completing high school or attending postsecondary education institutions?</td>
<td>Student focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have enrollment and persistence rates in postsecondary education institutions of graduates of PPS traditional public high schools changed since The Promise’s inception?</td>
<td>PPS district enrollment data and NSC data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What can be learned about The Promise’s progress to date to inform future improvements?</td>
<td>All data sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promise. Because The Promise was first made available to graduating seniors in the 2007–2008 school year, we refer to the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years collectively as the “pre-Promise years” and the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years collectively as the “Promise years.”

**What policies and efforts does the district have in place to support The Promise?**

To answer this question, we reviewed publicly available documents that describe efforts to significantly improve the quality of education that the district has undertaken from 2005–2006 through 2009–2010. Two officials from the district’s central office reviewed our description of these efforts to ensure that it was factually accurate. This description provides valuable context for understanding the variety of education reforms and initiatives that were under way in the district at the Promise’s inception.
Has enrollment in PPS’s traditional and charter schools changed since The Promise’s inception? If so, in what ways?

Using PPS individual-student enrollment data, we analyzed trends in enrollment of students in district traditional public and charter schools from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010, the year for which the most recent data were available. For each school year, we abstracted enrollment records on all students in grades 5 through 12 living in the district. While our focus is primarily on how high school (grades 9 through 12) students’ enrollment responds to the provisions of The Promise program, we also included students in grades 5 through 8 in order to gauge whether any “trickle-down” effects on enrollment may occur as these students and their parents begin to prepare for high school. We determined whether or not each student attended a district traditional public or charter school and if the student remained enrolled in any traditional public or charter school through the duration of the school year. Additionally, we identified new entrants into district traditional public and charter schools in each school year. Details of the analytic method employed are given in Appendix E.

To what extent are newly arriving families choosing to send their children to traditional public and charter schools within the district because of The Promise?

To answer this question, we analyzed data from our survey of parents of students who were new to district traditional public or charter schools to understand whether The Promise factored into their decisions. We first compared the level of importance attributed to 11 different reasons for moving the child to the school, one of which was The Promise program. We then examined whether responses differed for parents of different education levels, races, and economic status. To better isolate the relationships between parents’ and students’ economic and demographic characteristics and the importance placed on The Promise as a reason for moving to a district traditional public or charter school, we conducted ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses that controlled for the year the student first enrolled in school, the grade the student was in when first enrolled in the school, the student’s gender,
and parents’ self-reported level of engagement in the child’s schooling. Details of the model and analytic method are given in Appendix E.

**To what extent is The Promise a factor in students’ attitudes toward completing high school or attending postsecondary education institutions?**

To explore the extent to which The Promise’s scholarships affect students’ attitudes toward completing high school and going on to postsecondary education, we analyzed the data from the student focus group questionnaires and discussion sessions. We first organized notes from the discussion sessions by responses to each question. We then coded the notes by themes, highlighting concurrence in students’ responses to questions and any contradictions across students’ statements. We then synthesized the findings to draw out any recommendations. We used grounded-theory techniques to analyze the themes. Grounded-theory analysis is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes increasingly “grounded” in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models, rather than looking for patterns that support or test a pre-existing hypothesis. This approach allowed us to systematically identify key themes and patterns of responses, and it is a particularly sensitive technique for elucidating the experiences and perceptions of participants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

**Have enrollment and persistence of graduates of PPS traditional public high schools in postsecondary education institutions changed since The Promise’s inception?**

To examine whether rates of enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education were higher in the years following the inception of The Promise than in the years immediately preceding it, we merged PPS district enrollment data with NSC postsecondary transcript data for five cohorts of PPS traditional public high school graduates: 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. We descriptively compared enrollment and persistence rates for all PPS traditional public high school graduates with a subset of the graduates who met Promise eligibility criteria both before and after the inception of The Promise. To test whether these relationships were robust when adjusting for sociodemographic
and school characteristics, we estimated a series of difference-in-differences probit regression models. Finally, we descriptively explored whether these relationships differed for racial minorities and low-income students. More detailed information on the model and the statistical methods is included in Appendix F.

**What can be learned about The Promise’s progress to date to inform future improvements?**

To answer this question, we synthesized the results of our analyses to develop a theoretical model that the program can use to ensure continuous improvements throughout its existence. The model augments The Promise’s implicit impact theory, highlighting gaps in logic or connections where Promise administrators can focus their efforts. We then used the new model as a template to generate recommendations for future research that The Promise program can use to implement changes and to ensure continuous improvements.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations that are important to consider when interpreting our results. First, at the time of the study, Promise funding had been available for only three years (for the graduating classes of 2008, 2009, and 2010), and in those years, the eligibility requirements and types of postsecondary education institutions where the funds could be used changed. To measure the cumulative effects of exposure to a program, evaluators advise that services need to be consistently applied in the time frame of the evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). Because this was not possible, our study should be considered an evaluation of the initial implementation of the scholarship program. Our findings can therefore serve as a baseline against which future research can be compared as the program grows and evolves.

Second, changes in enrollment, college-going, or persistence rates that we found cannot be unequivocally attributed to The Promise. The short time in which The Promise has existed, the changes in eligibilit-
ity requirements and the amount of funds available for students, and changes in the economy, as well as the large number of reforms under way in the PPS district since 2005, may all have played a role in our findings.

Third, the selection criteria for focus group students differed, based on grade and whether the student was Promise-ready at the time of the discussion sessions. We are therefore not able to compare responses across groups or attribute any differences in responses across the grade groups to the grade or to where the students stood in terms of being Promise-ready.

Fourth, the analyses of postsecondary enrollment and persistence rates can provide only suggestive evidence regarding the overall efficacy of the scholarship program. This study was not designed to provide definitive answers about expected impacts. As is the case with other education initiatives with broad goals and impacts that take time to materialize, it may take some years to understand the full impact of The Promise. Furthermore, it will take a different kind of study to make that assessment: either a study that gathers longitudinal data and includes a comparison group of students who meet eligibility requirements but do not have access to Promise funds or a true experiment in which students are randomly chosen to receive or not receive Promise scholarships. The timing and design of the implementation of The Promise did not permit us to conduct such an analysis. Without a comparison group of students who did not have access to Promise funds or a true experiment in which students are randomly chosen to receive or not receive the scholarship, we are unable to ascertain whether The Promise causes changes in enrollment or persistence. In lieu of randomization, we employed a pre-post design wherein we compare rates of enrollment and persistence among scholarship-eligible youth in Pittsburgh before and after the program was in place. This approach provides strong evidence regarding the program’s efficacy.

A final limitation is that a number of research questions were outside the scope of this study. For example, we did not analyze the success to date of the PPS educational reform initiatives that are under way. Our description illustrates the myriad of initiatives that could be acting upon student and parent behavior to increase enrollment or pro-
mote high school graduation, college attendance, and college persistence. As another example, we explored changes in students’ attitudes about grades, attendance, and high school completion, but we stopped short of measuring changes in those behaviors, for a number of reasons. Trends in graduation rates could not be determined at this early stage of the program’s existence. We would need to follow students who were in 8th or 9th grade in the spring of 2008, when the first cohort of students was eligible to use Promise funds. At the time of this study, those students were in 10th or 11th grade, respectively. Furthermore, PPS student enrollment data may not be adequate to differentiate between students who leave the district (transfers) from those that drop out of school altogether. Although any student who leaves the district has a code that indicates whether he or she transferred or dropped out, the data do not contain information on where the transfers went. We recommend that analyses of changes in average grades, attendance, and high school completion be conducted in future research, as discussed in Chapter Eight.
Since the announcement of The Promise in December 2006, the PPS district has undertaken a number of sweeping reforms to improve the academic performance of its students. This chapter provides an overview of the most significant initiatives instituted from 2006–2007 through 2009–2010 to ensure that students are Promise-ready. A number of these initiatives are promoted as part of the Pathways to The Promise™ campaign, which seeks to encourage students to meet the Promise’s eligibility requirements and promotes the Promise’s scholarship system. These initiatives also fall under the district’s overarching reform agenda, Excellence for All (EFA), launched in May 2006 and still in existence (Roosevelt, 2006).

To inform this description, we collated information provided in public documents about the variety of reform efforts under way in the district. This chapter provides historical background on the myriad of reform efforts implemented in 2006–2007 and then describes the services and programs that fall under the Pathways to The Promise campaign from 2007–2008 through 2009–2010.


Threatened with state takeover of Pittsburgh’s public schools in 2005, the Pittsburgh Public School Board of Education tasked the newly
appointed superintendent of schools, Mark Roosevelt, with turning the district around. Roosevelt’s key plan for improving the academic performance of students in the district was the EFA reform agenda. EFA is guided by five “Foundations for Success” (Roosevelt, 2006):

- “Right-size” the district to improve finances, optimize facility use, and expand academic opportunity. Flatten central office organization and create a service-oriented culture that delivers equitable services to students and schools.
- Develop and deliver rigorous and aligned curricula, periodic assessments, data-driven instruction, and ongoing intensive professional development.
- Recruit, train, evaluate, and support principals and hold them accountable for academic achievement.
- Mobilize all available resources to provide a safe learning and working environment for all students and employees.
- Build partnerships with families and the broader Pittsburgh community to advance the academic achievement and character development of all students.

Under EFA, the district revised the suspension policy, which led to a “17% decrease in 1 to 3 day suspensions and a 20% decrease in 4 to 10 day suspensions,” and instituted mandatory discipline review committees to track behavioral data (Roosevelt, 2008b). The district also contracted to create Clayton Academy, an alternative school that specializes in supporting “chronically behaviorally challenged students in grades 6-12” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a). The school is intended to provide an opportunity for students in the district who may be at high risk for dropping out of school. It implements the districtwide curriculum, monitors each student’s progress on an individual behavioral plan, and “designs a transition plan for a safe and welcoming return to a PPS school” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a).

EFA includes specific goals for the number of students that participate in advanced coursework: to double the number of students who take AP courses, from 318 in 2004–2005 to 626 in 2008–2009; to quadruple the number of African-American students who take AP
courses, from 37 in 2004–2005 to 148 in 2008–2009; and to double the number of students graduating with an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, from 18 in 2004–2005 to 36 in 2008–2009. The hope was that students performing successfully in these courses would be more college-ready (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a). Further, EFA aimed to increase the proportion of graduating seniors taking the SAT from 52 percent in 2004–2005 to 80 percent by the end of 2008–2009 and to increase the 2004–2005 graduation rate from 76.8 percent to 86.8 percent in 2008–2009 (Roosevelt, 2006).¹

Curriculum and Instruction

Until 2006, schools within the PPS district had the autonomy to select, implement, and assess their own curricula. Further, teachers within the same grade level in a school had discretion and control over the implementation of the curricula. An examination of the district’s curriculum by Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) in 2006 found that schools were using different textbooks and courses for the same subjects, resulting in an inequity for schoolchildren (CGCS, 2006). The CGCS study noted that given high mobility rates in the district, the lack of consistency in curriculum from school to school heightened the negative impacts on students. In light of these findings, the EFA agenda required all schools to comply with a managed instruction approach.² The district contracted with Kaplan Learning Services to develop a core curriculum in math, science, and English for grades 6 through 12 that would be aligned with the state standards in the PSSA annual standardized tests and would be phased in over the course of

¹ Analyses conducted by the PPS Office of Research, Assessment, and Accountability found that the district is still striving to meet these goals. By the end of 2008–2009, 58 percent of graduating seniors took the SAT, 524 students took AP exams in 2008–2009, only 11 students graduated with an IB diploma in 2008–2009, and the graduation rate was 85.1 percent. The district exceeded its goal for African-Americans taking AP courses: 192 took AP courses in 2008–2009 (Pittsburgh Public Schools Office of Research, Assessment, and Accountability, 2009).

² Managed instruction has four key components: (1) consistent use, delivery, and pacing of a district-adopted curriculum; (2) use of evidence-based pedagogy; (3) assessment of student performance using benchmark tools and use of assessment data to guide instruction; and (4) a structure of accountability for the implementation of the curriculum.
three years (2007–2009). Schools now implement curriculum the district describes as more “rigorous and up-to-date” (Roosevelt, 2008b) that is in close alignment with the Pennsylvania standards and benchmarks for each grade level.3

Excel.9-12: The Plan for High School Excellence

In 2006, the district created the High School Reform Task Force to evaluate and reinvent Pittsburgh’s high schools. The task force was to create a plan that focused on decreasing the dropout rate, creating specialized learning communities for students, supporting students during the critical transition into high school, and graduating seniors with a postsecondary plan.

In 2007, the task force unveiled Excel.9-12: The Plan for High School Excellence, a five-year plan aimed at reinventing the high school experience using a phased approach. The vision of Excel.9-12 was expressed in the following five points (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a):

- Safe and welcoming schools – School is a physically and emotionally safe place that supports student learning.
- Relationships – Personalized learning environment with meaningful connections to teachers, peers, and the school.
- Student support – Consistent and ongoing help to ensure student progress toward goals.
- Rigor – High academic expectations for all students; engaging and demanding content and teaching.
- Relevance – Prepare and connect students to the real world.

The Excel.9-12 Five-Year Roadmap (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2008a) provides an overview of the points and the years in which it expects to implement these efforts. Implementation for some occurred during the 2007–2008 school year, while others are to be implemented during the 2011–2012 school year.

3 See Tharp-Taylor et al., 2007, and Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009, for an evaluation of the implementation of the managed instruction component of the EFA agenda.
Supporting the Transition to High School

Launched in 2006, 9th Grade Nation—Be the Change is a program to help ease students’ transition from middle grades to high school. District officials based the program on the best practices in high-performing high schools across the country (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated g). 9th Grade Nation provides a sense of camaraderie (as “one nation”) across 9th graders in the district, breaking down neighborhood barriers. Among many districtwide activities, all 9th grade students participate in a civics curriculum, “Be the Change.” The curriculum is described as a “rigorous, project-based, activity-oriented course that is designed to help students begin the journey of civic awareness, empowerment, and engagement in their first year of high school” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated f). Prospective 9th graders in 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 attended Camp Guyasuta over the summer to participate in team-building activities. The district also created READ 180 and Math Lab, which are double-period blocks of time devoted to accelerated instruction for students not proficient in reading or math (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated i). The goal of these instructional periods is to decrease the skills deficit of students who are struggling academically (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a).

9th Grade Nation activities are planned by school leadership teams, composed of the 9th grade assistant principal, 9th grade counselor, two teachers (including the civics teacher), parents, community members, students in 9th grade, and students in 10th grade. Among other responsibilities, leadership teams are expected to develop action plans to support students in meeting the grade-level standards, plan

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4 PPS district lists eight outcomes for 9th Grade Nation students. They will (1) be known, valued, and inspired; (2) attend, adjust, and achieve in an environment of high expectations and standards for all students; (3) have at least one involved caring adult who knows them well; (4) receive appropriate social, emotional, and academic supports that meet their needs; (5) connect to the school and community through extracurricular activities and service learning projects; (6) understand and experience their role and responsibilities as citizens; (7) achieve academically and earn promotion to the 10th grade; (8) graduate from high school with a plan for the future and be eligible for a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship.

5 Beginning in the 2010–2011 school year, team-building as well as service-learning activities were integrated into the regular school year at each 6–12 and 9–12 school (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated h).
activities that align with Excel.9-12’s guiding principles, and provide other kinds of support for students throughout their freshman year of high school. A 2010 study by Westat found that rates of promotion from 9th grade to 10th grade were significantly higher after the program was introduced than they were before; this was particularly the case for African-American students and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (Zhang, Miyaoka, and Frechtling, 2010).

Improving the District’s Infrastructure

In addition to introducing the EFA reform agenda, in 2006 the district examined its financial state and cost of operation. It reconfigured schools because of declining enrollment, high proportions of empty seats in schools, and the cost of operating or improving facilities relative to schools’ enrollment (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2006; Roosevelt, 2006; Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, 2005). With analysis from the RAND Corporation on academic performance of schools in the district (Gill, Engberg, and Booker, 2005) and their own cost analysis, the district devised a plan to “rightsize” their enrollments over five years. Rightsizing is an organizational approach whereby schools are strategically closed or merged and those that remain are calibrated such that the number of students enrolled can support the cost to operate and improve the facility. According to district officials, the goal of rightsizing was to move students from lower-performing schools to higher-performing schools or those that have “enhanced educational programs” (Roosevelt, 2008b), such as Accelerated Learning Academies,\(^6\) schools-within-schools, or career technology education programs.

