

Fall 2021 Rhode Island Promise Report to the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

Community College of Rhode Island – November 10, 2021

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Executive Summary: The following report is provided in accordance with RIGL 16-107-7a.

The Rhode Island Promise Program's fifth cohort began at the Community College of Rhode Island in the Fall 2021 semester. This report reflects the College's adaptation and response during the second year of navigating the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the RI Promise program continues to succeed in serving the state's high school graduates as a high-value postsecondary option.

While enrollment continued to decline this fall due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment of Rhode Island Promise students continued to exceed the first-time, full-time straight from high school population enrollment prior to the program's existence. In total, 1,863 students enrolled as part of the new Fall 2021 Rhode Island Promise cohort, which is an 18% decline relative to last year's cohort, but represents 69% growth relative to the Fall 2016 pre-Promise population. In the returning Fall 2020 Rhode Island Promise cohort, 1,252 students have either re-enrolled this fall (1,234) or graduated with an Associate Degree (18), representing a 55% fall-to-fall retention compared to last year's 57%. These enrollment and retention figures remain on par with national community college enrollment and retention rates experienced this fall due to the ongoing pandemic landscape. Nationally, community college enrollment of first-time students is down 20.8% this fall relative to pre-pandemic numbers in Fall 2019. ⁱ

This report provides a detailed summary of the enrollment figures and budget estimates for the Rhode Island Promise program. In the fifth year of the program, RI Promise continues to sustain significantly increased graduation rates. In the past only 4% of first-time, full-time students have graduated from CCRI in two years, and 15% have graduated in three years. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, our students have maintained noteworthy graduation rate gains, largely due to the impact of the Promise program. The most recent CCRI two-year graduation rate is 16%, which is four times the historic two-year graduation rate for the College. Moreover, this year 26% of students graduated in three years, as compared to CCRI's historical three-year 15% graduation rate. These positive student outcomes continue to result in many more Rhode Islanders earning college degrees throughout the first years of the RI Promise program, and have helped CCRI advance from being significantly below national completion rates to exceeding them. ⁱⁱ

Rhode Island Promise continues to have a measurably positive impact on the College and the State of Rhode Island, as it has increased the college attainment rates for our state's recent high school graduates, substantially improved graduation rates at the Community College of Rhode Island and increased the number of young adults who are prepared to enter the state's workforce. We remain focused on implementing Rhode Island Promise in a way that provides a path to opportunity for Rhode Island's young citizens and a return on investment for the State.

Demographics: The Rhode Island Promise program continues to advance CCRI’s mission to attract and retain a diverse student population. Over the course of the first five years of the Promise program, there has been substantial enrollment growth from across the entire state and particularly strong growth among low-income students and students of color. As low-income communities continue to be most negatively affected by the pandemic, this is evident in declines in both CCRI’s overall Fall 2021 enrollment and Rhode Island Promise enrollment. Overall, the new Fall 2021 Rhode Island Promise cohort is 18% smaller than last year’s starting cohort, but as reflected in Table 1 it remains diverse. CCRI is again focusing on reaching out to low-income students who did not attend this fall in an effort to support their future enrollment. As the college continues this targeted outreach and as the impacts of the pandemic subside, we expect to see more low-income Pell grant students return to college in 2022.

Table 1: RI Promise Cohort Demographics - Fall 2021				
New Fall 2021 cohort = 1,863 students (18% decline vs. last year's cohort)				
Returning Fall 2020 cohort = 1,252 students (55% retention of last year's cohort of 2,271)				
High School vs. GED				
	New Cohort		Returning Cohort	
GED	19	1%	7	<1%
HS Grad	1,844	99%	1,245	99%
Gender				
	New Cohort		Returning Cohort	
Female	911	49%	649	52%
Male	903	48%	593	47%
N	49	3%	10	<1%
Unknown	0	0%	0	0%
Race/Ethnicity				
	New Cohort		Returning Cohort	
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	<1%	25	2%
Asian	50	3%	45	4%
Black or African-American	138	7%	116	9%
Hispanic, of any race	550	30%	243	19%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	<1%	0	0%
Non-resident Alien	0	0%	1	<1%
Two or more races	127	7%	10	<1%
Unknown Race/Ethnicity/Other	60	3%	38	3%
White	934	50%	774	62%

Current Semester Tuition and Fee Funding Sources: The Rhode Island Promise students fall into four categories of financial aid awards, as outlined below in Tables 2A and 2B, or “self-pay/loans” if they are ineligible for financial aid or prefer not to accept financial aid. There are also some “unresolved” students in each cohort. Those are students with whom we are still working to finalize financial aid paperwork, including FAFSA corrections and FAFSA verification.

In the new Rhode Island Promise cohort, 50% of students are receiving federal Pell grant funding. This is a modest increase over the Pell rate in last year’s cohort, in which 47% of first-year Promise students were eligible for federal aid. In earlier years, a higher percentage of Promise students were Pell-eligible, yet since the beginning of the pandemic, low-income students both locally and nationally are pursuing higher education in fewer numbers. The healthcare and economic impacts of COVID-19 have hit low-income communities harder and made it more difficult for students facing these challenges to forge a path to college. We are focused on supporting low-income students in returning to CCRI and continue our outreach efforts through specialized programming in Providence and other school districts. In the returning cohort, 37% of students received federal Pell grants in their second year, representing a further decline in low-income student enrollment since last year. The Rhode Island Promise program continues to leverage substantial federal funds to increase state rates of educational attainment. This semester alone, these two cohorts of Promise students have received \$3.6 million in federal aid.

