

SEATTLE  
CENTRAL  
COLLEGE

Seattle Promise  
Scholarship  
Building  
2020-2021

FAMILIES  
EDUCATION  
PRESCHOOL  
& PROMISE



# Seattle Promise Scholar Persistence & Advising Support

2020-2021 Process Evaluation Report

Conducted by:



**Seattle** Department of  
Education & Early Learning

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# Executive Summary

The Seattle Promise program provides graduates of Seattle Public Schools (SPS) with up to two years (or 90 free credits) of financial assistance and support services at any of the three Seattle Colleges (North Seattle College, Seattle Central College, and South Seattle College). Funded by the City of Seattle since 2018 through the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy, Seattle Promise is a last dollar scholarship program that covers any remaining tuition costs students would incur beyond coverage from federal and state student financial aid. Seattle Promise enrollment has grown steadily since City investments began in 2018, with 835 scholars enrolled in fall 2020. However, nearly half (46%) of Seattle Promise scholars who began the program in 2018 or 2019 exited the program after one year, and only 22% graduated within two years.<sup>1</sup> While scholars who begin college in Seattle Promise graduate within three years at a rate above the national average for full-time community-college students (37%, compared to 28%<sup>2</sup>), there remains room to improve persistence.

During the 2020-21 school year, the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) conducted a process evaluation to understand how Seattle Promise can continue raising its graduation rates and improve practice, planning, and design of the Seattle Promise Program. A mixed-methods evaluation process used both qualitative and quantitative data to gain insights into program implementation, student experiences, and short-term outcomes, guided by the following evaluation questions:

1. How are scholars progressing in Seattle Promise during their first and second years, and what persistence challenges do they face?
2. How is Seattle Promise Advising supporting scholar success?

## Key Findings

85% of scholars were satisfied with their overall experience in Seattle Promise.		
 82% had enough financial support to attend college	 69% had enough support to succeed academically	 71% felt welcomed at their college

### Persistence barriers affecting progress toward a postsecondary degree:

- **Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)** and **full-time enrollment** were the most challenging Seattle Promise program requirements for scholars to maintain, impacting their ability to remain eligible for Promise scholarships. Full-time enrollment was a more challenging for scholars who were struggling academically, experiencing personal hardship, or enrolled in high-credit STEM courses.
- Seattle Promise's **90-credit funding limit** was problematic for many scholars who required more time to obtain a degree and transfer, especially for those struggling academically or undecided about career goals.
- Scholars entering college with **developmental course placements** faced firmer persistence barriers, finding it more difficult than their peers to meet the SAP eligibility requirement and complete a degree within the 90-credit funding limit.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Seattle Promise Administrative Data (Milestone Data), 2020

<sup>2</sup> Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2020

- The top **personal persistence challenges** participants reported were remote learning, indecision about career goals, and pressures related to family and employment.
- The **lack of flexible leave options** or a pathway back to Promise after **losing eligibility** created a persistence barrier for those who struggled with full-time enrollment or needed to leave college temporarily for personal reasons.

#### Scholar feedback about Seattle Promise advising:

- **Ninety-three percent (93%) of scholars surveyed were satisfied with Seattle Promise advising.**
- While a majority (84%) of surveyed scholars were able to access Retention Specialists when needed, scholar feedback suggested that **Retention Specialists at times lacked capacity** to be fully responsive to scholar needs.
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of **scholars reported needing more support** to successfully navigate their college experience. The top needs scholars identified were assistance with transferring, academic performance, career development, extra financial assistance and mental health counseling.



#### Eligibility and Enrollment Support

Registering for classes, academic planning, filling out financial aid paperwork, general support meeting Seattle Promise eligibility requirements

**95%** of scholars found Retention Specialist support in this area to be helpful.



#### Transfer and Career Support

Transfer planning, support with transfer applications, career planning, connecting to job and internship opportunities

**86%** of scholars found Retention Specialist support in this area to be helpful.



#### General Student Success

Advice about how to adjust to college, time management and study skills, finding support needed to succeed in classes, dealing with stress at school or at home.

**81%** of scholars found Retention Specialist support in this area to be helpful.

## Insights and Opportunities

Informed by suggestions from Seattle Promise scholars participating in the evaluation, the City of Seattle and Seattle Colleges have an opportunity to mitigate scholar persistence barriers and promote equitable postsecondary outcomes for scholars furthest from educational justice by considering the following recommendations:

1. **Adjust Seattle Promise Structure and eligibility requirements to limit program retention barriers.** Suggested strategies include expanding part-time enrollment and temporary leave options and extending financial support beyond 90 credits.
2. **Add scholar supports to promote degree completion and long-term post-secondary success.** Strategies may include strengthening academic supports to reduce the need for developmental courses, providing Promise-specific career development and transfer advising, and improving access to emergency financial assistance and mental health counseling.
3. **Strengthen Seattle Promise Advising Capacity to support scholars furthest from educational justice.** Approaches to consider include lowering scholar-to-staff ratios, adding administrative support for Retention Specialists, and introducing an advising and persistence data tracking system.