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\(^6\) Beginning in September 2006, the district designed and implemented Accelerated Learning Academies (ALA), which implement the America’s Choice instructional model; have a longer school day and year than the other public schools in the district; and implement rigorous coursework, a team approach to finding appropriate resources for students who need specialized support, frequent monitoring of individual student progress toward standards, frequent teacher-to-student and student-to-student feedback as part of the learning environment, ongoing intensive professional development for staff, and a high level of parent and community involvement facilitated by a parent engagement specialist (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated a). Eight ALAs serve elementary and middle-school students in the district. Parents can choose to send their children to these schools.
Pathways to the Promise (2007–2010)

The Pathways to the Promise campaign is a set of services and programs intended to “help students to master academic content, develop behaviors and habits, and explore ambitions and dreams so that they are Promise-ready upon graduation from Pittsburgh public schools” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009b). In this section, we describe the initiatives that were introduced in the district between 2007–2008 and 2009–2010, organized under key components of Pathways to the Promise: effective teachers, strong leadership, consistent assessments, counseling and social work, and out-of-school activities, as illustrated by the district’s Theory of Action reproduced in Figure 3.1 with permission from the district. The district’s Theory of Action describes how its initiatives and efforts work together to develop students’ Promise-readiness.

Supporting Effective Teaching

In an effort to evaluate and support teachers, the district piloted a rubric-based evaluation system known as the Research-Based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE) during the 2008–2009 school year. The purpose of RISE is to ensure that “teacher effectiveness continuously improves in a manner that benefits student outcomes and provides each teacher with the support and opportunity to grow his/her professional knowledge, practice, and skill” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009a). In 2009, PPS received significant funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to implement the Empowering Effective Teachers program, which expands RISE, incorporates teacher academies that focus on improving the quality of classroom instruction, changes the compensation and tenure system of teachers, and provides new career opportunities for teachers within the district. One of these opportunities is being part of The Promise-Readiness Corps Cohort, a team of six to eight staff members in a school who are collectively responsible for supporting 100 to 120 students transitioning into high school and

7 Other components of the Pathways to the Promise not discussed in this chapter include curriculum, parent engagement, and health and wellness.
ensuring they are Promise-ready when they arrive at 11th grade (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated e).

Empowering Effective Teachers seeks to “foster a culture of striving, resilience and college-readiness, so that more than 80 percent of all students will be Promise-ready and complete a college degree or workforce certification” (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009: p.2).

In addition to these efforts to improve the skills of PPS teachers, the implementation of managed instruction required teachers and principals to undergo professional development to understand how to implement the curriculum and make instructional decisions based on
student performance data. While the district provides general ongoing training in the curriculum and the use of student data in the classroom, each school receives additional targeted supports through instructional coaches whose purpose is to observe and support the instructional needs of individual teachers and provide customized professional development that caters to the overall needs of staff in each school.

**Strong Leadership**

The PPS district started the Pittsburgh Urban Leadership System for Excellence (PULSE) in 2008 to recruit, train, support, and retain effective principals who can raise student achievement levels in their schools. PULSE is a principal-accountability system that includes performance-based compensation. It provides principals with ongoing professional development and support from their area superintendent and departments within the central office. Newer principals are evaluated on a performance rubric, whereas veteran principals are evaluated through a directed “professional growth plan.” A principal’s base pay can increase by an additional $2,000 per year if he or she either is assessed as “proficient” across the seven performance standards and 27 components of practice in the performance-standards evaluation rubric or has a professional growth plan that is evaluated as “satisfactory.” Principals may also earn a bonus of up to $10,000 annually based on demonstrated growth in student achievement (Roosevelt, 2008b). As part of PULSE, the district taps strong teachers to participate in the Pittsburgh Emerging Leadership Academy (PELA), a training program for potential principals. PULSE also provides principals with ongoing professional development and support from their area superintendent and departments within the central office (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated b).

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8 During the 2007–2008 school year, 29,693 teachers, coaches, and administrators undertook nearly 146,000 hours of district-level professional development (Roosevelt, 2008b). Tharp-Taylor et al. (2009) analyzed the professional development of managed instruction and found that the program had some promising benefits.
Consistent Assessments and Data-Driven Decisionmaking
In 2008, the district implemented the 4Sight assessments, which provide reading and math benchmarks two to four times a year (Fahey, 2008) as well as ongoing feedback on student learning. The expectation is that teachers and principals will use these data to guide instructional decisions (Roosevelt, 2008b). All district staff are able to access student performance data through Real Time Information (RTI), an online student-information management system that provides reports at the individual, classroom, grade, and school level (PPS Office of Technology, 2003). School staff members are able to review a student's current and historical grades and performance on assessments such as the PSSA, as well as attendance and other behavioral data.

Counseling and Social Work
The district used the Excel.9-12 Five-Year Plan to redesign its model for student counseling so that students could receive more personalized academic and career counseling. The model provides counselors with opportunities for personalizing career counseling sessions, determining scholarship opportunities that best match student needs, reaching out to students who do not seek out counselors on their own, and informing every student about The Pittsburgh Promise (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007a).

Out-of-School-Time Activities
PPS has made efforts to improve out-of-school-time activities so that they support student learning or the development of critical skills. Through a partnership with United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, the district launched a mentoring program for 6th graders in 2009 to improve students’ awareness of jobs in the Pittsburgh area and their understanding of the relevance of completing high school and to provide positive role models (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009). The Summer Dreamers Academy, launched in the summer of 2010 for incoming middle-school students, allocates time to academic learning and skills development in July and August. The Academy was expanded to all K–8 students starting in summer 2011 (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2011). In addition, all PPS schools have an after-school
educational assistance program (EAP) that provides tutoring designed to help students make academic progress.

**Other Initiatives Undertaken Since the Inception of The Pittsburgh Promise**

**Providing Secondary Learning Options**
Beginning in 2008, the PPS Board of Directors approved the creation of a number of new specialized “learning options” for secondary school students throughout the district. Each specialized school has a unique focus, ranging from creative and performing arts to science, technology, engineering, and math. Four of these schools are now open: Pittsburgh CAPA, Pittsburgh Milliones or University Prep, Pittsburgh Obama 6–12 (The Barack Obama Academy of International Studies, formerly Pittsburgh Frick/Pittsburgh IB), and Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy. The schools offer advanced or specialty coursework for students. All students in the district may attend these schools, but there are eligibility requirements (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009c). In-school programs, such as the robotics program at Peabody High School, are also offered in schools throughout the district.

**Instituting Career and Technical Education (CTE)**
In 2007, the district developed a policy of providing a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in each traditional high school. CTE programs incorporate traditional academic coursework with experience in a career in a high-demand field. They allow students to earn college credits and industry certifications while still in high school (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2010b). The CTE programs are expected to offer students a pathway to Pittsburgh Promise scholarships (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated c and undated d). Career fields in the programs include transportation and logistics, healthcare, consumer science, construction and trades, and business, finance and information technology (IT). Full implementation of CTE programs is expected in the 2011–2012 school year. Some schools have a focus that is not offered anywhere else in the district, but each region of the city
will offer experience in health careers; business, finance, and IT; and culinary arts. All students can choose to participate in a CTE program offered at a school in a district (Pittsburgh Public Schools, undated c).

**Expectations for Student Conduct**

At the start of the 2007–2008 school year, Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and Superintendent Roosevelt signed the Pittsburgh Pledge, which communicated a common vision of clear expectations and high standards for stakeholders in the community (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2007b). In the same year, the district enhanced its Code of Student Conduct to more explicitly articulate the expectations for student behavior in schools, while attending school-sponsored activities, or while riding on school-sponsored transportation. It also more clearly articulated consequences for students who do not meet the expectations (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2010a). Within each school, the staff is expected to develop and implement a Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) program that aligns with the Code of Conduct to support a safe learning environment (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2008b). A school’s PBIS communicates clear behavioral expectations to all students, creates support to enable each student to experience success, and outlines procedures for addressing behavioral infractions throughout the district. The PPS central office provides ongoing training to staff members on the Code of Student Conduct to ensure that expectations for student behavior are uniform across the district and to create an environment conducive to learning in every school.

**Summary**

The educational reform initiatives the PPS district has instituted from 2006–2007 through 2009–2010 to ensure that students are Promise-ready include a number of initiatives to promote students’ learning and college-going. The district has also instituted the Pathways to the Promise campaign to encourage students to meet the eligibility requirements and to promote The Promise’s scholarship system. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, we report the findings of our analyses of PPS student
enrollment data, the parent survey, student focus groups, and NSC data. Given the myriad of reform efforts described in this chapter, it is difficult to determine causal effects of The Promise in these analyses—we run the risk of confounding changes resulting from The Promise with changes resulting from PPS district initiatives.
In this chapter, we address the second and third study questions. We report the results of our analysis of trends in enrollment of 5th through 12th graders in district traditional public or charter schools, concentrating on data from academic year 2005–2006 through 2009–2010. We then report the results from our survey of parents of students who enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools in the Promise years (2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010).

**Student Enrollment in the District Since the Inception of The Promise**

**Enrollment Trends**

With a financial incentive in place for students attending eligible high schools, it was anticipated that more students living within the district’s borders would enroll in a district traditional public or charter school. To assess whether this was the case, we calculated the percentage of school-age youth living in Pittsburgh who were enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools for grades 5 through 12 during the pre-Promise and Promise years, as shown in Figure 4.1.

On average, the percentages varied very little across the five school years. The highest rates were recorded for 12th graders in the pre-

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1 These enrollment figures are lower than estimates from survey data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau estimated that between 80.9 percent and 86.5 percent
Figure 4.1
School-Aged Youth Living Within PPS District Boundaries Enrolled in a District Traditional Public or Charter School

![Graph showing enrollment rates by grade.]

SOURCE: PPS Student Enrollment Data (2005–2009) and authors’ calculations.

Promise years, when nearly 74 percent were enrolled in a district traditional public or charter school. The lowest rates were recorded for 7th and 8th graders in the pre-Promise years, when 69 percent were enrolled.

of youth were enrolled in public high schools between 2005 and 2009. Our calculations indicate that during the same time period, 65.1 percent of youth were enrolled in public high schools. The difference is mainly due to differences in the method of measurement and our exclusion of schools that serve special-needs students. The Census Bureau estimate is a point-in-time estimate based on the ACS, which uses cross-sectional enrollment questions asked at different times throughout the year and smoothed to form a five-year average. Our measure of enrollment is a period-based estimate, reflecting enrollment at the end of a school year. The period-based approach incorporates a higher degree of dropouts and transfers than is typically captured by a point-in-time approach. Additionally, we do not classify schools serving special-needs students as PPS traditional public or charter schools. When we adjust our calculations for dropout and transfer behavior and include those attending schools serving special-needs students, our enrollment estimate for public schools is 82.1 percent—within the confidence interval produced by the ACS, 2000–2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).
If the availability of The Promise scholarship program had a positive effect on enrollment in public and charter schools within the district’s borders, we would have expected the percentages in the Promise years to be higher than those in the pre-Promise years. But rates of enrollment prior to the launch of The Promise are generally comparable to those in the Promise years. For example, in the pre-Promise years, 71 percent of 9th grade students were enrolled in district schools, and only slightly more, 72 percent, were enrolled during the Promise years. Although The Promise did not substantially spark an upward change in enrollment in Pittsburgh public and charter schools in the years immediately following its inception, enrollment in district schools is no longer precipitously declining. Thus, enrollment declines have been mitigated.

Raw enrollment tabulations are given in Table E.1 in Appendix E and presented for students in public and charter schools separately in Tables E.2 and E.3. Additionally, overall enrollment rates disaggregated by individual school year are given in Table E.4.

**Persistence Rates in PPS Traditional Public and Charter Schools**

Although aggregate enrollment rates did not appear to increase as anticipated, it is possible that students who were already enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools were more likely to remain in those schools in order to maintain eligibility for the scholarship. To explore this possibility, we compared rates of persistence for students attending traditional public and charter schools in the pre-Promise years with rates in the Promise years. The rates were calculated as the percentage of students enrolled in a district traditional or charter school in a given grade who remained enrolled in any district traditional public or charter school the following school year. These rates are shown in Figure 4.2 for grades 5 through 11. Persistence rates disaggregated by individual school year are shown in Table E.5 in Appendix E.

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2 We did not calculate rates of persistence for grade 12 because the end of the 12th grade school year typically involves graduation, beyond which persistence within a school is not possible.
Figure 4.2 shows that differences between students’ persistence rates in the pre-Promise and Promise years are negligible. In the 9th grade, rates of persistence during the pre-Promise years and the Promise years were nearly identical (83.6 percent and 83.3 percent, respectively). For the years and grades examined, students appear to be no more likely to remain in district traditional public or charter schools with the availability of the scholarship.

New Students Entering PPS Traditional Public and Charter Schools
In addition to maintaining students who are currently enrolled, The Promise is intended to attract new students to the district. To assess whether this occurred following the launch of the program, we tabulated the number of new enrollees for each school year and calculated the average number of new enrollees in the pre-Promise and Promise school years. These averages are shown in Figure 4.3.
It does not appear that substantially more new students enrolled in the 6th, 8th, and 12th grades in the district. In the 9th grade, however, when the largest numbers of students entered the school district, there were more new enrollees before The Promise was made available than after—an average of 390 new 9th graders per year prior to The Promise and an average of 328 following its implementation. In contrast, there were slightly more new 10th and 11th graders in the Promise years than in the pre-Promise years, even though those students are not eligible for a Promise scholarship. These mixed patterns do not spell out a clear trend with respect to attracting new families and students to the district. Tabulations for each individual school year for new enrollees from both within and outside the district are shown in Tables E.6, E.7, and E.8 in Appendix E.
Decisionmaking of Parents of Students New to District Traditional Public or Charter Schools

While the analyses of new enrollees are instructive in documenting aggregate patterns of transfer behavior, they do not tell us whether The Promise was a salient factor in parents’ choice to transfer their children into a district traditional or charter school. Students move into and out of schools and school districts for a variety of reasons that often have little to do with academic reputation or financial incentives. In the remainder of this chapter, we report the results of our analyses of the survey administered to parents of newly enrolled 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders into district traditional public or charter schools in 2007, 2008, or 2009. The survey results help to indicate whether The Promise played a role in parents’ decisions to move their children.

The Extent to Which The Promise Factors into Parents’ Decisions

The survey asked parents to rate the importance of 11 reasons for moving their child into a district traditional public or charter school along a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 signified “not at all important” and 5 signified “very important.” Figure 4.4 shows the average responses, rounded, with confidence intervals. Non-rounded means and standard errors are shown in Figure E.1 in Appendix E.

The three reasons parents noted as being close to “very important” in their decisionmaking process were

- The Pittsburgh Promise scholarship system
- The specialized programs of courses offered in the new school (e.g., performing arts, science and technology, International Baccalaureate)
- The academic programs in the new school.

All other factors are reported as being “not at all important” to “somewhat important,” on average. Because these other factors were rated significantly lower in importance than The Promise, on average,
## Figure 4.4
### Mean Responses of Importance of Reasons for Enrolling Children in a District Traditional Public or Charter School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at All Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the academic programs over those offered in the child’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 249)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the athletic programs over those offered in the child’s</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 252)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.00-2.35]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the resources for children with special needs over those</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offered in the child’s previous school (N = 253)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[1.87-2.24]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We felt the social environment was a better fit than in my child’s</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 253)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.87-3.26]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the level of safety over that in my child’s previous</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school (N = 247)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.64-3.06]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child started a new grade that was not offered at his or her</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.0***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 257)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.85-3.31]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wanted to take advantage of specialized programs/courses offered</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the new school(e.g., performing arts, science and technology,</td>
<td></td>
<td>[3.55-3.94]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Baccalaureate) (N = 256)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wanted to take advantage of The Pittsburgh Promise scholarship</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>system (N = 261)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[3.70-4.05]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We could no longer afford tuition or transportation for my child to</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attend his or her previous school (N = 247)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[1.69-2.06]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We moved to Pittsburgh from another city, state, or country (N = 243)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[1.75-2.18]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child was asked to leave his or her previous school because of</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic or disciplinary problems (N = 244)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[1.09-1.31]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Parent survey.

**Notes:** Weighted estimations. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001, significantly different from The Promise’s mean. Confidence intervals are shown in brackets under each mean estimation.
it appears that The Promise is a salient factor in parents’ decisions to move their children into a PPS traditional public or charter school.3

These results, when interpreted with the enrollment analysis, suggest that in its early years, The Promise did not increase the overall number of transfers into the district, but for those who did transfer, it was a motivating factor.

We next explored whether the importance of The Promise in the decision to enroll children in a PPS traditional public or charter school varied by students’ sociodemographic background. Figure 4.5 shows rounded mean responses by three sociodemographic characteristics: parents’ education level, students’ eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches (as a proxy for economic disadvantage), and students’ race. Non-rounded means and standard errors are given in Figure E.2 in Appendix E.

The survey responses indicate that parents with lower educational attainment and those of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches or who are non-white rate The Promise significantly higher in importance than other parents do.

We next examined whether parents’ responses on the importance of The Promise differed after we took into consideration all the characteristics described above. These results are shown in Table 4.1.

We found that even when a student’s race and economic status (Model 4 in Table 4.1) were taken into consideration, The Promise was more important to parents with a high school education or less than to parents who had some postsecondary education, a two-year associates degree, a bachelor’s degree, or more. The level of importance attributed to The Promise did not differ by a student’s race when the parents’ education level or the student’s economic status were taken into consideration. These relationships remained when we controlled for a number of other student and parent characteristics (Model 5). Regression results for all of the models are given in Table E.9 in Appendix E.

