

# Promise Programs, Emergency Aid, and Strategies for College Retention

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Brad Hershbein

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

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# What's a Promise Program?

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- Different Definitions
  - Big Tent: Penn AHEAD, CFCT, some others
    - Ongoing tuition assistance for college at subnational level
  - More-specific: Upjohn Institute
    - Local and place-based
    - Goal to transform community through higher education
    - Role for IHE and community supports
- *Lots* of variation, even under narrower definition
  - Universal vs. merit/needs-based
  - 2-year only vs 2- and 4-year colleges
  - First-dollar vs. last-dollar

# Upjohn Institute and Promise Research

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- Conducted research on Kalamazoo Promise for 10+ years
- Convened researchers working on other Promise programs
  - Community and statewide programs (Tennessee)
- Researcher consortium to develop evaluation framework
  - Education, and now workforce, outcomes
  - Challenges: program designs, data availability
- New, searchable database of programs with detailed features
  - Compare programs with links to existing research
  - Most programs don't offer emergency aid, but individual IHEs might... important, but hard to track

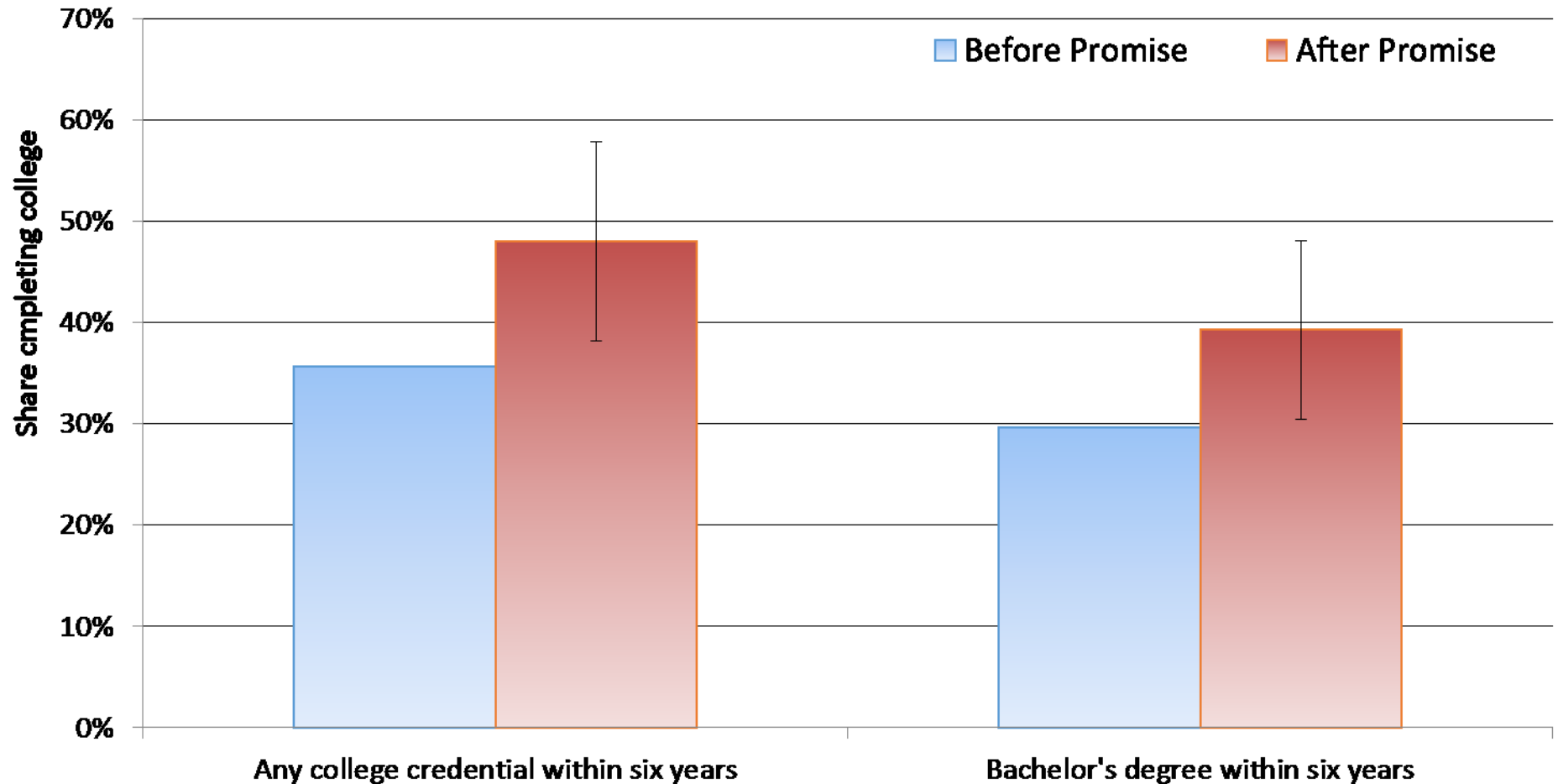
# What does the research show?