# Introduction

## Seattle Promise Program Overview

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Seattle Promise provides graduates of Seattle Public Schools (SPS) with up to two years (or 90 free credits) of financial assistance and support services at any of the three Seattle Colleges (North Seattle College, Seattle Central College, and South Seattle College). Originally established as the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship program at South Seattle College in 2008, Seattle Promise expanded to a two-year program offered at all three Seattle Colleges in 2018 following Mayor Durkan’s Promise Executive Order. The program, funded through the City of Seattle’s Families, Education, Preschool & Promise (FEPP) Levy, has operated in its current form with eligibility at all 17 SPS high schools since the 2019-20 school year. In fall 2020, Seattle Promise enrolled 835 scholars.

Seattle Promise is a last-dollar scholarship program that covers remaining tuition costs after all other public funding or grants a student may be eligible for are applied. Under the program, scholars from low-income households<sup>3</sup> are also eligible to receive an Equity Scholarship, which provides additional funds for non-tuition expenses such as books, childcare, food, transportation, and housing. To participate in Seattle Promise, scholars must meet a series of milestones beginning in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, with the support of Seattle Promise Outreach Specialists: complete FAFSA/WASFA paperwork, complete applications to Seattle Promise and a Seattle College of their choice, and participate in a spring Readiness Academy to plan for college. Once scholars enroll in college, they receive orientation through Summer Bridge programs at their respective campuses and are connected to campus-level teams of Retention Specialists who offer a range of advising supports and referral options to help scholars successfully navigate their college experience.

## Evaluating Seattle Promise Scholar Persistence

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In addition to providing college access to Seattle students furthest from educational justice, Seattle Promise ultimately aims to boost career readiness and long-term financial self-sufficiency for Seattle students through postsecondary degree completion. However, persistence and timely degree completion are common challenges among community college students nationwide: the average three-year graduation rate for community college students is 28% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). While scholars who begin college in Seattle Promise graduate within three years at a rate above the national average (37%) there remains room to improve persistence. Nearly half (46%) of Seattle Promise scholars who began the program in 2018 or 2019 exited the program after one year, and only 22% had earned a degree by the time they completed the two years of college that Seattle Promise funds (Seattle Promise Milestone Data).

Over the course of the 2020-21 school year, the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) conducted a process evaluation to understand how DEEL and Seattle Colleges can continue raising Seattle Promise graduation rates and support scholars furthest from educational justice. Best implemented during the early stages of a program, process evaluations are a tool that can be used to highlight early successes, pinpoint early implementation challenges, and determine how to improve practice, planning, and design of a program. This process evaluation is the first in a planned cycle of evaluations examining Seattle Promise program fidelity and impact, as outlined in the FEPP Levy Implementation & Evaluation Plan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Fall 2020, scholars with \$0 Expected Family Contribution (EFC) accompanying their federal aid were eligible for the Equity Scholarship and received \$500 per quarter. The Equity Scholarship has since been expanded to \$1,000 per quarter for scholars with an EFC within Pell Grant eligibility range.

<sup>4</sup> A third-party external evaluator will be engaged for evaluation of graduation and other long-term outcomes in Year 5 or 6 of the FEPP Levy.

# Methods

## Evaluation Focus

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This process evaluation focused on the experiences of Seattle Promise scholars once they enroll in college, assessing factors affecting Seattle Promise scholars' program retention and general college persistence. Using a mixed methods evaluation approach, the DEEL Performance & Evaluation team used both qualitative and quantitative data to gain insights into program implementation, student experiences, and short-term outcomes, guided by the following evaluation questions:

1. **How are students progressing in Seattle Promise during their first and second years?**
  - Why do students exit Seattle Promise during first and second years?
  - Do Promise students who exit transfer to another institution?
  - What persistence challenges do Seattle Promise students face?
2. **How are Seattle Promise Retention Specialists supporting student success?**
  - Is the advising component of Seattle Promise being implemented as intended?
  - How do retention staff support Promise Scholar transfers?

Because nearly half of Seattle Promise scholars exit the program before beginning their second year, a core goal of this process evaluation was to identify common persistence barriers that scholars face while enrolled in Seattle Promise. This evaluation explored the following key factors affecting persistence:

- **Seattle Promise Structure:** To maintain their Seattle Promise scholarship, scholars are required to meet a series of eligibility requirements each quarter, and they receive support through Seattle Promise for up to 90 credits of coursework. Structural aspects of Seattle Promise may impact scholars' ability or desire to remain in the program. Because Seattle Promise provides a funding source for scholars to attend college, program retention may in turn affect scholar persistence and degree completion.
- **Personal Persistence Barriers:** Scholars may face a range of challenges or motivators in their personal lives that affect their overall persistence in college.
- **Seattle Promise Advising Support:** A key feature of Seattle Promise is its advising program, designed to support scholars with retention and successful degree completion. Obtaining scholar feedback about the advising program provides an opportunity to identify ways to further support Seattle Promise scholar persistence by improving the retention advising program.