3 Worthy of note here is the importance of the PPS’s and charter schools’ specialized programs and academic programs in parents’ decisions. This suggests that the district’s educational reform efforts (discussed in Chapter Three) have played a role in attracting students to its schools.
Figure 4.5
Mean Response of Importance of The Promise in Decision to Enroll Children in District Traditional Public or Charter School, by Parents’ Education Level, Student Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches, and Student Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or lower (N = 56)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4.13-4.72]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary education, bachelor’s degree or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher (N = 203)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>[3.41-3.83]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eligible (N = 90)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[4.02-4.55]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not eligible (N = 171)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>[3.32-3.77]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student race</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>[3.86-4.43]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (N = 169)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>[3.38-3.84]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Parent survey.

NOTES: Weighted estimations. Means are significantly different from each other at the p < 0.01 level. Confidence intervals are shown in brackets under mean estimations.
Table 4.1  
OLS Regression of Importance of Promise in Parents’ Decision to Enroll Children in PPS Traditional Public or Charter School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>High school graduate or less</td>
<td>0.815***</td>
<td>0.619**</td>
<td>0.743***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.172)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
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<td>Eligible for free or</td>
<td></td>
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<td>reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>0.788***</td>
<td>0.583*</td>
<td>0.722**</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.229)</td>
<td>(0.245)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td>0.576**</td>
<td>0.118</td>
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<td>(0.179)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.673***</td>
<td>3.549***</td>
<td>3.627***</td>
<td>3.429***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>259</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>259</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Parent survey.

NOTES: The dependent variable is the importance of The Promise in the decision to enroll children in PPS traditional public or charter schools (scale: 1–5). Weighted estimations. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Model 5 controls for gender of student, year student enrolled in the school, grade in which student first enrolled, whether student moved from a school within or outside of the district’s boundaries, and parents’ self-reported level of engagement in the child’s schooling.

These findings suggest that regardless of race or other characteristics, economically disadvantaged students’ parents and parents with fewer years of schooling were more likely than other parents to report that being able to take advantage of The Promise scholarship program was a key factor in moving their child to a PPS traditional public or charter school.

Summary

The enrollment patterns of 5th through 12th graders in PPS district traditional public and charter schools from 2005–2006 through 2009–2010 were mixed. Specifically, we found that

- On average, the percentage of school-age youth living in Pittsburgh who attended PPS traditional public or charter schools remained constant across the pre-Promise and Promise years.
• Trends in enrollment of students new to district schools were mixed. For some grades, more new students enrolled in district schools after the inception of The Promise, and for other grades, the opposite was the case. For the years and grades examined, students appeared to be no more likely to remain in district schools after the inception of the program than before.

Parents who responded to our survey reported that The Promise was an important factor in their choice to enroll their children in a district school:

• Parents considered three factors “very important” in their decisions to send their children to district schools: The Promise scholarship system, specialized programs offered in the new school, and the academic programs in the new school.
• Economically disadvantaged families were especially likely to report that The Promise was an important factor in enrolling their children in a district school.

Chapter Five explores the extent to which academically average 8th through 12th grade students in district traditional public and charter schools consider The Promise in their behaviors (e.g., getting good grades or attending school) or decisions to complete high school and go on to postsecondary schooling.
This chapter examines the extent to which The Promise scholarship system promotes behaviors or attitudes that encourage students to graduate from high school and matriculate into postsecondary institutions. To gather information, we conducted focus groups with two groups of students in nine randomly selected district traditional public or charter schools. The first group consisted of 8th, 9th, and 10th graders who had GPAs ranging from 1.6 to 2.42 (students who were close to meeting The Promise’s eligibility requirement for a scholarship). Students in this range can reasonably expect to qualify for Promise funds if they improve their GPA by one letter grade in the time they have remaining before 12th grade. The second group consisted of 11th and 12th graders who met the GPA requirement of 2.5 (i.e., were Promise-ready).

We spoke with a total of 35 students, of whom 28 percent were white, 63 percent were African-American, and 9 percent self-reported as “other” or no race or ethnicity. Fifty-one percent of the students in our sample were female. More information about the sample selection, data-collection methods, and participating students is given in Appendix D.

Students’ responses in the focus groups provided valuable information on their experiences and attitudes. However, the responses should not be considered representative of all students’ experiences and attitudes. Moreover, because our two student groups were drawn from different populations, we were not able to attribute differences between their experiences or attitudes to their grade or to their cumulative GPA.
We first present our findings on students’ reported understanding of Promise eligibility criteria and funding amounts and their knowledge of their own eligibility status. We then report on whether participants believed the incentive of a scholarship for postsecondary schooling motivated them to improve their grades or attendance, complete high school, or continue their schooling after high school.

Students’ Knowledge of The Pittsburgh Promise Program and Requirements

To gauge students’ understanding of the program’s requirements, we asked focus group participants to answer the following questions and to share their responses with the facilitator and the group:

- What is the GPA a graduating senior needs to get a Promise scholarship?
- What is the percentage of attendance in school a graduating senior needs to get a Promise scholarship?
- What is the highest amount of money a graduating senior can receive each year from a Promise scholarship?

This section examines the responses to these questions and reports the students’ opinions on how the Promise program could be improved to meet their needs.

A majority of focus group participants lacked clarity on at least one aspect of the program’s requirements.

Three-quarters of the focus group participants were aware of the cumulative GPA required to receive Promise funds. The Promise-ready 11th and 12th graders tended to respond accurately to this item more often than the borderline Promise-ready students in 8th through 10th grade. More than half of the participants in both groups did not know the attendance requirement (8th grade students, who would presumably be less likely to know this level of detail about the program given that
they had yet to enter high school, gave the largest number of incorrect responses).

**The amount of funding was the greatest source of confusion.** Half of the participating seniors reported believing that they will earn a scholarship of $10,000 per year if they qualify for The Promise—the amount that will be available for students in the graduating class of 2012, but not for their graduating class. Similarly, students in grades 8 through 10 were unclear about the financial benefit, with many students reporting that they believed awards were $40,000 per year. In fact, at the time of our visits in December 2010 and January 2011, we noticed prominently placed signs that showed $40,000 as the maximum total benefit, although the maximum available at the time of the visits was $20,000 (the $40,000 maximum would not be instituted until February 2011 for the class of 2012).

Although we cannot be sure, changes in the funding amount through the years may have caused some of this confusion, along with the fact that the funding amount is based on a rubric factored on grade since enrollment, as discussed in Chapter One. Students were not aware of the changes in funding amount through the years, nor did they mention the rubric for calculating the amount for which students are eligible.

Participants’ lack of clarity on The Promise’s benefits is summed up in a comment from a borderline Promise-ready sophomore:

> They keep coming to our classrooms and they keep saying $10,000 a year. Sometimes they say $5,000 and $10,000. I’m like which one do we get?

**None of the students in the focus groups knew that Promise funds were last dollar.** None of the students in the focus groups reported knowing that Promise funds would cover costs *after* all financial aid had been applied to their college tuition bills, but before student loans were used (i.e., were last dollar). Despite the fact that students are required to apply
for financial aid to receive Promise funds, only about one-third of the Promise-ready 11th and 12th graders were familiar with federal financial aid in general; and fewer reported that they had received information on FAFSA. Those 11th and 12th graders who were familiar with FAFSA and federal financial aid reported that they had received this information from sources outside of the school (e.g., parents or older friends/relatives who had gone through the process already) and not from guidance counselors or other school staff who might have this information.

**Few students realized that Promise funds could be used at any accredited postsecondary education institution in Pennsylvania.** All of the students we spoke with, regardless of grade level or Promise-eligibility, knew that Promise funds could be used at four-year colleges. Few students, however, were aware that they could also use Promise funds for education in two-year technical or associate’s programs. As soon as one group of Promise-ready seniors (PR/S) became aware that they could use the funds for technical or associate’s programs, they asked a flurry of questions, illustrating the complexity of using Promise funds and their confusion about this program specification:

PR/S 15: If you go to a two-year school, can you still use the other $10,000? If you just get your associate’s degree, will it pitch in to what you owe still?

PR/S 16: What if I did two years, then I wanted to do some other classes after that. Would they give the money to cover my loans?

PR/S 17: If you want to go to a trade school for two years and then you decide that you want to start a four-year college too, will that pay for that? For me, I want to go to VoTech [vocational and technical school] for mechanics, then after I do that I may want to go back to school to get a business degree or something. Would they cover that?

Fewer than one-quarter of the focus group participants answered that they knew that Promise funds could be used only at schools within Pennsylvania.
Most students were unaware of their eligibility status for Promise funds.
In the discussion sessions, approximately one-fifth of focus group participants reported that they use some type of strategy to track their personal attendance record. Most of these were students who reported that they had few, if any, absences. One student, a borderline sophomore, described the following tactic: “I keep a calendar. I can discuss all of my absences or tardies in detail.” Overall, however, strategies such as this were rare. More often, responses to questions about personal attendance status were more like those of a group of borderline sophomores (B/S):

B/S 4: I wouldn’t know. I have doctor’s appointments and I don’t know how they [school administrators] are keeping track of those absences.

B/S 9: [A school administrator] recently called out who was above 90 [percent] and who was below. This was the first time they did something like that individually.

B/S 10: It’s got to be like 90 percent.

One borderline freshman (B/F) summed up the risks of being unaware of his own attendance status as follows:

You could be thinking that “I’m cool and I could miss a couple of days of school,” but in reality you cannot, you are just about to miss it [the required 90 percent]. If you are not [aware of 90 percent status] and you think you are above it and miss the couple of days, then you fall behind.

Schools’ efforts to provide information on The Promise or on the student bodies’ eligibility status were perceived as ineffective or embarrassing.
Students at two of the schools we visited mentioned receiving information at assemblies where students were separated by grade and gender. At these assemblies, a school administrator would give a group GPA
and attendance percentage for the group attending, for example, 11th grade girls. This type of aggregated information was not valued highly by focus group participants.

Said one Promise-ready junior (PR/J):

I wouldn’t have such a big meeting about it with all of the 11th graders. I would do it in small groups so that you could have a group discussion about it, be able to ask more questions about it, and have better knowledge about what is being presented to you. In a big group, you have your whole class and everyone wants to ask a question, not everyone can of course ask a question. In a big group, things can be misheard, because you can be distracted by someone next to you or something like that.

Another school had publicly listed the names of Promise-ready students. Focus group participants at that school reported that this public display created disincentives for students to become Promise-ready. A group of borderline sophomores from the school stated that this practice was embarrassing:

B/S 1: They put people’s names up [in a public place in the school]. It tells you this kid who is Pittsburgh Promise-ready and those missing are people who are not Promise-ready.

B/S 2: I would wipe my name off.

Facilitator: Why?

B/S 3: There are so few kids on there.

B/S 4: It’s embarrassing because so few are there, you stand out in a negative way if your name is on there.

B/S 5: Really negative.
To improve their knowledge about The Promise and their eligibility for funds, participants preferred face-to-face meetings that provide individualized information.

Focus group participants unanimously agreed that personalized information would be helpful for them to track their progress toward becoming and remaining Promise-ready. One Promise-ready junior reported that receiving clear information about program requirements and personal status at an earlier point in one’s high school career would be helpful:

They need to advertise more aggressively to students when they are in the 9th grade, early 10th grade, to get your GPA ready. When I was in the 9th grade I was kind of like, “I have time. I’ll get it together 10th grade year.” No one ever told me that after junior year it was so hard to get your GPA up. I feel that if students were told earlier that this is where you need to be by this point in time, that it would be an effective strategy.

While the students preferred having information conveyed face-to-face, they were amenable to receiving a written notice at the start of each grading period that provided their personal attendance and GPA information. Specifically, they wanted information on the grades they needed to achieve to bring their GPA up to 2.5 and how many days they had been absent so that they could be aware of their official attendance average. The same students who voiced their displeasure at having the names of Promise-ready students listed in a public venue also commented that a better practice would be to inform each student personally:

Facilitator: So it sounds like names in a public place in the school is not the best way to let you know that you are Promise-ready. What is a better way?

B/S 4: Alone.

B/S 7: Yes, in a private conversation with just me. Don’t send anything home because I’m not going to see it. Talk to me or give me a paper.
B/S 3: Right, have the conversation with me. Don’t rely on someone else in my family to tell me. We almost never get the stuff in the mail that everyone else is talking about.

Across focus groups, participants noted three ways they were able to get personalized information about their eligibility status, each of which they perceived as insufficient to meet their needs. The first way was to wait for their report card, which provides the number of unexcused absences, at the end of each grading period. But waiting until the end of a grading period to find out the number of unexcused absences on their record did not allow them to make mid-period corrections.

The second way to get personalized attendance records was through excessive absences (EA) notifications, which the students also considered insufficient. EA notifications are letters sent home when the student exceeds the allowable number of absences based on PPS district guidelines for participation in sports or other activities (i.e., six or more absences during one of four grade periods) (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2009). The EA guidelines are not as stringent as The Promise guidelines. Furthermore, many students in our groups reported that they were trying to keep from receiving an EA notice, yet the EA notice was the only non-solicited notice of personal attendance status that could potentially assist with mid-period corrections.

Third, participants reported that they could schedule a meeting with their guidance counselor if they wanted personal Promise status information. Few underclassmen in our focus groups reported taking advantage of this opportunity; more upperclassmen reported having spoken with school staff about their eligibility for The Promise. One group of Promise-ready juniors discussed how helpful one particular guidance counselor had been for checking Promise eligibility status. They noted:

PR/J 11: Mr. X does [a lot] to let people know what grades they have to get to be Promise-ready for the year or what grades you have to get by your 12th grade year to be Promise-ready.

PR/J 12: If you care about your grades you go to him.
PR/J 11: Or you can just come down and see him. He will say you need to maintain a 2.5 or 2.6 for the rest of your high school career to be Promise-ready.

**Teachers are a possible source of information on The Promise that could be better utilized by the district.**

While participants did not perceive teachers as being good resources for information on whether they were Promise-ready, teachers were reportedly helpful in maintaining students’ focus on The Promise. While the type of communication reported by students in the focus groups varied widely, students in each grade level reported that their teachers often reminded them of The Promise in an effort to encourage them to come to class and to get their work done. Three borderline sophomores provided the following quotes from their teachers regarding The Promise:

B/S 4: They say, “You need to get your grades together so that you can get that scholarship” or “You need to show up to class on time.”

B/S 5: She tells me, “If you miss too many days you are not going to get The Promise.”

B/S 6: She said, “Think about how much you get a year. Don’t you want to make $40,000? If I was young and I was going to college, I would do what I needed to do to get $40,000 a year for college.” They also say, “$40,000 would make a difference for me.”

At the same time, a group of Promise-ready seniors had suggestions about ways teachers could play a stronger role in encouraging students to become Promise-ready:

PR/S 16: I think that if teachers would talk to us [it would help]. Teachers talk to us but they don’t really talk to us about it. They could push us more to get good grades in class. They could talk to us about The Promise. If they would talk to us more, all of them, then we would be more informed about it. We would know more.

PR/S 20: Yeah.
PR/S 16: Not stress it at every test or for every homework assignment; just mention some to clarify questions we have.

PR/S 15: Like once a month.

The Role of Promise Funds as an Incentive to Change Students’ Behaviors and Attitudes

In this section, we explore whether focus group participants believed that the existence of Promise funds motivated them to change their attitudes and behaviors to get better grades, attend school more regularly, finish high school, or go on to postsecondary education. Although their responses provide insights into whether they factor The Promise into their decisions, it is important to note that we do not know the extent to which students’ perspectives translate into real changes in behaviors.

Focus group participants reported they were willing to work harder on their grades and attendance to become or remain Promise-ready. Responses to the questionnaires students filled out prior to the discussion sessions indicated that 94 percent (n = 33) of the participants would work to get all “B’s or B–’s” for the rest of their high school careers if they were told they must do so to get a Promise scholarship; 75 percent of the borderline students and 100 percent of the Promise-ready students responded that they would work to get all “A’s or A–’s” for the rest of their high school careers if they were told they must do so to get a Promise scholarship.

Nearly all students, regardless of grade level or Promise eligibility status, responded that they would miss fewer days if they were told that they needed to do so to be Promise-ready. A borderline sophomore stated in the discussion session that the pressure from family members to meet Promise eligibility requirements got them to go to school when they would rather stay home, and this resonated with the other members in the group:
When I stay home, my mom is like, “You are not going to get The Promise, you are not going to get The Promise.” I would rather just go to school at that point.

A borderline 9th grader commented that The Promise motivated him to push himself to get good grades and keep his attendance up:

I’m good [my attendance is good], because I haven’t missed a day of school yet. I can get the grade point average as long as I try to. I’m cool with it. You got to push yourself harder to get your grades so that you can get the scholarship.

All focus group participants reported that they planned to finish high school.