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1. Soft changes in attitudes and aspirations are common to most programs and detectable almost immediately
2. Many programs find K-12 enrollment increases within a year; often from keeping (rather than attracting new) students
3. Little evidence of HS graduation increase, but behavior and grades may improve
4. College enrollment increases are typical; persistence and completion are more variable (and less studied)

# Kalamazoo Promise:

## College completion within 6 years of HS graduation



Source: Bartik, Hershbein, and Lachowska (2015). Note: Estimates correspond to the second column of table 6 in the paper. Whiskers show 95 percent confidence intervals around estimate in Promise period.

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4. College enrollment increases are typical; persistence and completion are more variable (and less studied)
5. Community impacts (home values, crime) dependent on context
6. Workforce outcomes not yet studied... but in the works
7. Money and messaging are each important and can get students in the door, *but additional supports from community needed for success*

# Consequences and Going Forward

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- Reducing college costs substantially **can** increase graduation rates, but many barriers remain
- Unintended consequences...
  - Students induced to enroll may have greater needs

# Change in Student Characteristics of KPS Graduates at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Before and After Promise

Characteristic	Before Promise	After Promise
Free/Reduced Price Lunch in HS	41%	66%
From Alternative HS	2%	11%
HS GPA	2.66	2.28
Share without Algebra II	20%	35%



# Consequences and Going Forward

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- Reducing college costs substantially **can** increase graduation rates, but many barriers remain
- Unintended consequences...
  - Students induced to enroll may have greater needs
  - IHEs don't necessarily get increased resources
  - Scholarship students often few relative to IHE enrollment
  - Problems often worse at 2-year sector
- As Promise programs mature, growing interest in supports
- Emergency Aid?

# Emergency Aid

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- Growing evidence of need for, and effectiveness of, emergency aid programs
- What is emergency aid?
  - Small grant disbursements (often \$100–\$1,000) to individual students on as-needed basis
  - Meant to deal with cash-flow problems (e.g., rent, transport, books, medical) that can cause students to drop out
- *Covers non-tuition expenses*

# Emergency Aid: Some Examples

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- Over 100 programs in existence
  - Most small or pilots
  - Most at community colleges
  - Funding mix from donors, foundations, IHEs, gov't grants
- Several prominent (and studied) examples
  - Scholarship America's Dreamkeepers
  - American Indian College Fund's Angel Fund
  - ASAP (CUNY and Ohio; MDRC)
  - Great Lakes DASH
  - Tarrant County College (Trinity River)

# Emergency Aid Can Vary A Lot

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- Like Promise programs, emergency aid programs vary a lot
  - Eligibility (financial aid-based or not)
  - Advertising (word-of-mouth, or blanket approach)
  - Types of expenses (what qualifies?)
  - Administration/adjudication
  - Money and/or add'l supports (financial counseling, case mgmt)
- Not well-studied yet, but evidence so far suggests programs are effective
  - Dreamkeepers: 2<sup>nd</sup> term reenrollment ↑ 3-15 pp
  - ASAP (CUNY): nearly doubled 3-year AA grad rate
  - Tarrant CC: 31 pp ↑ (tripling) women's AA grad rate, but only with case mgmt. + EA

# Emergency Aid: Cost effective?

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- Best evidence from ASAP and Tarrant CC (RCTs)
- Both programs offer add'l services beyond emergency money
  - ASAP: enhanced advising, block courses, career services, transportation and textbook vouchers
  - Tarrant CC: comprehensive case management from social workers
  - Both had external administrative support
- Both were cost-effective
  - Cost per degree fell (ASAP) or earnings post-school pay for program  $\leq$  5 yrs
- Money-only programs less studied, but evidence weaker
- [Guides available](#) from Wisconsin Hope Lab

# Promise Programs + Emergency Aid

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- Most successful supports are layered
  - Tuition support + expenses/EA support + counseling/case mgmt.
  - Giving money is (relatively) easy; coordinating multiple supports is hard
- Kalamazoo, other Promise programs now expanding supports
  1. Survey and interview students, administrators to understand needs
  2. Developing monitoring system (a la Georgia State)
  3. Contemplating adding EA and student ombudsperson through Promise (liaison with campuses)
- How best to leverage financial support? Need to know context
- Plan to roll out best practices on our new website... stay tuned

# Thank you!

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Brad Hershbein  
W.E. Upjohn Institute  
[hershbein@upjohn.org](mailto:hershbein@upjohn.org)

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promise-place-based-scholarships](http://www.upjohn.org/research/education/kalamazoo-promise-place-based-scholarships)

<http://www.upjohn.org/promise/database/>