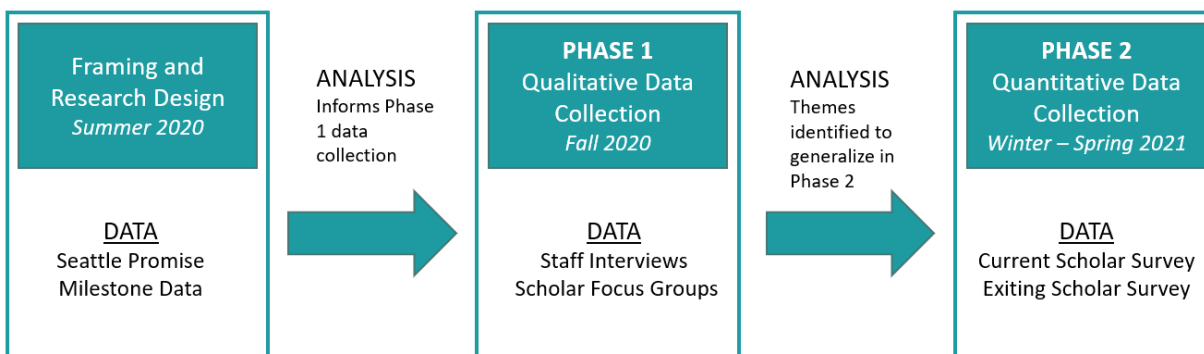
### Key Terms: Retention and Persistence

In this report, the term **persistence** refers to scholars continuing their college progress through to degree completion (in this case, an associate degree or certificate earned at one of the Seattle Colleges). The term **retention** refers to scholars remaining in the Seattle Promise program.

# Research Design

DEEL’s process evaluation team took an iterative approach to data collection and analysis between summer 2020 and spring 2021, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Evaluation Design



**Milestone Data Analysis:** Before beginning data collection, the evaluation team conducted a review and analysis of Seattle Promise administrative data, known as Milestone Data. Milestone Data tracks scholars beginning with their first engagement with the Seattle Promise application process in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The dataset includes demographic, college enrollment, and academic progress data for all Seattle Promise scholars and is updated on a quarterly basis. The purpose of this analysis was to gain context about the Seattle Promise student body, including trends in enrollment, persistence, and graduation. Insights from the Milestone Data informed the evaluation questions and focus of inquiry during the first data collection phase.

**Phase 1:** In the first data collection phase, the evaluation team collected qualitative data and used inductive qualitative coding to describe the scope and intended implementation of the Seattle Promise advising program and identify themes in scholar experiences and progress. Semi-structured interviews with Retention Specialists provided a key informant perspective about Seattle Promise advising and common persistence barriers among scholars. Themes identified in Retention Specialist interviews informed protocols and the direction of inquiry in scholar focus groups. The evaluation team conducted eight focus groups with current and former Seattle Promise scholars, asking participants to discuss the scope of support they received from Seattle Promise and their sentiments about Seattle Promise advising. Scholars were also asked to identify persistence challenges they faced or observed peers facing, and to describe their experiences navigating program eligibility requirements. Sampling methodology and data collection protocols for interviews and focus groups are detailed in Appendix A: Methods.

**Phase 2:** In the second data collection phase, the evaluation team administered two surveys of Seattle Promise scholars to test themes from Phase 1 and quantify how often experiences identified by scholars in focus groups occurred within a broader sample of scholars. The Current Scholar Survey was administered online in February 2021, and all currently enrolled scholars were invited to complete the survey. The online Scholar Exit Survey, designed to capture feedback about why scholars exited the program, was administered by Retention Specialists on a rolling basis between December 2020 and May 2021 to scholars who exited the program during that period.

For details about data analysis and limitations, see Appendix A: Methods.



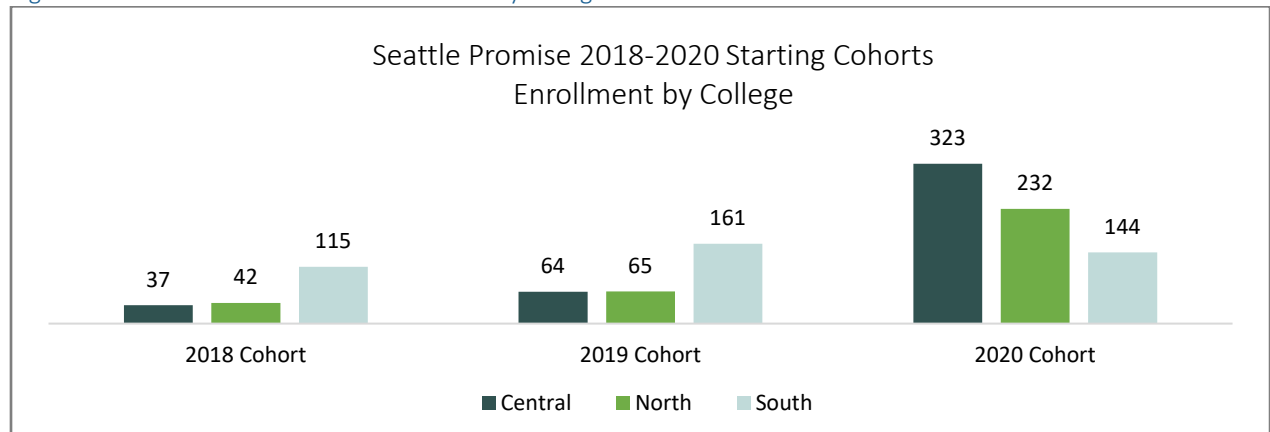
# Evaluation Findings

## About the Seattle Promise Student Body: Trends in Enrollment and Persistence

The evaluation team’s review and analysis of Seattle Promise Milestone Data conducted prior to data collection provided context about the full Seattle Promise student body, including demographics, academic performance, and trends in enrollment, persistence, and completion. The following highlights emerged from this analysis.