While all focus group participants reported that they were planning to finish high school, 10 percent of the Promise-ready and 13 percent of the borderline students responded that if Promise funds were decreased or not available, their plans to finish would change. This suggests that for a handful of students, The Promise is making an impact on their decision to complete high school. This finding was borne out in the discussion sessions. We found that a number of students who had weighed options such as quitting school or joining the Armed Forces rather than going on to postsecondary education had changed their minds because of The Promise. For example, a borderline sophomore noted:

What made the difference for me is The Pittsburgh Promise. I thought, “I’ll quit and go to the military. They’ll fund my school from there.” The military was a way to fund school and now this [The Promise] is another option.

Nearly all participating students reported planning to attend college or another school after high school.

Nearly all the students in our focus groups responded on the questionnaire that they planned to attend college or another school after high school, and 83 percent reported feeling that they needed to go to college or other postsecondary school to get the job they wanted as an adult. This finding aligns with previous research that has found that nearly
all high school students report plans to attend college, even if most
do not actually enroll (Rosenbaum, 2001). More than three-quarters
of the participants in our groups responded on the questionnaire that
“The Promise had made it more likely that I will go to college or other
school after graduation,” regardless of Promise-eligibility or grade level.

The positive impact participants attributed to The Promise was
supported in the discussion sessions when we talked about funding
amounts. Many students were enthusiastic about the funds. Said one
borderline freshman, “I get money for college and I don’t have to pay
for it, for real, for real?! It gives you something to look forward to.”
Another said, “$5,000 or $10,000 is a lot of money. That helps because
I don’t have to pay it back.” However, a number of them were only cau-
tiously optimistic about being able to use the funds for their postsec-
ondary education or considered the allotted funding insufficient. One
borderline sophomore said, “It’s less debt that you have to pay off when
you are done with school. It’s not enough, but it helps.” Another stu-
dent stated, “The Promise will help [my] ability to attend college, but
it won’t be enough.”

In discussion sessions, we asked students about their understand-
ing of college costs and their knowledge of the financial-aid process.
Overall, students demonstrated a clear understanding of the cost of
attending the type of college they intended to enroll in and demon-
strated a general understanding of private versus public, two-year versus
four-year programs. We also asked students whether they factored in
the Promise scholarship when considering their college options. We
learned that the funds play a role for students who are choosing to
attend postsecondary education institutions close to home (as well as
for their peers with whom they have discussed the issue). Other partici-
pants were deliberating whether to narrow their search to schools that
are eligible for Promise funds to take advantage of the scholarship, as
exemplified by the statements of two Promise-ready juniors:

PR/J 13: A lot of my friends are basing their college decisions off
of The Pittsburgh Promise and staying in Pittsburgh because they
feel it is a good way to get the money to go to college. They would
not have the money to go to college otherwise. Definitely it is a big topic in my friend circles.

PR/J 14: A lot of my friends with The Pittsburgh Promise want to stay in Pittsburgh because it is a big help; it is a lot of money. Also a lot of my friends want to get outside of their comfort zone and experience different things, go somewhere else.

At the same time, about half of the focus group students reported that they do not intend to take advantage of Promise funds, even if they are eligible, because they want to go to a school that is not so close to home. These students felt they wanted to attend a school outside of Pennsylvania, which would render them ineligible for Promise funds. Nevertheless, most of them conceded that qualifying for The Promise was important whether or not they ultimately used the funds, as was illustrated by the comments of a Promise-ready junior:

Something my mom was telling me was not to let The Promise dictate where you want to go because you are not only limited to college in Pittsburgh. She was saying that if my grades were good enough, I could apply for scholarships and get the same amount [as The Promise funds], if not more, to go to a college that I would primarily want to go to rather than go to a college that I had to go to for The Promise.

Summary

Most of the students in our focus groups did not fully understand Promise program eligibility and benefits. Specifically:

- Many participants lacked clarity on the program’s eligibility requirements, the postsecondary education institutions at which the funds could be used, the requirement that the funds were to be used after other scholarship and financial-aid sources were utilized, and the amount of funding available.
• Participants reported that large-scale assemblies in schools that inform students about Promise requirements and aggregate GPA or attendance information were not informative.

Participants reported that public recognition of students who were Promise-ready was embarrassing. The majority reported a preference for individualized reports to allow them to monitor their own grade and attendance records.

Participants also reported that they were planning to graduate from high school and that The Promise factored into their decisions to attend college:

• A majority of participants reported that the existence of the Promise scholarship made it more likely that they will attend college.
• Half of the participants reported that they planned to attend school outside of Pennsylvania and therefore did not think they would use Promise funds, but they were still striving to meet the eligibility requirements in order to increase the likelihood that they would be accepted at a college of their choice.

The information in this chapter provides important context for the quantitative analyses of postsecondary education attendance and persistence discussed in Chapter Six.
In this chapter, we examine whether the inception of The Promise has been accompanied by changes in PPS traditional public high school graduates’ enrollment and persistence rates in postsecondary educational institutions. We analyzed PPS and NSC data on the graduating classes of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 from the city’s 10 traditional public high schools to compare the rates of enrollment and persistence in the years preceding the initiation of the program with those in the years after its inception.

We expected that graduates who were eligible for Promise funds would be most affected by the program, since those who do not meet the Promise eligibility criteria would be less likely to fare well in college because of their lower grades and poorer attendance in high school—two factors that negatively affect overall educational attainment (Bosworth, 1994; Rosenbaum, 2001). These students lack preparation for college, and that cannot be fixed with scholarship money alone. Promise-eligible students are in a better position to transition to and succeed in college. With additional financial support, academically well-prepared students who may have forgone postsecondary education because of economic constraints may now have the resources to attend. We hypothesized that if the scholarship program was providing adequate financial support to improve the transition to college, those who were Promise-eligible and who graduated when the program was available (in 2008, 2009, and 2010) should have had higher rates of
enrollment and persistence than their Promise-eligible peers who graduated before the program was available (2006 and 2007).

The findings in this chapter can help gauge the progress The Promise has made thus far in shaping college-going patterns. They do not, however, provide definitive evidence that The Promise affects PPS graduates’ college-going behavior.

### Percentage of Students in PPS Who Are Eligible for The Promise

Using PPS student data on high school grades, attendance records, and date of enrollment in the district, we classified PPS graduates as Promise-eligible if they met the three student eligibility criteria:

- A minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5
- A minimum attendance record of 90 percent
- Attendance at a PPS district school continuously since at least the 9th grade.

Table 6.1 shows the distribution of each eligibility criterion, as well as the overall percentage of graduates who were eligible for The Promise, for each of the graduating classes from 2006 to 2010. The years in the shaded columns (2008, 2009, and 2010) are the Promise years.

The criterion met by the most students was enrollment within the district: 94.0 percent of graduates from all five classes had been continuously enrolled since the 9th grade in PPS. Fewer graduates met the GPA and attendance requirements: 56.1 percent of graduates from all five classes earned at least a 2.5 GPA, and 77.8 percent maintained at least a 90 percent attendance record. The proportion of students meeting all three eligibility criteria held steady across the five graduating classes at just under 50 percent, with a 2 percentage point increase from 2006 to 2010.

The proportion of African-American graduates meeting the 2010 Promise eligibility requirements increased by 5 percentage points
Table 6.1
Graduates from PPS Traditional Public High Schools Meeting Promise Scholarship Eligibility Criteria, 2006–2010

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<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>At least 2.5 GPA</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 90% attendance</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>77.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled in PPS since 9th grade</td>
<td>92.0</td>
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<td>1,709</td>
<td>1,802</td>
<td>1,636</td>
<td>1,686</td>
<td>8,718</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: PPS student enrollment data.

NOTES: Promise-eligibility is defined as meeting the 2010 requirements. Eligibility requirements for Promise funds differed in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (see Table 1.1 in Chapter One).

through the years. In 2006, about 27 percent of the graduating African-American students would have been Promise-eligible according to 2010 standards. In 2010, almost 32 percent of graduating African-American students were Promise-eligible. The percentage of graduates who were Promise-eligible also increased slightly for white students: from about 68 percent in 2006 to about 71 percent in 2010.

Postsecondary Enrollment Trends of Promise-Eligible PPS Graduates

Using the dates of postsecondary-institution entry and exit provided by NSC, we determined whether or not each sample member had enrolled in a postsecondary institution by October 1 of the year in which he
or she graduated from high school. This time-referenced approach is a conservative measure of postsecondary enrollment, as not all students enroll in college immediately after finishing high school. We used this measure in our analyses for two reasons. First, earlier cohorts have more time to enroll in college than do later ones. Therefore, comparing graduates across years biases overall enrollment rates in favor of those in the pre-Promise years. A time-referenced measure allows for comparable estimates across graduating classes. Second, students who delay enrollment are less likely to complete college than their peers who start immediately after high school, or “on-time” (Bozick and DeLuca, 2005). Given that The Promise is intended to support the acquisition of postsecondary credentials, on-time enrollment serves as an indicator of the success of the program in moving toward these longer-term goals. For ease of expression, we refer to our measure of on-time enrollment simply as postsecondary enrollment in this monograph.

Figure 6.1 shows rates of postsecondary enrollment for all graduates from PPS traditional public high schools and for the subset of graduates who met the three scholarship eligibility criteria.

Figure 6.1
PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.
Across all graduating classes, there was a gradual increase in the proportion enrolling in postsecondary institutions. Among the graduating class of 2006—two years before The Promise scholarship program was available—47.6 percent enrolled in some form of postsecondary institution. Among the graduating class of 2010 (the third class for which The Promise was available), 53.9 percent enrolled. This slight upward trend was also evidenced for those who were Promise-eligible, but the overall rates were even higher: Approximately 76 percent of Promise-eligible graduates of the class of 2010 had enrolled in postsecondary schooling, compared with 71.1 percent of their peers five years earlier.

To assess whether those eligible for The Promise were more likely to enroll after the scholarship was made available, we pooled data from all five graduating classes and estimated a difference-in-differences probit regression model where the dependent variable was a binary measure indicating postsecondary enrollment (0 = non-enrollee; 1 = enrollee), shown in Table F.2 in Appendix F. We found that Promise-eligible youth were as likely to enroll in college in the pre-Promise years as they were in the Promise years. This suggests that at the outset, the Promise may not have played a role in improving the rate of postsecondary enrollment. Data, methods, and findings from these analyses are given in Appendix F.

**Trends in Types of Postsecondary Institutions at Which PPS Graduates Enroll**

To document the types of postsecondary institutions PPS graduates are choosing to attend after high school, we categorized such institutions into three types: (1) four-year schools in Pennsylvania; (2) two-year schools in Pennsylvania; (3) schools outside of Pennsylvania. Enrollment rates in these institutions are shown in Figures 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4, respectively.

Enrollment rates of Promise-eligible students rose slightly in both four-year schools (Figure 6.2) and two-year schools (Figure 6.3). This suggests that the availability of The Promise did not motivate enrollment into any particular type of institution. However, as shown in Figure 6.4, enrollments in schools outside of Pennsylvania were lower
Figure 6.2
PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Four-Year Schools in Pennsylvania

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.

Figure 6.3
PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Two-Year Schools in Pennsylvania

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.
after Promise funds were made available: 15.1 percent of Promise-eligible 2010 graduates attended out-of-state schools, compared with 19.7 percent of 2006 graduates.

Although these descriptive comparisons cannot determine causal effects, they do suggest that the introduction of the scholarship program may have enhanced postsecondary enrollment within the state among youth graduating from PPS schools.

Enrollment Patterns of Racial Minorities and Low-Income Students
We also explored the effects of race and economic status of students on enrollment. To assess race differences, we compared enrollment patterns of African-American PPS traditional public high school graduates with those of their white peers. (African-Americans are the largest racial minority group in Pittsburgh.) Figure 6.5 shows the enrollment rates of Promise-eligible African-American graduates and white Promise-eligible graduates. As with the overall increase in enrollment shown in Figure 6.1, enrollment rose for both African-American and white graduates. Promise-eligible white graduates had slightly higher rates
of enrollment in 2006, but the differences between the two subgroups were negligible by 2010. We estimated our difference-in-differences probit regression model separately for African-American and white students (estimates are shown in Table F.4 in Appendix F) and found that the main variable of interest, the Promise-available × Promise-eligible interaction term, was not significant. The lack of significance in these models indicates that differences between African-American and white students’ enrollment were of similar magnitude before and after the Promise was introduced.

Differences by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches are shown in Figure 6.6. Although there was a slight increase in enrollment for both eligible and non-eligible students, the rates of Promise-eligible PPS graduates who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches are lower than those of Promise-eligible PPS graduates who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in every graduating class. It appears that in the early years of the program, this financial
support was not sufficient to eliminate overall differences in enrollment between lower- and higher-income youth.

Additionally, we estimated our difference-in-differences probit regression model separately for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and for non-eligible students. As in the model estimated on the full sample (shown in Table F.2 in Appendix F), the Promise-available × Promise-eligible interaction term was not significant (the estimates are shown in Table F.4 in Appendix F). The lack of significance in these models indicates that differences between students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and non-eligible students were of similar magnitude before and after the Promise was introduced.

**Trends in Postsecondary Education Persistence Rates**

Although it is too early to determine whether rates of postsecondary degree completion improved following the introduction of The Promise, we can assess whether rates of persistence in postsecondary schools
have changed. Using NSC data, we measured persistence, defined as a student’s enrollment (by August 15) in a postsecondary institution in two consecutive years immediately following his or her graduation from high school. Since members of the class of 2010 had been out of high school for only one year at the time of this analysis, we examined persistence for the classes of 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

Figure 6.7 shows rates of persistence for all graduates from PPS traditional public high schools who had enrolled in college and for the subset who met the three Promise scholarship eligibility criteria and enrolled in college.

Among all PPS traditional public high school graduates who had enrolled in college, there was a small decline in the percentage who stayed in school for two consecutive years. College enrollees from the high school class of 2009 had an 84.7 percent persistence rate, approximately 5 percentage points lower than that of their peers who gradu-

Figure 6.7
PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.
ates in 2006 (90.3 percent). However, most of those who were Promise-eligible maintained their rate of persistence before and after The Promise was made available, which suggests that Promise funds may have helped support students after they had initially enrolled.

To formally test whether this effect was significant, we pooled the four graduating classes and estimated a difference-in-differences probit regression model where the dependent variable is a binary measure indicating postsecondary persistence (0 = enrolled and did not persist; 1 = enrolled and persisted). We found that Promise-eligible youth were “buffered” from the negative downturn in persistence detected in the years after the scholarship was made available. The estimated coefficients and marginal effects are presented in Table F.3 in Appendix F.

Patterns in Persistence of Racial Minorities and Low-Income Promise-Eligible Students

Figure 6.8 compares rates of persistence of Promise-eligible African-American and white PPS graduates who enrolled in college, and Figure 6.9 compares rates of persistence of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and non-eligible PPS graduates. The persistence rates of African-American and free- or reduced-price-lunch-eligible graduates declined slightly over time, while the persistence rates of white and regular-lunch graduates remained stable, on average. While both African-American and free- or reduced-price-lunch-eligible graduates appeared to have increased enrollment during the years in which The Promise was available, they were less able to sustain this enrollment.

Additionally, we estimated our difference-in-differences probit regression model separately for African-American students, white students, free- or reduced-price-lunch-eligible students, and regular-lunch students. The estimates are shown in Table F.5 in Appendix F. Interestingly, the Promise-available \( \times \) Promise-eligible interaction term was

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1 Because our measurement of persistence is limited to only two years, we found relatively high rates of persistence, which are consistent with national averages. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study dataset, which is the most recent national-level longitudinal data on college-going youth, we found that among students who graduated from public high schools in spring 2003 and started college in fall 2003, 90.3 percent were still enrolled as of August 15, 2004.
Figure 6.8
Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year, by Race

![Graph showing promise eligible PPS high school graduates in second year at postsecondary institutions by race.

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.](image)

Figure 6.9
Promise-Eligible PPS Traditional Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions Persisting into the Second Year, by Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches

![Graph showing promise eligible PPS high school graduates in second year at postsecondary institutions by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch.

SOURCE: PPS student data and National Student Clearinghouse data.](image)
significant only in our samples of white students and regular-lunch students, which indicates that the buffering effect of the Promise did not extend to the other two groups of students. This suggests that more support may be needed to improve disadvantaged youths’ chances of degree completion beyond what is already provided by The Promise.

Summary

Our analysis of the graduating classes of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 found increases in postsecondary education enrollment through the years and indicates that The Promise may have played a role in improving students’ persistence in college:

- Rates of postsecondary enrollment increased, on average, following the introduction of the scholarship program. However, Promise-eligible youth were as likely to enroll in college in the pre-Promise years as they were in the Promise years. This suggests that at the outset, the Promise may not have played a role in improving the rate of postsecondary enrollment.
- There is some evidence that The Promise promoted persistence among those who did make the transition to college. Persistence rates of PPS traditional public high school graduates declined following the inception of The Promise, but this decline was attenuated for those who met the eligibility criteria for the scholarship.
- The attenuation in rates of persistence was evident only among white students and students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. In the short time The Promise has been in existence, its protective effect on persistence did not extend to African-American students or students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.
This study provides a preliminary assessment of the extent to which The Pittsburgh Promise is achieving its short- and long-term educational and regional goals three years after its inception. As is the case for other education initiatives with broad goals and impacts that may take many years to materialize, it will take some years to definitively measure the impact of The Promise. Our study was designed to explore what was feasible given the early stage of the program’s implementation and the limited available data: early signs of progress and emerging trends.