CCRI submitted an initial Rhode Island Promise Fall 2021 bill to the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner on November 3 for \$3,270,598. We will submit a spring bill in February or March, which will include spring Rhode Island Promise scholarship awards as well as any new fall awards for students who finalize their unresolved financial aid paperwork.

Table 2A: Fall 2021 RI Promise Financial Aid Awards - New Cohort					N=1863
Award category		Average Award	Total Amount	Number of Students	Percentage of cohort
Rhode Island Promise (state funding)		\$2,509	\$2,248,280	896	48%
Full Pell grants + SEOG (federal funding)		\$3,242	\$1,961,489	605	32%
Partial Pell	Pell portion (federal funding)	\$1,611	\$526,875	327	18%
	State grant portion (former RIHEAA funds)	\$1,365	\$446,341		
	Combined award	\$2,976	\$973,216		
Other (other scholarship, waiver, etc)		\$1,996	\$7,984	4	<1%
Self-pay		N/A	N/A	12	1%
Unresolved: FAFSA, Federal Verification, etc.		TBD	TBD	19	1%
Balance of tuition and fee revenue vs. refunds to students for Pell recipients					
Full Pell	Avg. Tuition & Fees	\$2,696			
	Avg. Award	\$3,242			
	Refund for books and other expenses	\$546			
Partial Pell	Avg. Tuition & Fees	\$2,681			
	Avg. Award	\$2,976			
	Refund for books and other expenses	\$295			

Table 2B: Fall 2021 RI Promise Financial Aid Awards - Returning Cohort N=1234

Table 2B: Fall 2021 RI Promise Financial Aid Awards - Returning Cohort N=1234					
Award category		Average Award	Total Amount	Number of Students	Percentage of returners
Rhode Island Promise (state funding)		\$2,511	\$1,026,921	409	33%
Full Pell grants +SEOG (federal funding)		\$2,958	\$869,632	294	24%
Partial Pell	Pell portion (federal funding)	\$1,512	\$234,423	155	13%
	State grant portion (former RIHEAA funds)	\$1,294	\$200,592		
	Combined award	\$2,807	\$435,015		
Other scholarship award or waiver		\$2,142	\$224,869	105	8%
Self-pay/loans		N/A	N/A	243	20%
Unresolved: FAFSA, Federal Verification, etc.		TBD	TBD	28	2%
Graduated before Fall 2021 semester		N/A	N/A	18	N/A
Balance of tuition and fee revenue vs. refunds to students for Pell grant recipients					
Full Pell	Avg. Tuition & Fees	\$2,463			
	Avg. Award	\$2,958			
	Avg. Refund for books and other expenses	\$495			
Partial Pell	Avg. Tuition & Fees	\$2,494			
	Avg. Award	\$2,807			
	Avg. Refund for books and other expenses	\$313			

Budget Estimates for FY 2022 and FY 2023: Rhode Island Promise budget estimates are provided below in Table 3, including FY2023 budget estimates to reflect projected costs. With significant growth over its first four years and a slowing during the past two years due to the ongoing pandemic, we expect Promise enrollment would remain steady with an overall cohort size of 2,000-2,200 new students and a state-funded student count of approximately 1,600 annually across both cohorts. We do expect the overall cohort size to rebound over this year’s 1,863, but expect that growth to slowly increase in future years.

Table 3: CCRI FY 2022 and FY 2023 Estimates for RI Promise Budget					
FY 2022	Fall 2021		Spring 2022		FY2022 Total
	New Cohort	Returning Cohort	New Cohort	Returning Cohort	
Student Count	896	409	753	339	1,305
Required funding	\$2,248,960	\$1,026,590	\$1,889,126	\$852,070	\$6,016,746
Budgeted Dollars					\$7,680,838
Variance to Budget					\$1,664,092
FY 2023	Fall 2022		Spring 2023		FY2023 Total
	New Cohort	Returning Cohort	New Cohort	Returning Cohort	
Student Count	1,078	538	906	446	1,616
Required funding	\$2,786,630	\$1,389,696	\$2,340,769	\$1,153,448	\$7,670,543
Budgeted Dollars					TBD
Variance to Budget					TBD
<p>Note, the above budget assumes the following: Pell students not included here, as this projects state funds for the RI Promise scholarship A small number of unresolved FY22 cases will be RI Promise scholarship-funded once finalized An average award per semester of \$2,510 in FY22 and \$2,585 in FY23 (3% tuition/fee increase) A fall-to-spring retention rate of 84% for new cohorts and 83% for returning cohorts A modest increase in the new Fall 2022 cohort as we work to rebuild to pre-pandemic enrollment rates A 60% rate of students earning the second-year RI Promise scholarship in FY22</p>					

Institutional impacts of this program: The Rhode Island Promise program continues to positively impact CCRI, our students and our state despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the past five years since the program's inception, the College has experienced meaningful increases in the enrollment of full-time students, is creating greater access for low-income students and students of color, and is graduating more Rhode Islanders in preparation for transfer opportunities and the workforce. While we do not yet have data on neighboring states enrollment declines this fall, we expect to see similar numbers to the 12.6% enrollment decline from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 experienced by CCRI. With ongoing student outreach and support to help students persist during the pandemic, the Promise program will continue to bring resources and students into the institution, sustaining the momentum that has helped make CCRI an even stronger contributor to Rhode Island's economic strength and competitiveness.

ⁱ Sedmak, Todd <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/blog/undergraduate-enrollment-declines-show-no-signs-of-recovery-from-2020/>

ⁱⁱ Chen, Grace <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/the-catch-22-of-community-college-graduation-rates>