1. [Seattle Promise enrollment has grown rapidly over the past three years, but the growth has not been evenly distributed across college campuses.](#) A total of 835 scholars enrolled in Seattle Promise in Fall 2020. 17% (N=145) were second-year scholars (2019 cohort) and 83% (N=690) were first-year scholars (2020 cohort). Eligibility for Seattle Promise was limited to graduates of six SPS high schools in 2018 and 2019, followed by an expansion to all 17 high schools in 2020. As a result of expanded eligibility and a higher application rate than projected, the Seattle Promise enrollment tripled between 2018 and 2020. Most of the growth in enrollment occurred at Seattle Central and North Seattle College (see Figure 2).

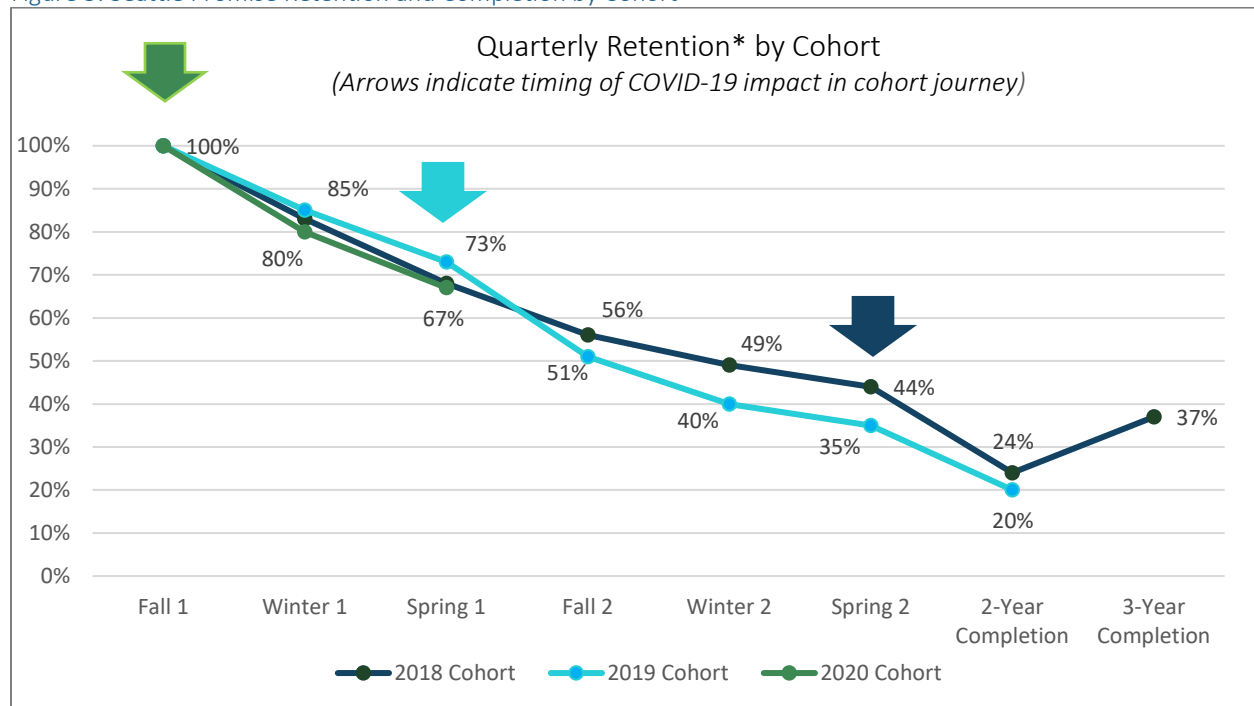
Figure 2: Seattle Promise Enrollment Growth by College



Source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data

2. [An upward trend in retention between 2018 and 2019 cohorts reversed after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.](#) Before the pandemic, Seattle Promise retention appeared to be improving: 73% of 2019 Cohort scholars were retained after their first two quarters, a rate six points above retention among 2018 Cohort scholars during the same period. After the switch to remote learning in the early months of the pandemic, retention for 2019 Cohort scholars and newly enrolled 2020 Cohort scholars began to trend 5-10% lower than the 2018 Cohort baseline (see Figure 3). This impact mirrors national persistence trends at two-year colleges over the course of the pandemic (enrollment declined by 10% in fall 2020) and is an important consideration when interpreting the progress of students enrolled during this period (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

Figure 3: Seattle Promise Retention and Completion by Cohort



Data Source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data. \*Retention definition: Percentage of starting cohort enrolled in Promise. Completion rates include any scholars who began college as a Promise scholar and earned a degree at the Seattle Colleges.

- A majority of Seattle Promise scholars identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, but retention and persistence across race/ethnic groups varied. Seattle Promise milestone data shows that 66% of the student body enrolled in Fall 2020 identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (students of color). The share of scholars who identify as students of color appears to be decreasing as program eligibility expands: 64% of 2020 starting cohort scholars identified as students of color, compared to 74% of 2019 starting cohort (see Appendix, Table B1). Scholars identifying as Asian and white were most likely to graduate within two years (38% and 27%, respectively), and quarterly enrollment trends show the greatest opportunity for improvement in Seattle Promise support of Black scholar persistence (see Appendix, Figure B2).
- Seattle Promise scholars were more likely than their non-Promise peers to enter college with educational support needs, and nearly half enrolled in developmental courses in college. The percentages of 2019 and 2020 Cohort Seattle Promise scholars who met Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math in high school were lower than non-Promise high school graduates by 13 and 25 percentage points, respectively. In addition, 20% of the Promise 2020 starting cohort and 17% of 2019 starting cohort were English Language Learners, twice the rate of non-Promise SPS graduates (Appendix, Table B2). As of winter quarter 2021, 43% of 2019 cohort scholars had enrolled in pre-college developmental Math or English courses since beginning college (see Appendix, Table B3).