We found evidence that The Promise is off to a solid start and is having the kind of results one would expect in its initial stages. This chapter summarizes the key findings from our analyses and offers some recommendations that Promise administrators can use to implement future changes.

Key Findings

Student enrollment in PPS traditional public and charter schools has been stabilizing, rather than continuing to decline. Enrollment of 5th through 12th graders in PPS traditional public or charter schools remained constant in the years immediately before and after the inception of The Promise, indicating that The Promise did not initially spark a change in enrollment in district schools in the years immediately following its availability. This finding is not unsurprising given the limited time in which The Promise has existed.
Trends in enrollment of students new to the district showed mixed results.
There was no clear difference in patterns before and after the inception of The Promise to determine whether it has attracted new families and students to PPS district schools. It is also difficult to ascertain whether the mixed results we found were due to the changes occurring within the district (discussed in Chapter Three), because of the inception of The Promise, or because of other, broader, economic factors.

The proportion of students remaining in PPS traditional public and charter schools from one year to the next has remained steady.
Persistence rates of students in targeted grades from 2005–2006 through 2009–2010 did not appear to be affected by the availability of The Promise: Students appeared to be as likely to remain in district schools before the inception of the program as after its inception.

The Promise is reported to be an important factor in parents’ decision to enroll their children in PPS traditional public or charter schools within the district.
Surveys of parents of 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders who newly enrolled in the district in either 2007, 2008, or 2009 revealed that parents considered three reasons to be “very important” in their decisions to send their children to district traditional public or charter schools: The Promise scholarship system, the academic programs offered in the new school, and the specialized programs in the new school. These findings suggest that in its early years, The Promise was a motivating factor for parents who transferred their children to a district school. They also suggest that parents were recognizing the PPS district’s efforts to restructure schools to offer specialized programs and to improve academics.

Economically disadvantaged families are especially likely to report that The Promise is an important factor in the decision to enroll their children in PPS traditional public or charter schools.
Parents with fewer years of schooling, those with children who were non-white, and whose children were eligible for free or reduced-price
lunches rated The Promise significantly higher in importance than other parents. This suggests that regardless of race or other sociodemographic characteristics, more parents of economically disadvantaged students considered The Promise a factor in their decision to move their children to the district.

There is reason to believe that parents will continue to enroll their children in district traditional public and charter schools to take advantage of the scholarship offered by The Promise. This is particularly the case for parents with fewer years of schooling, whose children may ultimately become the first in their families to go on to postsecondary education.

**Some students do not fully understand program eligibility and benefits.**

To examine students’ understanding of program eligibility, we conducted focus groups in nine schools with 35 students in 8th, 9th, and 10th grades who had GPAs that with some effort could be brought up to the GPA requirement to be eligible for a Promise scholarship (borderline Promise-ready) and students in 11th and 12th grade who met the GPA requirement (Promise-ready). We found that many participants lacked clarity on the program’s eligibility requirements. For example, many students did not know the percentage of unexcused absences allowed, the postsecondary education institutions in which the funds could be used, the amount of funding available, or that the funds were to be used after other scholarship and financial-aid sources were exhausted. Moreover, the focus group participants did not consider the large-scale assemblies schools use to inform students about The Promise requirements and aggregate GPA or attendance information to be informative. Participants also reported instances in which school staff did not know how students could apply for a Promise scholarship or the specifics of the program’s requirements. These findings suggest that more-effective ways should be found to communicate with students about the program’s elements.
Strategies to publicly recognize students who are Promise-ready may need to be redesigned.

Some participants in our student focus groups reported that public recognition of students who are Promise-ready was embarrassing to them and worked counter to the schools’ intentions to reward students—these students did not want to be singled out for their accomplishments. The majority of participants reported a preference for individualized reports to allow them to monitor their personal grade and attendance records. We found this to be the case across grades. These findings suggest that schools’ efforts to recognize and reward students for meeting Promise eligibility requirements might be backfiring.

Focus group participants reported that The Promise factored into their decisions to attend college.

A majority of participants in the student focus groups reported that the existence of The Promise scholarship made it more likely that they will attend college. While all of the participants had plans to go on to college, half of them reported that they planned to attend school outside of Pennsylvania and therefore did not think they would use Promise funds. Nonetheless, they understood that being prepared to succeed in college outside of Pennsylvania meant, in part, achieving The Promise’s eligibility requirements, and they were therefore striving to meet them.

Enrollment rates of PPS traditional public high school graduates in postsecondary education institutions have steadily increased through the years.

Analyses of PPS student data and postsecondary enrollment data from the NSC Student Tracker system found that youth who graduated from PPS high schools after the inception of The Promise were more likely to attend postsecondary schooling than were those who graduated prior to its availability. However, Promise-eligible high school graduates were as likely to enroll in college in the pre-Promise years as they were in the Promise years.
The Promise may have helped sustain persistence in college for Promise-eligible students who enrolled. While there was a subtle decline in rates of persistence over time for all graduates of PPS traditional public high schools, persistence rates of Promise-eligible students were steady before and after The Promise became available. This suggests that The Promise may have buffered the overall decline in persistence of PPS traditional high school graduates. However, this effect was evident only for white students and for students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, suggesting that more supportive measures may be needed to improve disadvantaged youths’ chances of degree completion beyond what is currently provided by The Promise.

Suggestions for Improvement

In this section, we offer recommendations to Promise administrators that can help ensure that The Promise will continue to work to meet its intended goals. Given the limited scope of the study and the few years The Promise has been in existence, we focus our recommendations on specific areas in which the program can foster change in the community’s and students’ attitudes and behaviors. Since no one group of stakeholders has the resources to singlehandedly facilitate the success of the program, our recommendations offer ways for Promise administrators to work with the PPS district to continue to involve the wider community.

Utilize multiple methods to provide information to students—particularly younger students—about the college and federal financial-aid application process.

Research suggests that college-going rates can be improved if schools ensure that students understand the necessary steps to prepare themselves for college (e.g., course-taking, application processes) starting in the 9th grade or earlier (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001; Wimberly and Noeth, 2005). We recommend that to generate a college-going norm within the Pittsburgh community and among students,
Promise administrators and PPS work together to improve information about the college and financial-aid application process. Furthermore, we recommend that students and parents receive college counseling early in the children’s education, particularly parents who have not attained higher education. Students need concrete guidance to understand the steps they need to take each year to meet their long-term goals (course offerings, summer programs, grades, attendance, how to apply for FAFSA grants, and how to identify institutions that fit their interests) (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

PPS should look for ways to increase the numbers of counselors in middle and high schools or to improve the capacity of the current counselors or teachers to better equip them to provide consistent guidance, information, and support on these issues. PPS has instituted a Promise-Readiness Corps, a group of teachers who are assigned to individual students in 9th grade to provide support and information about how the students can become and remain Promise-ready by 11th grade. This is a step in the right direction. PPS could also incorporate counseling on the college and financial-aid application process into its Summer Dreamers Academy curriculum. Finally, PPS could work hand in hand with community-based organizations that are already working within the schools to help students prepare for college.

**Coordinate district attendance policies to align with The Promise eligibility requirements.**

Our focus group participants noted that one way to get information on their attendance records was through an EA notification. However, the guidelines for allowable absences in the district are not as stringent as Promise eligibility requirements. Nevertheless, the EA notice was reportedly the only non-solicited notice of personal attendance status that could potentially assist with mid-period corrections. If EA policy were aligned with the Promise attendance requirement, there might be less confusion among students. The EA notifications could also be used to alert students of the status of their Promise eligibility.
Improve students’ knowledge about The Promise scholarship system’s characteristics.

Students in our focus groups lacked clarity about many of the program’s characteristics and reported that they were not receiving accurate or appropriate information from teachers or school staff. One possible reason for this was that The Promise program’s characteristics and eligibility requirements have changed over time so that more rigorous student eligibility requirements were phased in. This flux has made it difficult for teachers, school leaders, and students to understand program eligibility and benefits and to sort out which requirements apply to each cohort of students. In addition, changes make it difficult to evaluate how various program features support or hinder program goals.

Given the lack of clarity on Promise eligibility requirements and funding amounts reported by students in our focus groups, we suggest that The Promise disseminate information about the scholarship system’s characteristics in small venues and in personal letters to students. Small group sessions can be carried out by district liaisons who have undergone training on The Promise’s requirements, or school counselors can carry out standardized, regularly scheduled, small-group information sessions or meet with individual students to provide clear instructions on how to apply for a Promise scholarship and what must be done to become eligible.

Provide students and parents with personalized information about whether the students are Promise-ready.

While holding large-scale assemblies would appear to be an efficient way to get the word out about The Promise, our focus group analyses suggest that these efforts are less than effective in disseminating information. We suggest that students have access to individualized reports on whether they are Promise-ready to encourage them to maintain required GPAs and attendance records. This could be done by developing an electronic portal on the PPS website where students or their par-
ents or guardians could check on their status at regular intervals, such as each month or at the end of each semester, depending on the capacity of the database. Students could receive access to the portal when they enter high school (or earlier). This would enable them to check on their status and note any inconsistencies between their personal records and the portal’s records. This type of system would encourage students to be responsible for their grades and attendance and would clear up any misunderstandings about whether they are Promise-ready. A similar system that has been implemented in Philadelphia (StudentNet) could be adapted to monitor student progress toward meeting Promise eligibility criteria and the academic requirements of PPS more generally.1

Continue to leverage parents’ knowledge of and support for The Promise.

Although some students in our focus groups reported that they would prefer receiving individualized information rather than having that information go to their parents, our parent surveys indicated that The Promise was an important factor in parents’ decision to send their children to a PPS traditional public or charter school. It is therefore important to continue sessions with parents that impart information about The Promise. We recommend, however, that the large-scale information sessions that already exist be complemented with individualized communication, such as letters to parents that provide information on their children’s Promise-eligibility and individualized, detailed instructions on how a student can become Promise-ready if he or she is not yet at that stage.

Institute a mentoring system in which Promise scholars mentor high school students.

We recommend that Promise administrators design and implement a mentoring system to improve the likelihood that students will go on to and graduate from college. Such a mentoring system would match Promise scholars with high school students who are working toward

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1 More information about StudentNet can be found at http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/s/studentnet/all-about-studentnet (as of July 5, 2011).
becoming Promise-eligible and with high school juniors and seniors who are preparing college applications.

A system in which Promise scholars are the mentors would have a number of benefits for both the program and the scholars. It would help disseminate information on the college application process and on what to expect in college, encourage Promise scholars to be engaged citizens, and increase the likelihood that Promise scholars will continue their postsecondary education. Mentoring has been proven to be an effective method of ensuring that students complete high school and go on to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). It would enable Promise scholars to stay engaged in the program, even after they graduated from higher learning and no longer needed the funding. This, in turn, would enable them to remain engaged with Pittsburgh students. Furthermore, being a mentor has proven to help college students remain in college, because it makes them feel like role models to the mentees (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The mentoring system could take the form of online mentoring, much like what is done with PAmentor.com, which is both cost-effective and time-efficient.
This study provides early indications that The Promise is working positively toward achieving its goals, yet a number of questions remain that this study could not answer. At this early stage in The Promise’s existence, findings cannot be definitive, and researchers should track how well The Promise is meeting its intended goals over time. Further research will be needed to determine the program’s long-term success in motivating parents to choose PPS schools and in motivating students to achieve. As federal, state, and local entities continue to take cost-cutting measures, the Pittsburgh community needs to have well-designed evaluative studies to demonstrate why specific programs are worth immediate and long-term investment. This chapter suggests directions for future research to provide compelling evidence of The Promise’s effects through time and to ensure continued improvements to the program.

We first illustrate a model that augments The Promise’s impact theory (introduced in Chapter One). Promise administrators can use this model to frame or develop evaluations that assess how well the program is meeting its intended goals. We then offer suggestions for future research to assist in evaluating the efforts of The Promise and to ensure continued success in the coming years.

A Model to Guide The Pittsburgh Promise Program in Meeting Its Goals

The model we present focuses on how well program inputs, processes, and outputs produce larger intended outcomes benefiting the Pitts-
burgh area. It highlights the components and connections on which Promise administrators can focus their efforts to better serve students and the population of Pittsburgh in the years to come. We developed the model from a synthesis of the study’s analyses presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. A number of components and connections that already exist, shown in Figure 1.3, are retained. However, we found that a number of elements and relationships not included in The Promise’s impact theory are important and need to be evaluated. Figure 8.1 illustrates the model.

The inputs to our model are the services and activities The Promise provides (the scholarship system, fundraising activities, and community outreach). The services and activities lead indirectly to outcomes (social benefits such as promoting economic development of Pittsburgh) through the processes (community and students’ attitudes and behaviors and PPS improvements to the district education system) and the outputs (The Promise’s goals). The model illustrates how the processes work to impact each other to develop an “ethos of engagement.” The ethos depends on the community and students supporting The Promise, supporting the district, and working together to develop a culture of school-going and achievement.

The key to this model is the dynamic flow of the relationships between and among the inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. Understanding the connective tissue that holds the components of the model together will strengthen the program, ensure its continued success, and allow for systematic evaluations.

**Inputs: Activities and Services Provided by The Promise**

The components of The Promise scholarship system shown in Figure 1.3 were the key levers expected to impact goals 1 and 2. They were also expected to impact community and students’ attitudes and behaviors. In the new model, the components still act as levers, but the program works indirectly through community and student attitudes and behaviors. We also suggest the addition of two other key levers for change: The Promise’s engagement with the community and students through its fundraising efforts and in its outreach and communication.
Goal 1
Mitigate and reverse the population declines in the city of Pittsburgh and the enrollment declines in Pittsburgh public schools.

Goal 2
Grow the high school completion rates, college readiness, and post-high school success of all students in Pittsburgh public schools.

Goal 3
Deploy a well-prepared and energized workforce and an eager core of volunteers.

Improve economic development in Pittsburgh.
Outreach and communication with students and parents can affect students’ motivation and behavior. For example, although the students in our focus groups knew of The Promise scholarship, they were confused about the student and school eligibility criteria, as well as about the amounts of funding available to them. If decisions are based on misinformation among students about the elements of the scholarship system, the confusion and uncertainty could negatively affect their motivation to graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education. It could also prevent students from meeting the eligibility requirements. Outreach and communication with parents, schools, and the larger community could also impact community attitudes and behavior. Without a coherent and effective communication plan to reach its targeted audiences, the community might know little about The Promise. The model hypothesizes that a lack of information about the program might hinder community members’ willingness to financially support it.

Processes: Linking the Inputs with The Promise’s Goals

The PPS district’s education initiatives can impact goals 1 and 2, but only if the initiatives are succeeding in (1) promoting a culture of learning within the district’s schools and across its students and (2) delivering instruction and content in a way that meets the needs of students and provides guidance counseling that informs them of postsecondary options. These, in turn, impact students’ attitudes and behaviors. As students’ attitudes and behaviors change so that completing high school, continuing education after high school, earning certain grades, and maintaining good attendance records become more attractive to students, the culture within the PPS education system will shift. Likewise, community attitudes and behaviors and students’ attitudes and behaviors act upon each other to continuously promote change. The expectation is that all the inputs in the model affect the processes. Together, the inputs and processes act upon each other to develop a culture across the Pittsburgh community that promotes college-going and achievement for its students. The scholarship system, fundraising efforts, outreach and communication, and the PPS education initia-
tives work in tandem to make postsecondary schooling attractive to students.

**Outputs: Measuring Success by How Well the Program Meets Immediate Outcomes**

The events following directly from the program activities (inputs) are the most direct outcomes, often called *proximal* or *immediate* outcomes. Events further down the chain are the *distal* or *ultimate* outcomes. The more-distal outcomes are contingent on the successful attainment of the more-proximal ones.

Each of the processes—community and students’ attitudes and behaviors and the quality of the PPS education system initiatives—impacts goals 1 and 2. And it is through goal 2—growing the high school completion rates, college-readiness, and post–high school success of all students in PPS—that goal 3 can be attained. The outputs, in turn, affect the broader social conditions, the outcomes.

The current expectation is that the program’s scholarship system will directly impact these goals. However, our analyses suggest that The Promise’s activities and services affect these goals *indirectly*, through the mediating processes. It is therefore important that in ascertaining whether the goals are being met, Promise stakeholders look at how the program is impacting the processes delineated in the model and then at how those processes impact the goals.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

We were unable to examine a number of questions given the scope of our study, the limited data available, and the short time frame in which The Promise has been in existence. The suggestions in this section are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they provide examples of the type of evaluations that are important to conduct in the coming years to continue to measure The Promise’s success. Promise administrators and stakeholders can use Figure 8.1 to help shape a future research agenda that will continue to measure the progress the program
has made in achieving its goals. We recommend that future research address the specific questions discussed below.

**Have high school graduation rates and average GPA or attendance records improved since the inception of The Promise?**

This study explored students’ beliefs about whether The Promise was a factor in their decisions to work for good grades, attend school, complete high school, or go on to postsecondary education. Students’ reports are speculative by definition, however, so we do not know whether their behaviors changed. Future research could explore the extent of behavioral changes (such as improvement in grades and attendance records or whether high school completion rates have increased). To gauge how graduation rates or high school completion rates have changed, research should examine the students who were in 8th or 9th grade at the time The Promise started in 2007–2008. The most recent year for which data were available at the time of this study was 2009–2010, when those 8th and 9th graders were starting their 10th and 11th grades, respectively. However, research on these questions should be undertaken with caution. PPS student data may be inadequate to differentiate between students who leave the district (transfers) and those that drop out of school altogether. Although each student who leaves the district has a code that indicates whether he or she transferred or dropped out, the data do not include information on where the transfers go. Moreover, prior to embarking on these analyses, an evaluation will need to consider the likelihood of grade inflation or the doctoring of attendance reports. Future research that explores changes in graduation rates, grades, or attendance records will need to take these issues into consideration.

**Have there been any unintended consequences of The Promise on schooling practices?**

This study did not explore whether the incentive of a scholarship for postsecondary schooling has brought about any unintended consequences such as grade inflation, doctoring of attendance records, or students’ taking courses perceived to be easier in order to maintain a Promise-eligible GPA. In Chapter Six, we noted that for each year
since 2005, about 50 percent of the graduating student population in PPS was Promise-eligible, based on average GPA and attendance records. Future research could examine these trends more closely and ask whether any increases in the proportion of Promise-eligible students have occurred because student learning has increased and therefore more students are improving their grades, or because of grade inflation. Researchers could compare students’ test scores in PSSA or district-level tests with grades; if test scores are improving alongside average GPAs, this could indicate that student learning is also improving. However, if PSSA or district-level test scores are not improving, on average, but grades are, there might be cause for concern about how reliably grades measure student learning.

In addition, it would be worth exploring whether students’ average grades are improving because more students are taking less-demanding courses. An evaluation of changes in course loads before and after the inception of The Promise could provide information about whether students are taking more high-level courses (such as AP or college-preparatory courses) in order to better prepare themselves for the rigors of college-level courses or are opting for an easier path to maintain their GPAs.

To what extent do schools affect students’ high school graduation and college-going rates? Do some schools do a better job of preparing students to take advantage of the Promise scholarship? We did not closely examine students’ day-to-day practices and experiences while in school, the capacity of school staff to address the needs of students to become or remain Promise-eligible, or the organizational resources available to staff and students to promote high school completion and college-going. The school structure and the organizational supports available for staff and students (such as the ratio of counselors to students, counselors’ and teachers’ knowledge of and expertise about the college application process, and peer culture to promote college readiness) are important elements in ensuring that students develop the necessary skills to become Promise-eligible. Evaluating whether schools are adequately preparing students to become Promise-eligible is an important area of study.
In what ways is the Pittsburgh community supporting The Promise? Has this support brought about stronger social capital within the community?

The success of The Promise program relies, in part, on community financial support. We would also argue that its success relies on the extent to which it galvanizes the community to rally behind its message. We therefore suggest that in addition to tracking monetary support, as they currently do, Promise administrators document the number and types of community groups whose primary mission is to support the program and whether the existence of these groups has strengthened the Pittsburgh community’s social capital—the networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms that bind a society together (Coleman, 1988). Social capital can promote individuals’ civic engagement and foster social cohesion (Putnam, 1995). For example, a number of Pittsburgh private citizens who have run in the Pittsburgh marathons over the years are collecting money on behalf of The Promise. There is also a Parents for The Promise group that raises donations for The Promise. An evaluation of whether the Pittsburgh community’s social cohesion has strengthened since The Promise’s inception would provide greater understanding of how The Promise might be promoting the community’s well-being.

Has there been a shift in attitudes toward college-going in the broader student population, particularly among those most at risk of dropping out of school?

We examined whether The Promise is being factored into the attitudes and decisions of a subgroup of academically average students, but we did not explore whether students who are either doing very well or very poorly factor The Promise into their decisions to complete high school or go on to postsecondary education. It would be worthwhile to explore the extent to which the wider student population considers The Promise in its decisions. This would provide a better understanding of the potential impact The Promise can have. If The Promise is not a factor in the decisions of students who are doing poorly academically, how might Promise administrators work to reach these populations to
motivate them to graduate from high school or go on to postsecondary education?

To what extent is The Promise sustainable?
A key part of engaging the community to secure financial support, having parents move their children into district traditional public or charter schools, and motivating students to become Promise-ready is ensuring that the program will be in existence in the near and short term. To understand how sustainable the program is, researchers could model different scenarios of demand (that is, numbers of students applying for Promise funds) and how well that demand meets current funding levels. Given that a primary goal of The Promise is to attract newcomers to Pittsburgh and to retain students in the school system, it is important to know how sustainable the program is.

What are the implications of pegging Promise funding amounts to test scores for student motivation and behavior?
Given that the amount of Promise funding will be based on performance on PSSA or SAT tests starting with the graduating class of 2012, it will be important to track changes in college-going rates and in PSSA or SAT test scores in the coming years. Will test scores improve? Or will this have unintended consequences such as greater emphasis in the classroom on teaching to the test?

How will enrollment patterns, college-going, and persistence rates shift in the coming years?
The analyses in this study can serve as early-year benchmarks against which future changes can be measured. In the years to come, enrollment or college persistence patterns may shift. Additional years of data will be needed to examine this possibility. However, evaluators using this study as a baseline will need to keep in mind that the changes in the funding amounts starting with the graduating class of 2012 will require a new set of analyses. Alternatively, evaluators could incorporate a methodology that compares differences in outcomes of interest before and after 2012.
How important is the last-dollar feature of the scholarship in students’ decisions to attend postsecondary education or in their selection of schools?

Given that many students in our focus groups did not understand that Promise funds were last dollar, we hypothesize that students could be limiting their choices of postsecondary schools to those that are least expensive, assuming that Promise funds must cover all of their tuition costs in order for them to afford attending college. An analysis of students’ selections of colleges along with surveys or interviews of students would allow researchers to obtain this information, which would help Promise administrators focus communications about the program more effectively.

How do Promise scholars’ enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education institutions compare with those of other students in the state?

In the coming years, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will have a data warehouse system that tracks K–12 students into postsecondary education institutions in the state. These data will allow a quasi-experimental study that could pinpoint the extent to which the existence of Promise funds has made a difference in students’ college-going and persistence. Promise scholars could be compared with students in other districts who attend the same postsecondary education institutions and who are equivalent on key sociodemographic and educational characteristics (such as GPA, attendance, high school course-taking, parents’ education, race/ethnicity, gender, or eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches). This type of study would allow stakeholders to understand how a place-based scholarship such as The Promise works to improve postsecondary outcomes within the context of broader statewide economic and educational policies.

How well is The Promise doing in reaching goal 3 (to deploy a well-prepared and energized workforce and an eager core of volunteers)?

Before embarking on an evaluation to understand the extent to which the program is reaching goal 3, Promise administrators will need to
explicitly define terms such as *well-prepared, energized, and eager*. Once these terms are operationalized, evaluators can track the numbers of Promise scholars who return to Pittsburgh to work after they complete their postsecondary education, their employment rates, their income levels, and whether they volunteer in the community.
APPENDIX A

Promise-Type Scholarship Programs Across the United States

This Appendix provides details about the 14 Promise-type scholarship programs that are part of PromiseNet.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year of Creation</th>
<th>High School Eligibility Requirement</th>
<th>GPA Requirement</th>
<th>Attendance Requirement</th>
<th>Other Requirements</th>
<th>Scholarship Amount</th>
<th>Eligible Postsecondary Schools</th>
<th>Postsecondary Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalamazoo Promise</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Four years of continuous enrollment in KPS district and schools</td>
<td>65% to 100%; sliding scale based on continuous residency and KPS enrollment</td>
<td>Public State of Michigan colleges, universities and community colleges, including vocational schools at community colleges</td>
<td>2.0 GPA each semester, enrollment in 12 credit hours per semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle Creek Legacy Scholars</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Battle Creek Public Schools (BCPS) and Lakeview School District (LSD)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Continuous enrollment in BCPS and LSD since 6th grade, begins with class of 2012</td>
<td>Up to 100% of two years, 62 credit hours, depending on need</td>
<td>Kellogg Community College</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Year of Creation</td>
<td>High School Eligibility Requirement</td>
<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Bound Scholarship, Hammond</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Accredited public or private school in Hammond; homeschool exemption; homeowners in Hammond</td>
<td>3.0 GPA cumulative; 2.5 GPA and minimum SAT score of 1000 or ACT of 21; or 2.5 GPA and SAT score of 1400 or ACT of 21</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Homeownership</td>
<td>60% to 100% of college tuition; sliding scale based on number of years student’s parent has owned a home in Hammond</td>
<td>Indiana University, Bloomington</td>
<td>2.0 GPA cumulative, 40 hours of community service, reapply each year, show proof of residency and continued homeownership of student's parents each year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Promise</td>
<td>Penn.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pittsburgh public schools and PPS district charter schools</td>
<td>2.5 GPA cumulative</td>
<td>90% cumulative</td>
<td>Four years of continuous enrollment in PPS public or charter school in its district</td>
<td>2008–2011 graduates, up to $5,000 per year; up to $10,000 per year beginning in 2012</td>
<td>Any accredited postsecondary institution in Pennsylvania</td>
<td>2.0 GPA plus 20 earned credits per year, submit FAFSA application each year in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Dorado Promise</td>
<td>Ark.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>El Dorado Public Schools (EPS)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Four years of continuous enrollment in EPS</td>
<td>65% to 100%; sliding scale based on continuous enrollment in EPS; not exceeding highest annual resident tuition at an Arkansas public university</td>
<td>Schools granting two-year associate's degrees or four-year bachelor's degrees, accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation</td>
<td>2.0 cumulative GPA, maintain a minimum of 12 credits per semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Year of Creation</td>
<td>High School Eligibility Requirement</td>
<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
<td>Other Requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF)</td>
<td>Colo.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>DPS high school</td>
<td>2.0 cumulative</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Three years of continuous enrollment in DFS before graduation, demonstrate financial need based on the expected family contributions from FAFSA</td>
<td>Determined by students' expected family contributions, college, and the year in which the student graduated from high school and first became eligible for the scholarship</td>
<td>DSF-eligible colleges are not-for-profit Colo. public technical colleges and not-for-profit Colo. two- and four-year colleges and universities; students in technical colleges receive two years of funding; those in community colleges receive three years of funding; those in four-year colleges receive five years of funding</td>
<td>2.0 cumulative GPA, maintain at least half time enrollment at participating college, must renew scholarship annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoria Promise</td>
<td>Ill.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Peoria public schools</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Three years of continuous residency in Peoria city limits and graduation from Peoria public schools; eligibility based on parents' payment of City of Peoria property taxes</td>
<td>50% to 100%; sliding scale based on continuous enrollment in Peoria public schools</td>
<td>Illinois Central College</td>
<td>2.0 or higher GPA each term of enrollment, complete 67% of classes with a grade of C or higher, complete 6 hours or more per semester, reapply every year, submit new thank you letter annually. Covers 64 credit hours over three years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
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<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackson Legacy Program</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Participating Jackson County High School</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Residency in Jackson County and continuous enrollment in participating school since 10th grade</td>
<td>Determined annually; sliding scale based on years of attending a participating high school</td>
<td>Jackson Community College, Spring Arbor University, Baker College of Jackson, and certain technical certifications and vocational training</td>
<td>Maintain residency in Jackson County, fulfill community service requirements, enroll in at least 12 credit hours per semester; two years of funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say Yes Syracuse</td>
<td>N.Y.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Syracuse City School District (SCSD)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Three years of continuous enrollment (10th, 11th, 12th) in SCSD</td>
<td>100% tuition at State and City Universities of New York, Syracuse University, and Cooper Union; private institutions limit full tuition to families with annual incomes less than $75,000</td>
<td>Partner schools, which include most State University of New York, City University of New York, and some private institutions in the state</td>
<td>Enroll in 12 credit hours per semester and maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Year of Creation</td>
<td>Eligibility Requirement</td>
<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
<td>Other Requirements</td>
<td>Scholarship Amount</td>
<td>Eligible Postsecondary Schools</td>
<td>Postsecondary Requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Success Foundation, Washington</td>
<td>Wash.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Five public high schools in Tacoma School District</td>
<td>2.0 cumulative</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or foster youth; receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits; or meet family income requirements, be a good citizen in school and in community, do not commit a felony, complete a FAFSA when a senior in high school</td>
<td>Amount of tuition and fees not covered by other state financial aid and $500 for books</td>
<td>Washington public colleges and universities</td>
<td>Not found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Year of Creation</td>
<td>High School Eligibility Requirement</td>
<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baldwin Promise, Michigan Promise Zone</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Baldwin Public High School or non-public school in the Zone</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Graduate from an eligible high school</td>
<td>$5,000 per year for four years or $20,000 maximum; sliding scale: graduation 25%, 11th and 12th grades 50%, 10th to 13th grades 75%; 9th to 12th grade 100%; GED completion covers 10%</td>
<td>Public or private postsecondary institutions in Michigan</td>
<td>Full time enrollment and a minimum 2.0 GPA; for students who are not full-time, the scholarship is prorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit College Promise, Michigan Promise Zone</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Detroit Public Schools (DPS)</td>
<td>No, but recommend 3.0 cumulative</td>
<td>No, but recommend 95% cumulative</td>
<td>Continuous residence and enrollment in DPS from 12/1/2010 to graduation; recommend ACT score of at least 21</td>
<td>2010 graduates received $500 per year for four years; amount announced each spring; amount depends on amount of money raised by Detroit College Promise</td>
<td>Public universities or community colleges in the state of Michigan</td>
<td>Enrolled in at least 12 credit hours per semester; four years or 130 credit hours supported with funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Name</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Year of Creation</td>
<td>Eligibility Requirement</td>
<td>GPA Requirement</td>
<td>Attendance Requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muskegon Opportunity, Michigan Promise Zone</td>
<td>Mich.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Muskegon Area Intermediate School District</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Unknown, Promise Zone is raising the required funds to release state funds</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Promise</td>
<td>Calif.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Attend SFUSD since 6th grade. Begins with the graduating class of 2015; students must meet requirements of admission to San Francisco State University</td>
<td>San Francisco State University</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES:** The Kalamazoo Promise, undated; Legacy Scholars, 2007; City of Hammond, Indiana, College Bound Scholarship Program, undated a and b; El Dorado Promise, 2011; Denver Scholarship Foundation, 2009; Peoria Promise, undated a and b; Jackson Community Foundation, 2009; Say Yes to Education–Syracuse, 2010; Baldwin Community Schools, 2011; College Success Foundation, undated a and b; The Detroit College Promise, 2010; San Francisco Promise, 2010; Muskegon Opportunity, undated; Muskegon Opportunity and Muskegon Area Promise Zone, undated.

**NOTES:** NA = not applicable; TBD = to be determined.
The PPS district provided RAND with enrollment records for all students enrolled in grades 5 through 12 living within the borders of the school district during five consecutive school years: 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. Of a total of 127,112 student-year records for 43,461 students, we identified 8,169 (6.4 percent of the total file) from schools that serve only special populations, such as incarcerated youth, students with mental illness, and students with learning disabilities. Because enrollment in these schools is contingent on the special needs of the student, not every student in the district population has an equal opportunity to enroll. Consequently, classification of students in these schools as Promise-eligible could downward bias the effect of The Promise on the average student attending a public or charter school in Pittsburgh—and determining that effect was our primary analytic goal. Therefore, we removed these records and focused only on the students in traditional public and charter schools within the PPS district. Of the remaining 118,943 student-year records, 40 were for individuals who had died in the corresponding school year or had become physically and/or mentally incapacitated. We removed the records for these students from our file for the year in which they died or became incapacitated but included their enrollment records in prior years.

Our total analytic file comprised 118,903 student-year records for 41,454 students. The grade and year enrollment distribution is shown in Table B.1. Data in the unshaded rows are for the pre-Promise years (2005–2006 and 2006–2007) and those in the shaded rows are for The Promise years (2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010).
### Table B.1
**School-Aged Youth Living Within PPS District’s Boundaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>2,899</td>
<td>2,955</td>
<td>3,076</td>
<td>3,015</td>
<td>3,775</td>
<td>3,233</td>
<td>3,006</td>
<td>2,785</td>
<td>24,744</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>2,838</td>
<td>2,669</td>
<td>2,817</td>
<td>2,756</td>
<td>3,131</td>
<td>2,996</td>
<td>2,791</td>
<td>2,599</td>
<td>22,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>2,778</td>
<td>2,782</td>
<td>2,607</td>
<td>2,761</td>
<td>2,953</td>
<td>2,940</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>2,757</td>
<td>22,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>14,358</td>
<td>14,488</td>
<td>14,459</td>
<td>14,782</td>
<td>16,919</td>
<td>16,036</td>
<td>14,004</td>
<td>13,857</td>
<td>118,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each record includes the name of school in which the student was enrolled in the school year. We classified schools into “district schools” and “not district schools.” The 19 traditional public high schools (13 currently open and six no longer in operation) and the four charter high schools that enroll students living within the district are classified as district schools. We also classified the middle schools and junior high schools, the public and charter schools that feed into the eligible high schools, as district schools. In total, we identified 91 schools as district schools in our analytic file. Of the 118,903 student-year records, 92,864 (or 78.1 percent) were for students at district schools.