# How are Seattle Promise scholars progressing during their first and second years?

## Overview

Results in this section address the first evaluation question using insights shared by staff and scholars through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Because this process evaluation was designed to obtain actionable data about how to support scholar persistence and graduation, key findings are focused on persistence barriers: insights about scholar experiences that may explain why they exit the program or stop attending college. A total of 215 scholars participated in focus groups and surveys, and experienced Retention Specialists representing all three college campuses provided their perspective in interviews. Participating scholars represented similar shares of enrolled scholars at North, Central, and South Seattle Colleges, and scholars identifying as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) were overrepresented in the sample by 12 percentage points, compared to the overall student body. Details about participant demographics are provided in Figure 4 below and in Appendix D.




Figure 4: Process Evaluation Participant Demographics by Data Source

Current Scholar Survey	Scholar Focus Groups	Retention Specialist Interviews	Scholar Exit Survey
<b>Respondents: 178</b> <b>27% of enrolled Promise Scholars</b> <b>19% (N=33) Second-Year Cohort</b> <b>81% (N=145) First-Year Cohort</b> <b>78% BIPOC</b> <b>47% first-generation</b>  College campuses represented at similar rates.	<b>Participants: 27</b> <b>40% 2020 Cohort</b> <b>37% 2019 Cohort</b> <b>23% 2018 Cohort</b> <b>90% BIPOC</b> <b>63% first-generation</b>  College campuses represented at similar rates.	<b>Participants: 4</b> Participants had at least one year of Seattle Promise advising experience. All three college campuses represented.	<b>Respondents: 10</b> <b>80% 2020 cohort</b> <b>70% BIPOC</b> <b>30% first-generation</b> <b>60% placed in pre-college courses</b>

## Key Findings

**Finding 1: Eight in 10 scholars were satisfied with their Seattle Promise experience and felt they had the financial support they needed to attend college. Seven in 10 felt welcomed at their college and supported academically.**

Eighty-five percent of Seattle Promise scholars surveyed were satisfied with their overall experience in the program, and 82% of scholars agreed that they had the financial support needed to attend college. Scholars were less likely to agree that they had sufficient support to succeed academically (69%), and only 71% felt welcomed at the college they attended (see Appendix, Tables D11 & D13). In addition to financial support, academic progress and social integration are important contributors to college student persistence (Karp et al, 2010). The remainder of this report delves into details about scholar experiences across these three domains and beyond.

85% of scholars were satisfied with their overall experience in Seattle Promise.		
 82% had enough financial support to attend college	 69% had enough support to succeed academically	 71% felt welcomed at their college

**Finding 2: The majority of Seattle Promise Scholars intend to transfer, and many view Seattle Promise as a supportive bridge between high school and a four-year institution.**

Student objectives and reasons for choosing Seattle Promise shape their experience and provide context for understanding persistence and support needs. Evaluation findings suggest that in addition to being a cost-saving opportunity, Seattle Promise drew scholars to the program for its supportive setting and opportunity to explore career interests before investing in their continued education at a four-year college or university. Sixty-one percent of Seattle Promise scholars surveyed aimed to transfer to a four-year college or university after completing their two year degree in Seattle Promise, 12% intended to begin a career after completing an associate degree, and 16% were undecided about their goals in the program (see Appendix D, Table D12).

Scholars who participated in focus groups were asked to describe what motivated them to apply to the Seattle Promise program. The following top themes emerged:



**Academic Bridge**

Seattle Promise offered a bridge between high school and a four-year institution for scholars who sought a supportive setting to improve their academic performance and build confidence in their ability to navigate the perceived rigor of a larger university.



**College Access**

Seattle Promise provided college access to scholars for whom the cost of entering higher education immediately after high school was prohibitive.



**Career Exploration**

Seattle Promise created a space for high school graduates who were undecided about attending college to build a stronger understanding of their career interests and goals without taking on a heavy financial burden.



**Cost-Saving**

Seattle Promise presented an opportunity for scholars to reduce the financial burden of college on their families by earning college credits in Promise before transferring.

**Finding 3: Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and full-time enrollment were the most challenging program requirements for scholars to maintain, impacting their ability to remain eligible for Promise scholarships.**

Scholars and Retention Specialists participating in focus groups and interviews were asked to identify any challenges or barriers to maintaining eligibility for the Seattle Promise program. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and full-time enrollment were the most commonly cited eligibility barriers. In the Current Scholar Survey, respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty maintaining each requirement on a scale from 1 (not at all challenging) to 5 (very challenging). Among 178 survey respondents, half (49%) rated full-time enrollment challenging (a level 4 or higher), and more than 1 in 3 scholars surveyed (37%) found the SAP requirement challenging to maintain (see Figure 5, below). Scholars have the option to appeal decisions

**ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

**Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)**  
*2.0 minimum GPA, pass and remain enrolled in courses*

▪

**Full-Time Enrollment**  
*Enroll in 12 credits minimum each quarter or complete a part-time appeals process*

▪

**Quarterly check-ins with Retention Specialist**

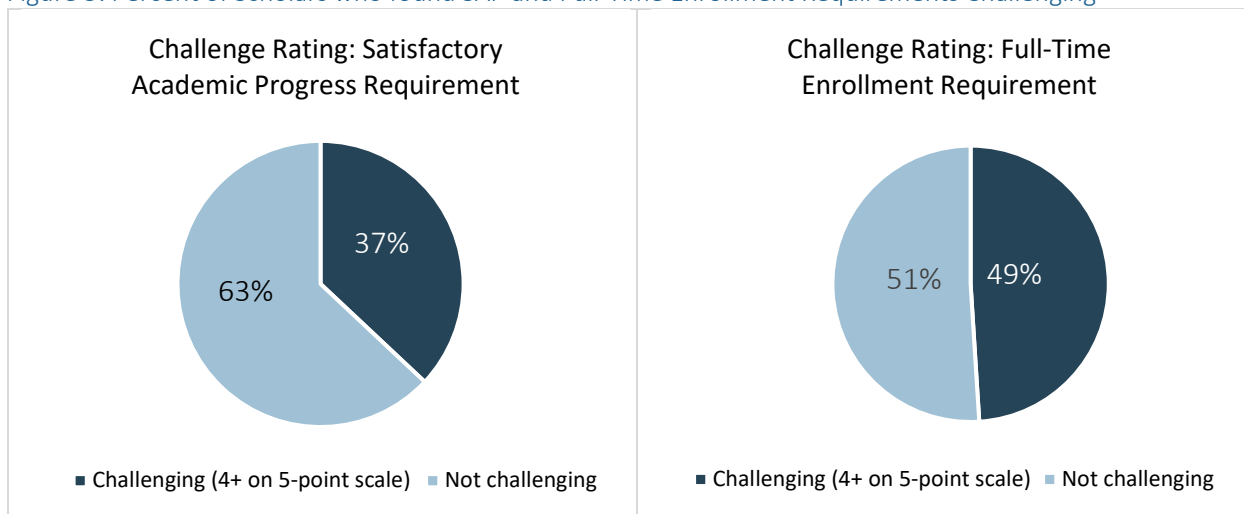
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**Complete Annual Financial Aid Paperwork**

about loss of eligibility due to SAP and full-time enrollment. However, feedback from scholars and Retention Specialists participating in the evaluation suggest that some scholars may not engage in the appeals process due to lack of awareness or the complexity of the SAP appeals process.

*“When I first started Promise, I was pretty scared about the program because of the eligibility requirements. You have to pass all your classes, be a full time student, and have a 2.0 GPA or higher. If you are lower, you have a 2 strike rule before you would need to write a letter to keep your scholarship. I have some friends who had to do this. Some of them had their [appeal] accepted, but those that didn’t ended up dropping out. This was one of my biggest fears.”* – Second-Year Promise Scholar, 2019 Cohort (focus group participant)

Figure 5: Percent of Scholars who found SAP and Full-Time Enrollment Requirements Challenging



Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered by DEEL February 2021.

**3A: The full-time enrollment eligibility requirement was especially challenging for scholars struggling with academic progress, experiencing personal hardship, or enrolled in high-credit STEM courses.**

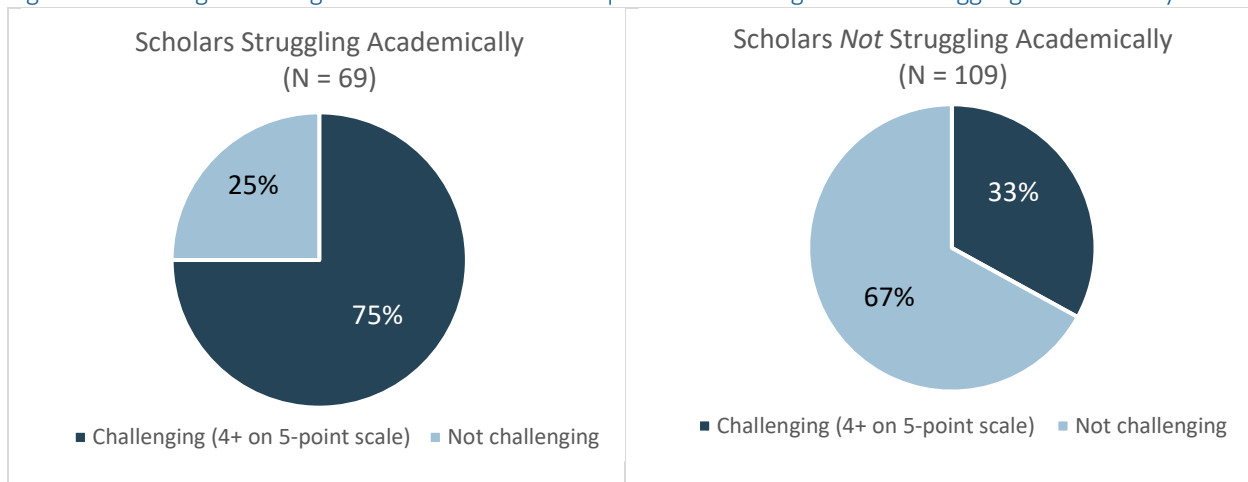
In interviews and focus groups, several scholars and Retention Specialists emphasized that SAP and full-time eligibility requirements created a double bind. The demands of a full-time course load, on top of other commitments such as employment, could limit scholars’ capacity to prioritize challenging coursework or seek out tutoring support needed to keep their grades up and pass courses. High-credit STEM courses (5-10 credits each) were cited as especially challenging to juggle when enrolled in other courses. Some scholars expressed frustration that they did not have the flexibility to make strategic decisions about their quarterly credit load to prioritize academic progress, suggesting that it would be helpful if a full-time progress requirement applied to a credit minimum for the year, rather than each quarter.