All of our analyses documenting enrollment trends are anchored around students’ enrollment at the end of the school year. This was determined by the codes provided for each student-year record by PPS. The distribution of possible end-of-year enrollment codes within our analytic file is shown in Table B.2.

For a student to qualify as enrolled in a district school, his or her student-year record had to indicate enrollment in one of the 91 district schools and had to have an end-of-year enrollment code indicating that the student was enrolled at the end of the school year, had received a certificate of graduation, or was promoted/transferred to another public school within the district. Our analytic file contained 109,258 student-year records with an eligible end-of-year code: 96,132 students were enrolled at the end of the school year, 12,192 had graduated, and 934 were promoted or transferred to a public school in the district.
Table B.2
PPS End-of-Year Enrollment Codes, Number of Students, and Percentage of Total

| Enrolled at end of school year | 96,132 | 80.85 |
| Certificate of graduation     | 12,192 | 10.25 |
| Moved from the district/administration | 5,212 | 4.38 |
| Attends school in another district | 1,928 | 1.62 |
| Quit school                   | 1,210  | 1.02  |
| Promoted/transfered to public school in the district | 934  | 0.79 |
| Committed to a correctional institution | 409  | 0.34 |
| Promoted/transfered to a non-public school in the district | 371  | 0.31 |
| Runaway                       | 319    | 0.27  |
| In care of child care agency  | 145    | 0.12  |
| General employment certificate| 28     | 0.02  |
| Immunization incomplete       | 14     | 0.01  |
| Expelled from school          | 5      | < 0.00 |
| Drafted/enlisted in armed services | 2   | < 0.00 |
| Farm/domestic-service exemption permit | 2   | < 0.00 |
| Total                         | 118,903| 100   |
Survey Development

To investigate whether The Promise factored into parents’ decision to enroll their children in a district traditional public or charter school, we administered a paper-and-pencil survey to parents of PPS students in December 2010. The survey asked about the following:

- The importance of 11 reasons, including The Promise program, for enrolling students in PPS traditional public or charter schools
- Familiarity with PPS education initiatives, of which The Promise was one
- Perceived level of communication about education initiatives from the school and the PPS district
- Communication with school administrators about children’s postsecondary education plans
- Attendance at PTO, PSCC, or parent-teacher conferences
- Perception of whether students will continue education after high school
  - If no: reasons for why not
  - If yes: type of school the parents expect the children to attend and the importance of reasons for making their education decisions
Generic questions about educational expectations for students and communication with school staff about children’s post–high school plans were based on validated items from large-scale education surveys developed by the National Center for Education Statistics. We also conducted a usability study with five parents of middle-school students who had recently moved their children into or out of Pittsburgh area schools to check the readability of the survey’s questions.

Sample Selection and Administration

We used student enrollment data from the PPS to select our survey population. The data included dates of students’ enrollment into and withdrawal from all schools within the Pittsburgh catchment area. With this information, we were able to select students who had newly enrolled in a district traditional public or charter school in the years following the announcement of The Promise (2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010) and who were in 6th, 7th, 8th, or 9th grade at the time of their new enrollment. The students were therefore in 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade at the time of the survey administration. We retrieved contact information for 495 targeted students from the PPS district. Sixteen surveys were returned to RAND because of inaccurate postal addresses. We therefore fielded a total of 479 surveys, and we received 267 responses (a 56-percent response rate).

To encourage parents to respond, we provided a $10 gift card to a popular local grocery store with the survey, and we conducted two follow-up efforts. Table C.1 lists the dates of the first administration and each follow-up effort, with response rates.

Weights

We assessed whether the final sample was representative of the overall target population on the basis of information the PPS district gave us about the targeted population: race/ethnicity of student, whether the student was eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, gender of student, grade the student enrolled in upon entry, and year the student
first enrolled in a PPS traditional public or charter school. Table C.2 shows the mean differences between the sample of respondents and the overall target population.

Respondents tended to be parents of white children (65 percent in the sample versus 57 percent of the population) and of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table C.1</th>
<th>Parent Survey Administration and Follow-Up Dates, with Response Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First administration</td>
<td>Mailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up 1</td>
<td>Mailing to non-responders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up 2</td>
<td>Phone calls to non-responders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table C.2</th>
<th>Differences in Student Characteristics Between the Population Mean and the Sample Whose Parents Responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Population Mean (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White**</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch*</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 6th grade</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 7th grade</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 8th grade</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 9th grade</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 2007–2008</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 2008–2009</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 2009–2010</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:** Percentages are rounded. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001 that the sample mean is significantly different from the population mean.
not eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (34 percent in the sample versus 41 percent of the population).

We generated predicted values of response and created weights for each case based on the inverse of these predicted values by first running a logistic regression in which the dependent variable was whether the parent responded to the survey (1 for response; 0 for non-response) and the independent variables were the student characteristics of the targeted parent population listed in Table C.2. We used the results of the logistic regression to generate the predicted values of response. The weighting of parents in the sample who resemble non-responding parents was increased so that the sample more closely resembled the population. Parents who were overrepresented (whites and those whose children were not eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches) were downweighted relative to underrepresented parents. It is important to note that other characteristics might account for non-response bias in our data that we cannot account for, such as parents’ education level. We do not have data on the characteristics of the targeted population of parents other than those listed in Table C.2.

In general, using weights in the analyses causes standard errors to increase, which is likely to result in underestimation of the significance of the results.
School Selection

For our focus groups, we selected 13 schools containing any of our four targeted grades (8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th/12th) and included a variety of grade configurations (K–8, 6–8, 9–12, and 6–12).

We first assigned a random number to each school and then selected schools in four rounds. In round 1, we selected two schools for our 8th grade focus groups. In round 2, we selected two schools for our 9th grade focus groups. In round 3, we selected four schools for our 10th grade focus groups. And in round 4, we selected five schools for our focus groups with 11th and 12th graders—four 11th grade schools and one 12th grade school. For each round, we generated a number at random (the referent number). We then selected the schools with an assigned number closest to the referent number without exceeding for inclusion.

Schools with grade configurations that included more than one targeted grade (e.g., 6th–12th and 9th–12th) were included for all relevant selection rounds. Although it was possible for a school that housed multiple targeted grades to be included in multiple focus groups (e.g., a 9th–12th grade school could be selected in the grade 9, 10, or 11/12 rounds), we selected only one school with the relevant grade for each focus group. Special schools (e.g., those serving students with special needs) were included in the random assignment process; however, none were randomly selected.
Student Selection

The level of effort required to be eligible for a Promise scholarship may be a factor in students’ attitudes toward and motivation for completing high school, going on to postsecondary education, and meeting the eligibility requirements for a Promise scholarship. Because we wanted to explore whether students’ motivation to become Promise-ready was based on the amount of effort it would take to achieve this goal and whether the lure of Promise funds factored into their intentions to improve their grades or continue their schooling, we developed a model for student selection based on students’ current cumulative GPA. The model placed students into groups based on the level of effort required to achieve grades eligible for Promise-ready status: one group for students in 11th and 12th grades and another for students in 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. We asked principals of our selected schools to choose students for inclusion in focus groups based on the GPA groupings, described below. We held one focus group for each group at each school.

Group 1: Students in Grades 11 and 12

Our target population of students in grades 11 and 12 comprised those whose cumulative high school GPA was at or just above the 2.5 needed to receive a Promise scholarship. We reasoned that if an 11th or 12th grader had not already met the Promise GPA requirement, he or she would not be Promise-eligible by the time he or she graduated. By targeting this group, we would gain valuable knowledge about students’ perspectives of the extent to which The Promise had affected their efforts to attain a 2.5 GPA.

Group 2: Students in Grades 8, 9, and 10

Our target population of students in grades 8, 9, and 10 comprised those whose cumulative GPA was below 2.5 but with a degree of effort could be expected to reach the 2.5 necessary to be eligible for a Promise scholarship. Cumulative GPAs considered for Promise-eligibility begin in 9th grade. However, for the purposes of this study, 8th grade students were eligible for inclusion in the focus groups based on their GPA average during the fall semester.
To calculate the GPA range for students in group 2, we used the following equation, for which \( x \) = average required in remaining courses to achieve a 2.5 GPA:

\[
((2.5*(p+f'))-(2.317*p))/f' = x
\]

where:

- \( 2.5 \) = GPS required for The Promise
- \( p \) = past credits taken
- \( f' \) = total credits still to be taken (out of 120)

We defined group 2 as students who need to improve their performance slightly (by 0.05 grade point) up to one full grade (1.0 grade point) in their remaining courses to become Promise-ready. These were 8th and 9th graders with GPAs between 1.6 and 2.45 and 10th graders with GPAs between 1.9 and 2.42.

**Population Recruitment**

Once we finalized the student selection criteria, we provided principals at our selected schools with the guidelines for selecting students. We also provided them with a time frame within which we hoped to conduct the focus group. Principals identified the date and time that was most convenient for students to participate and used their school-level data to identify eligible students or delegated this activity to a school staff member (e.g., a guidance counselor, secretary, or assistant principal).

Because the PPS district requires active parental consent for research on the student population, RAND developed letters asking parents for their written consent for the selected students to participate in the focus groups. Principals sent the consent letters home with students. Each letter was accompanied by a stamped envelope addressed to RAND. Parents could either mail the letter to RAND or send it back to school with their child.
Schools distributed consent letters to students in the first week of December 2010. Our initial parent response rate was 4 percent. To increase the number of participants, we asked schools to distribute the letters one more time. The second effort yielded an overall 49 percent response rate across 10 schools (we did not receive any parent consent letters from three of our selected schools).

There was no consistent follow-up effort across schools. During the first distribution, two schools requested permission to have their staff collect the consent letters, in the hope that the school would be more successful at garnering permission than our approach of providing postage-paid envelopes would be. During the second round of distribution, three additional schools asked to revise the procedure so that staff could explicitly tell students that they could either return the letters to the school or return them to RAND. In at least three schools, the contact staff member called parents to remind them to return the permission form if their child was allowed to participate in the focus group. These efforts led to higher success in recruiting students in those schools.

In all schools, the principal or contact person made the final student selections, excluding any students who either did not return parental consent slips or did not assent to participate themselves. On the date of each focus group, some students were absent and therefore did not participate. Groups were conducted with as few as two students.

Table D.1 shows the school type and the numbers of targeted students, parent consents received, and focus group participants, by grade.

**Data-Collection Activities**

We were able to conduct focus groups at nine of our 13 selected schools. In one school, we were not able to speak directly with the principal to receive permission to conduct the focus groups, and it is unclear whether letters seeking parental consent were distributed to students. In two of the remaining 12 schools, we received permission from the
Table D.1
Numbers of Participants in Focus Group Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targeted Grade</th>
<th>Grade Range of Participating School</th>
<th>Population of Students Meeting Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Number of Parental Consents Received</th>
<th>Number of Participants in Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>K–8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>9–12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>6–12; 9–12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>9–12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

principals to conduct the focus groups and letters were sent home, but we did not receive any parental consent letters. In one of the 10 remaining schools for which we received parental consents, we were unable to organize the focus group sessions because school administrators were unresponsive to our requests.

Team members traveled in pairs (a facilitator and a note-taker) to hold the focus groups at empty classrooms or offices in the schools. All team members who came into contact with students had valid Act 34, 151, and Federal Criminal History Record Information clearances. Each team gave students name-tag stickers containing numbers so that names would not be needed to facilitate discussion. The note-takers took notes during the discussions and audio-recorded the discussions so that the notes could be fact-checked if necessary. The teams linked responses to gender and name-tag number; and since focus groups were conducted separately by grade, grade level was linked to particular responses. Notes of the focus group discussions did not hold any identifying information such as names of participants or schools.
Enrollment Analyses

Using the PPS enrollment data described in Appendix B, we calculated three enrollment measures that allowed us to make comparisons across grades as well as across the years before and after The Promise scholarship was made available: percentage enrolled in district traditional public and charter schools, persistence, and new enrollees. This appendix describes how we created each of these measures.

Percentage Enrolled in PPS Traditional Public and Charter Schools

We tabulated each student-year record in our analytic sample that indicated enrollment in a district traditional public or charter school at the end of the school year. These tabulations are shown in Table E.1; a breakdown by traditional public schools is shown in Table E.2, and a breakdown by charter schools is shown in Table E.3.

Using the population totals in Table E.1 as the numerator and the population totals in Table B.1 as the denominator, we calculated the percentage of school-aged youth living within PPS district boundaries who were enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools as

\[
\frac{\# \text{ enrolled in district traditional public and charter schools}}{\# \text{ living in PPS district boundaries}} \times 100
\]

The numerator and the denominator are tabulated separately for grade \(g\) in year \(y\) in Table E.4.
Table E.1
Total Enrollment in District Traditional Public and Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>2,184</td>
<td>2,112</td>
<td>2,288</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>2,473</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>18,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>2,179</td>
<td>2,179</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>2,778</td>
<td>2,357</td>
<td>2,163</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>18,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>2,081</td>
<td>2,056</td>
<td>2,029</td>
<td>2,353</td>
<td>2,352</td>
<td>1,941</td>
<td>2,106</td>
<td>16,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>2,007</td>
<td>1,859</td>
<td>1,989</td>
<td>1,967</td>
<td>2,204</td>
<td>2,131</td>
<td>1,903</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>15,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>1,953</td>
<td>1,944</td>
<td>1,808</td>
<td>1,934</td>
<td>2,119</td>
<td>2,055</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>1,970</td>
<td>15,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,239</td>
<td>10,247</td>
<td>10,144</td>
<td>10,354</td>
<td>12,131</td>
<td>11,368</td>
<td>9,767</td>
<td>10,181</td>
<td>84,431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E.2
Total Enrollment in District Traditional Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>2,094</td>
<td>2,129</td>
<td>2,074</td>
<td>2,248</td>
<td>2,457</td>
<td>2,252</td>
<td>1,822</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>17,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>2,093</td>
<td>2,129</td>
<td>2,127</td>
<td>2,095</td>
<td>2,552</td>
<td>2,166</td>
<td>1,964</td>
<td>1,916</td>
<td>17,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>1,948</td>
<td>2,033</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>1,981</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>2,149</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>1,947</td>
<td>15,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1,807</td>
<td>1,942</td>
<td>1,917</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>1,730</td>
<td>1,754</td>
<td>15,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>1,896</td>
<td>1,757</td>
<td>1,885</td>
<td>1,897</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>1,813</td>
<td>14,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,004</td>
<td>9,994</td>
<td>9,910</td>
<td>10,126</td>
<td>11,033</td>
<td>10,330</td>
<td>8,888</td>
<td>9,430</td>
<td>79,715</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4, these calculations are aggregated such that 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 are combined and classified as pre-Promise years, and 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 are combined and classified as Promise years.

Persistence in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools
To assess the extent to which The Promise has influenced students enrolled in district schools to remain in school, we constructed a mea-
Table E.3
Total Enrollment in District Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>4,716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E.4
Percentage of School-Aged Youth Living Within District Boundaries Enrolled in Traditional Public or Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sure of persistence for grades 5–11 for 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, and 2008–2009. We did not include grade 12 because the end of the school year typically involves graduation, beyond which persistence within the district is not possible. We do not include 2009–2010 because at the time of this report, data measuring enrollment in 2010–2011 were not yet available. Our measure of persistence is calculated as

\[
\frac{\text{# enrolled in district traditional public and charter schools}_{y+1}}{\text{# enrolled in district traditional public and charter schools}_y} \times 100
\]
The denominator is the total number of students enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools in grade $g$ at the end of school year $y$. The numerator is the total number of students who were enrolled in a district traditional public or charter school the following school year $y + 1$, conditional on enrollment in a district school at grade $g$. These persistence rates are shown in Table E.5.

We see that 92.9 percent of the 5th grade students enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools in 2005–2006 remained enrolled in district schools the following school year. For ease of presentation, we calculated for each grade a weighted average of the percentage of students persisting in the years prior to the availability of The Promise scholarship and a weighted average of those persisting in the Promise years. These aggregate comparisons are shown in Figure 4.2 in Chapter Four.