Current Scholar Survey data reflects the interaction between academic progress and full-time enrollment barriers: 75% of survey respondents who reported struggling academically<sup>5</sup> rated the full-time enrollment requirement as challenging, more than twice the rate of scholars not struggling academically (33%) (see Figure 6).

<sup>5</sup> The “struggling academically” group is defined as scholar survey respondents who selected “generally struggling with grades and passing classes” among a list of challenges affecting their progress in college.



Figure 6: Challenge Meeting Full-Time Enrollment Requirement Among Scholars Struggling Academically



Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered by DEEL February 2021. Difference Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

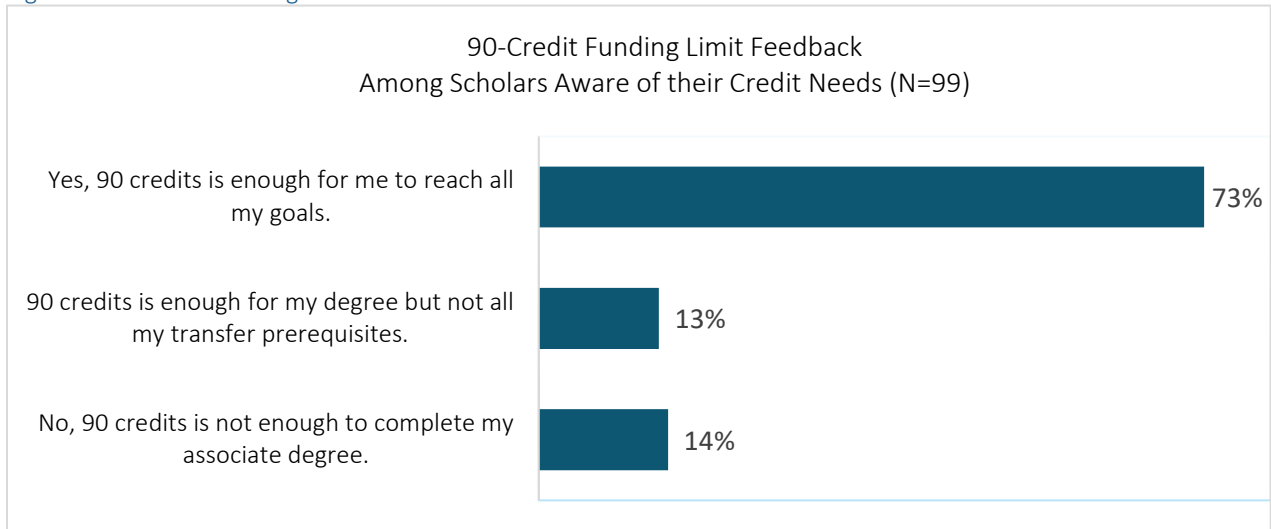
**Finding 4: Seattle Promise provides scholars with two years (up to 90 credits) of support to attend college. However, 90 credits were insufficient for many scholars to obtain a degree and transfer, especially for those struggling academically or undecided about their career goals.**

Half of current scholars surveyed knew how many credits they needed to complete their degree (N = 99). Of those scholars, 27% reported that 90 credits were insufficient for them to complete an associate degree or transfer requirements (see Figure 7, below). The top reasons scholars cited were failing or having to retake classes (48%), spending credits on developmental coursework (33%), and pursuing a degree that required more than 90 credits (30%). Other factors that affected scholars’ ability to graduate within 90 credits included taking classes outside of their education plan to meet full-time enrollment requirements, “wasting” credits during their first year due to indecision about their area of study, and needing transfer prerequisites that don’t count toward a degree (Current Scholar Survey, see Appendix D, Table D26).

*“When I created my education plan with my counselor back in the summer, it was hard, because most of the computer science classes I want to take have prerequisites upon prerequisites. This made it so I couldn’t really build a full schedule every single quarter, because I hadn’t met the prerequisites. Given the prerequisites, if I hadn’t started early and planned to take summer classes, I don’t think 2 years would have been possible for my degree. Maybe 2.5 years.”* – First Year Promise Scholar, 2020 Cohort (focus group participant)

*“It makes sense that there is a 2-year timeline when you look at it from the outside. But, based on my experience with students, when you do an education plan with students in their first quarter based on their placement, only about half of them are on track to graduate on time from the start.”* -- Retention Specialist