### New Enrollees in District Traditional Public and Charter Schools

To assess the extent to which The Promise has encouraged new students to enroll in district traditional public or charter schools, we compared end-of-year enrollment in the current school year $y$ with end-of-year enrollment in the previous school year $y - 1$ for each student for grades 6 through 12. We did not include grade 5 in this analysis because we do not have enrollment records for grade 4 to determine where 5th graders were enrolled in $y - 1$. Students who were enrolled in district traditional public or charter schools in $y$ but not in $y - 1$ were classified as new enrollees. The tabulations of new enrollees into

### Table E.5

**Percentage of Students Persisting in a Traditional Public or Charter School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
district traditional public and charter schools by school year and grade are shown in Table E.6; tabulations for new enrollees who were previously enrolled in another school within the district are shown in Table E.7; and tabulations for new enrollees who were previously enrolled in a school outside the district are shown in Table E.8. For ease of presentation in Chapter 4, we calculated for each grade the average number of new enrollees per year prior to the availability of The Promise scholarship and the average number of new enrollees per year following its inception. These aggregate comparisons are shown in Figure 4.3.

**Table E.6**

New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1,007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>5,587</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table E.7**

New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools Who Were Previously Enrolled in Non-Public Schools Within District Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>451</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>435</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>511</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>2,276</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E.8
New Enrollees to District Traditional Public and Charter Schools Who Were Previously Enrolled in Schools Outside District Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2007</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>3,311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyses of the Parent Survey

In this section we describe the methodology we employed to examine differences in parents’ responses on the parent survey.

Calculating Means, Standard Errors, and Confidence Intervals

We calculated means, standard errors, and confidence intervals of the level of importance parents reported that The Promise had in their decision to enroll their children in district traditional public or charter schools, using the weights we developed to correct for non-response bias. We compared the mean level of importance attributed to The Promise and tested whether it was statistically significantly different from the means of the other 10 factors listed in the survey. Figure E.1 shows the mean responses of parents for each factor, with standard errors and p-values.

Figure E.2 shows the mean responses, standard errors, and p-values of parents’ responses on how importantly The Promise factored into their decision to enroll their children in a district traditional public or charter school, by parents’ education level, children’s eligibility for free or reduced-priced lunches, and children’s race. We compared the mean level of importance attributed to The Promise and tested whether
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at All Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the academic programs over those offered in the child's</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.625 (0.098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 249)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the athletic programs over those offered in the child's</td>
<td>2.182*** (0.089)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 252)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the resources for children with special needs over</td>
<td>2.062*** (0.093)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those offered in the child's previous school (N = 253)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We felt the social environment was a better fit than that in my</td>
<td>3.067*** (0.099)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child's previous school (N = 253)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We preferred the level of safety over that in my child's previous</td>
<td>2.857*** (0.107)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school (N = 247)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child started a new grade that was not offered at his or her</td>
<td>3.081*** (0.116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previous school (N = 257)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wanted to take advantage of specialized programs/courses offered</td>
<td>3.745 (0.098)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the new school (e.g., performing arts, science and technology,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Baccalaureate) (N = 256)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wanted to take advantage of The Pittsburgh Promise scholarship</td>
<td>3.878 (0.090)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>system (N = 261)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We could no longer afford tuition or transportation for my child to</td>
<td>1.878*** (0.094)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attend his or her previous school (N = 247)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We moved to Pittsburgh from another city, state, or country (N =</td>
<td>1.968*** (0.108)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child was asked to leave his or her previous school because of</td>
<td>1.207*** (0.056)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic or disciplinary problems (N = 244)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Parent survey.

**Notes:** Weighted estimations, standard errors in parentheses. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001, significantly different from The Promise mean.
Figure E.2
Mean Responses on Importance of Pittsburgh Promise in Decision to Enroll Children in District Traditional Public or Charter Schools by Parents’ Education Level, Student’s Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches, and Student’s Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or lower (N = 56)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary education, bachelor’s degree or higher (N = 203)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s economic status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (N = 90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eligible (N = 171)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (N = 92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (N = 169)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Parent survey.

NOTES: Weighted estimations, standard errors in parentheses. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001, significantly different from other means.
parents in one category had a mean response that was significantly different from that of parents in another category.

The Associations Between Importance of The Promise and Parents’ and Students’ Characteristics

To examine the relationships between the importance parents attributed to The Promise in their decision to enroll their children in district traditional public or charter schools and parents’ and students’ characteristics, we employed OLS regression, using the weights developed to adjust for non-response bias. The dependent variable was the parents’ report of the importance of The Pittsburgh Promise in their decision to enroll their children in PPS traditional public or charter schools. The scale was 1 through 5, with 1 being “not at all important” and 5 being “very important.” We included parents’ education, whether the student was eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, whether the student was white or non-white, the grade the student was in when he or she was enrolled in the school, the school year in which the student enrolled in the school, whether the family moved from a non-public school within the district or from a school outside of the district, and an index of parental engagement developed from parents’ responses on the survey about whether they attended their children’s school’s open house at the beginning of the school year, PTO meetings, PSCC meetings, and the parent-teacher conference meetings the district organized in October 2010.

Table E.9 presents the elaborated results of our analyses.
Table E.9
OLS Regression on Importance of The Promise and Parents’ and Students’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>0.815***</td>
<td>0.619**</td>
<td>0.743***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.172)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>0.788***</td>
<td>0.583*</td>
<td>0.722**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.229)</td>
<td>(0.245)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.576**</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.179)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered in grade 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.233)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered in grade 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.286)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered in grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.239)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered in 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.270</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.490)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered in 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.474)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved from school within Pittsburgh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.368</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.215)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.283)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.673***</td>
<td>3.549***</td>
<td>3.627***</td>
<td>3.429***</td>
<td>3.017***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.107)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
<td>(0.121)</td>
<td>(0.585)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Parent survey.

NOTE: Dependent variable = importance of Pittsburgh Promise on decision to enroll children into PPS traditional public or charter schools; weighted estimations.

a Comparison group entered in grade 9.
b Comparison group entered in 2009.
c Constructed from (1) attendance at school open house, (2) attendance at PTO, (3) attendance at PSCC, and (4) attendance at parent/teacher meeting in October 2010. Chronbach’s alpha = 0.569.
Data

To assess whether rates of postsecondary enrollment and persistence were similar or different in the years immediately preceding and following the inception of The Promise scholarship program, we merged and analyzed secondary enrollment data maintained by the PPS district and postsecondary enrollment data maintained by NSC. The PPS data were used to identify students who graduated from PPS schools who met the eligibility criteria for the scholarship. The NCS data were used to identify whether graduates of PPS schools enrolled in and persisted in college.

PPS provided data for all graduates of traditional public high schools from the classes of 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. The data included only those students who received a regular diploma; GED recipients are not eligible for Promise scholarships. PPS does not maintain GPA and attendance data for students enrolled in the district’s four charter schools, and those schools do not maintain data in a way that makes them comparable with the PPS data. Therefore, our analysis pertains only to students in the district’s traditional public high schools.

Our analytic sample comprised 8,718 students who graduated with a diploma from PPS traditional public high schools in one of the five target years: 1,885 graduates in 2006; 1,709 in 2007; 1,802 in 2008; 1,636 in 2009; and 1,686 in 2010.
We determined whether each of these graduates met the three eligibility requirements for The Promise:

- A minimum 2.5 GPA
- A minimum attendance record of 90 percent
- Attendance at a PPS district school continuously since at least the 9th grade.

The first and second criteria are directly measured in variables provided by PPS. Data on the third criterion were not maintained prior to the scholarship program in a way that made them directly comparable to data for the Promise years. For the two classes that graduated prior to the availability of the scholarship (2006 and 2007), we worked with PPS officials to develop a proxy for this variable based on the grade students first entered the PPS district.

In addition to determining eligibility for The Promise, the PPS data files provided sociodemographic information on students that we used in our multivariate analyses. That information included sex, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, limited-English-proficiency status, and age at high school graduation. Additionally, we included the average unemployment rate in Allegheny County for July-August of the graduation year from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table F.1 shows the distribution of these variables for each of the graduating classes in the analytic sample.

To determine whether graduates of the district’s traditional public high schools enrolled and persisted in college, PPS obtained a subscription to the NSC’s Student Tracker service, which provided postsecondary enrollment data for members of the graduating classes of the targeted years. NSC aggregated this information by linking the names and birth dates of students provided by PPS with enrollment data abstracted from the approximately 3,300 postsecondary institutions that supply their transcript files to the clearinghouse. From these data, we constructed measures of enrollment and persistence.

Enrollment is a binary variable coded 1 if the sample member had enrolled in a postsecondary institution by October 1 of the year
Table F.1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of PPS District Graduates (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at graduation (years)</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate in Allegheny County (percent)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total graduates</td>
<td>1,885</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in which he or she graduated from high school and 0 if he or she never enrolled in college or enrolled in college after October 1 of that year. Measures of on-time enrollment typically use October 1 as the cutoff date to maintain comparability with the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS), which measures school enrollment in its October survey supplement.
Persistence is relevant only for sample members who were coded 1 on the measure of enrollment. Persistence is coded 1 for those who had evidence of enrollment after August 15 of the year after they first began college and 0 for those who did not.

**Analytic Method**

To identify the relationship between The Promise and our two post-secondary outcomes, we estimated a difference-in-differences probit regression model of the following form:

$$\text{probit} [\pi(y)] = \alpha + \beta_{\text{available}} + \beta_{\text{eligible}} + \beta_{\text{available}} \times \text{eligible} + \beta X + \beta_{\text{SCHOOL}/\text{CLASS}}$$

where the probability $\pi$ of the outcome $y$ is estimated as a linear function of the program availability indicator $\text{available}$, the program eligibility indicator $\text{eligible}$, a vector of control variables $X$ (sex, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, limited English proficiency, age at graduation, unemployment rate, year of graduation), and a vector of dummy variables $\text{SCHOOL/CLASS}$ corresponding to the school and graduating class in which the student graduated (e.g., school-class fixed effects), using the maximum-likelihood probit link. The inclusion of these fixed effects controls for time-invariant aspects of the schools the students attend (such as policies, programs, and climate) or their particular graduating class (such as shared norms and values of their peers) that may affect the odds that they will attend and persist in college.\(^1\) In the model, $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are parameters to be estimated.

In a difference-in-differences model, there are three parameters of interest. Here, the first is $\beta_{\text{available}}$, which indicates the effect of

---

\(^1\) The models predicting enrollment contain $j - 1$ dummy variables representing school-class fixed effects, where $j = 50$ (10 schools $\times$ 5 graduating classes across 2006–2010). The models predicting persistence have $j - 1$ dummy variables representing school-class fixed effects, where $j = 40$ (10 schools $\times$ 4 graduating classes across 2006–2009).
scholarship availability among those who were ineligible. The second is $\beta_{\text{eligible}}$, which indicates the effect of scholarship eligibility during the years in which it was not available. The main parameter of interest is the multiplicative interaction term for the availability and eligibility indicators: $\beta_{\text{available}} \times \text{eligible}$. The associated coefficient tests whether the difference between eligible and ineligible students is different in the pre-Promise years and the Promise years.

To yield consistent and unbiased estimates for our main parameters of interest, there must be no other changes over time that could have influenced the odds that youth in Pittsburgh would enroll and persist in college. One of the more notable changes during our study was the rise in unemployment due to the recession, which has been shown in other research to increase postsecondary enrollment (Bozick, 2009). Therefore, we include a control for unemployment in Allegheny County for each year. Additionally, to capture any other potential confounding factors that are correlated with time, we include a control for year of graduation.

Coefficients from probit regression models can be interpreted in terms of their direction and statistical significance: In our model, statistically significant coefficients greater than zero indicate a positive relationship with postsecondary enrollment net of the other variables, and statistically significant coefficients less than zero indicate a negative relationship with postsecondary enrollment net of the other variables. The values of probit coefficients do not have a straightforward interpretation. Therefore, we also include marginal effects, which indicate the average change in the probability of enrolling in college $y$ for a unit change in an independent variable $x$ when all other independent variables are held at their mean.

**Elaborated Findings**

**Statistical Significance of the Trends in Postsecondary Enrollment**

The coefficients and marginal effects from difference-in-differences probit regression models predicting college enrollment are shown in Table F.2.
Table F.2  

Coefficients and Marginal Effects from Difference-in-Differences Probit Regression Models Predicting College Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Marginal Effect</th>
<th>Marginal Effect Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>−0.10**</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>−0.41</td>
<td>−0.13</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>−0.22**</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at graduation</td>
<td>−0.31**</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Promise (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise available</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Promise-eligible (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise-eligible</td>
<td>0.97**</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility undetermined</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise available x Promise-eligible</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: All models control for high school and graduating class fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. N = 8,718. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01.
Though the control variables do not directly address the research questions posed in this report, their relationship with postsecondary enrollment accords with patterns found using national-level data (Bozick and Lauff 2007). Among graduates in PPS traditional public high schools, being male decreases the probability of enrolling in college by 0.03 (i.e., 3 percentage points), all else equal. When taking into consideration the other variables in the model, African-Americans and whites have an equal probability of attending college, but Hispanic students are less likely to attend college than are white students. The coefficient for eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches—a proxy for economic resources—is negative: students who receive the lunch benefit (i.e., those with fewer economic resources) have a 0.07 lower probability of attending college than those who do not receive the lunch benefit (i.e., those with more plentiful economic resources), all else equal. Finally, the negative coefficient for age at graduation indicates that those who were older at the time they received their high school diploma are less likely to enroll in college than those who were younger.

The coefficient for availability of The Promise is not significant ($\beta = 0.05$), indicating that for those ineligible for the scholarship, the probability of enrollment was no different in the years immediately before and after the program was introduced. The coefficient for Promise eligibility is significant ($\beta = 0.97$) at $p < 0.01$. The associated marginal effect indicates that during the pre-Promise years, those who were eligible for The Promise had a 0.31 higher probability of attending college than those who were not eligible.

Our key variable of interest is the interaction term: Promise available $\times$ Promise-eligible. This interaction term yields a positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.09$), but it does not reach statistical significance, which indicates that the probability of Promise-eligible youth attending college is not contingent on the availability of the scholarship. Even though Promise-eligible youth should be the most sensitive to changes in financial sup-

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2 Although fewer African-American than white students enroll in college in the aggregate, a consistent finding in multivariate analyses of postsecondary enrollment has been that these differences disappear (or in some cases favor African-Americans) when controls for socioeconomic background are included. For a discussion of this, see Bennett and Xie, 2003.
port, the enrollment advantage that Promise-eligible youth hold over non-eligible youth does not differ before and after implementation of the program.

**Statistical Significance of the Trends in Postsecondary Persistence**

The coefficients and marginal effects from difference-in-differences probit regression models predicting persistence among college enrollees are shown in Table F.3.

Parameter estimates reach statistical significance for three control variables: Asian, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches, and age. Asian students have a 0.14 higher probability of persisting in college than white students. Those receiving the free or reduced-price-lunch benefit have a 0.07 lower probability of persisting in college than those who do not receive the lunch benefit. The coefficient for age at graduation is negative and significant, indicating that those who were older at the time of high school graduation are less likely to persist than those who were younger at the time of high school graduation.

Among the key independent variables, the coefficient for Promise availability is not significant ($\beta = 0.30$), indicating that for those not eligible for The Promise, the probability of persisting was no different in the years immediately before and after the program was introduced. However, the coefficient for Promise-eligibility is significant ($\beta = 0.39$) at $p < 0.01$, indicating that during the pre-Promise years, those who were eligible for The Promise had a 0.07 higher probability of attending college than those who were not eligible. Our key variable of interest—the Promise available × Promise-eligible interaction term—yields a positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.28$) that is significant at $p < 0.05$. This suggests that Promise-eligible youth were buffered from the negative downturn in persistence detected in the years after the scholarship was made available.

**Differences Among Sociodemographic Subgroups**

To test whether the relationship between The Promise and the postsecondary outcomes varied across sociodemographic subgroups, we
### Table F.3
Coefficients and Marginal Effects from Difference-in-Differences Probit Regression Models Predicting Persistence Among College Enrollees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Marginal Effect</th>
<th>Marginal Effect Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.78*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>−0.40**</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>−0.63</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at graduation</td>
<td>−0.09**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>−0.35</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Promise (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise-available</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Promise-eligibleible (reference)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise-eligible</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility undetermined</td>
<td>−0.56</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise available x Promise-eligible</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:** All models control for high school and graduating class fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. N = 3,607. * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01.
estimated the difference-in-differences probit models separately for African-American students, white students, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and regular-lunch students. We present the $\beta_{\text{available} \times \text{eligible}}$ estimate and its corresponding marginal effect for the full sample as well as for each of these four subgroups, for enrollment in Table F.4 and for persistence in Table F.5.

### Table F.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients and Marginal Effects Corresponding to the Promise Available × Promise-Eligible Interaction Term from a Series of Probit Regression Models Predicting College Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coefficient</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular-lunch students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table F.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients and Marginal Effects Corresponding to the Promise Available × Promise-Eligible Interaction Term from a Series of Probit Regression Models Predicting Persistence Among College Enrollees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coefficient</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular-lunch students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** * = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01.
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PPS—See Pittsburgh Public Schools.