Figure 7: 90-Credit Funding Limit Feedback

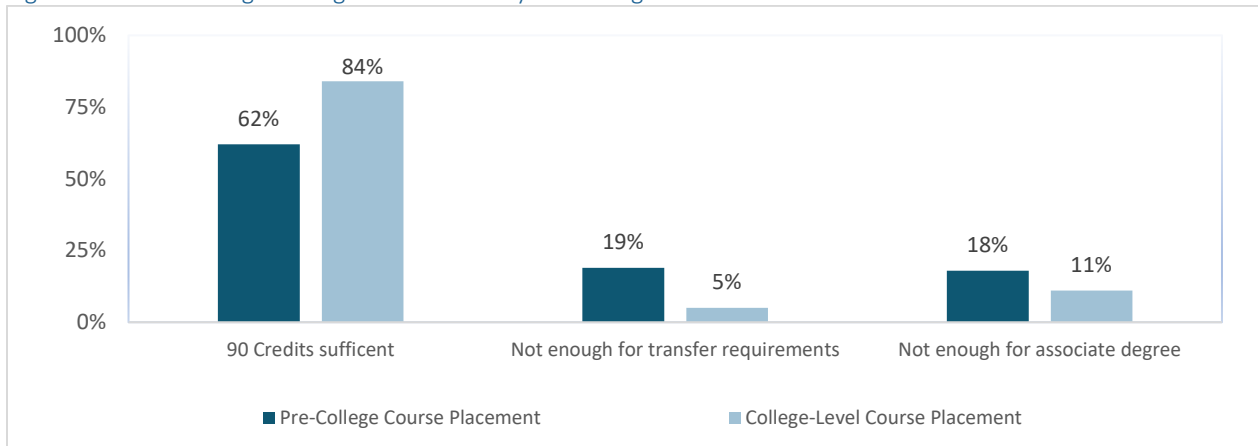


Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered by DEEL February 2021. This data excludes 79 respondents who answered “I don’t know yet” when asked about the 90-credit limit.

**Finding 5: Scholars entering college with developmental course placements faced firmer persistence barriers, finding it more difficult than their peers to meet the SAP eligibility requirement and complete a degree within the 90-credit funding limit.**

Thirty percent of scholars surveyed (Current Scholar Survey) indicated that passing required Math or English courses was a challenge affecting their college progress (see Figure 9). Scholars who placed into developmental courses were also more likely to report struggling with other persistence barriers. Current Scholar Survey respondents who reported placing into one or more pre-college courses (Math, English, or both) were significantly more likely (by 31 percentage points) to find the SAP requirement challenging to maintain, compared to scholars placed into college-level courses (see Appendix E, figure E1). When it came to both SAP and full-time enrollment requirements, placement into pre-college courses was a stronger predictor of students facing eligibility barriers than differences by race, speaking a language other than English at home, and employment status (Appendix E, Table E2). In addition, the share of scholars with pre-college placements who reported needing more than 90 credits was 22 percentage points greater than among scholars who placed at the college level (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: 90-Credit Degree Progress Feedback by Pre-College Course Placement



Excludes students unsure of credit needs. College-level placement defined as being placed in a Math or English course at level 100 or higher. Difference between pre-college (N=89) and college-level placed scholars (N=74) was statistically significant at  $p = 0.01$

**Finding 6: The top personal persistence barriers Seattle Promise scholars reported were remote learning, competing priorities in their personal lives, and uncertainty about college and career goals.**

**6A. Forty-three percent of scholars cited remote learning as a challenge affecting their college persistence.**

The context of COVID-19 shaped the college experiences of 2019 and 2020 Cohort Seattle Promise scholars significantly. At the time this evaluation was conducted, second-year (2019 Cohort) scholars had experienced the switch to remote learning in the middle of their first year of college, and first-year scholars (2020 Cohort) had never met their peers, instructors, or Retention Specialists in person. Forty-three percent of scholars surveyed (Current Scholar Survey) felt that remote learning was a challenge affecting their college journey, and eight percent also reported issues with internet and lacking a personal device to complete coursework.<sup>6</sup> Common themes that scholar focus group participants raised about their experiences with remote learning included struggling with isolation, trouble with motivation, lack of clarity or communication from instructors, and a desire for more meaningful learning in courses.

*“Promise has truly been an incredible opportunity for me, however personal struggles in combination with the pandemic have made school feel really inaccessible and stressful.”* -- Second Year Promise Scholar, 2019 Cohort (focus group participant)

**6B. Forty-two percent of scholars struggled with competing priorities in their personal and professional lives that affected their persistence.** Forty-two percent of scholars surveyed cited challenges in their personal life that were impacting their ability to prioritize school, and 17% felt they had limited capacity to focus on school due to working full or part time (Current Scholar Survey).

*“I’ve experienced stress around school in general in addition to my home life. Right now stuff at home has been overwhelming, and that’s been affecting how I do my work. I also feel kind of scared that I’m going to burn out in a few months.”* – First-Year Scholar, 2020 Cohort (focus group participant)

*“[My Retention Specialists] helped give me advice about time management. I had a lot going on because of work and school, so sometimes I felt like dying because there was so much going on for me. I need to make money and I have to study, and sometimes the two of them would interfere with each other.”* – Seattle Promise Graduate, 2018 Cohort (focus group participant)

**6C. Thirty percent of students surveyed felt that indecision about their career interests or goals was a barrier getting in the way of their college progress.** While several scholars who participated in focus groups were drawn to Seattle Promise as an opportunity to explore their career interests and develop goals in a supportive environment, they also pointed out the downside of using a portion of their 90 credits of funding on courses that may later not count toward a degree as they explored their potential academic and career paths. Among student survey respondents for whom 90 credits were insufficient to reach their goals, 27% had taken extra courses due to indecision about their area of study.

*“It’s important to know what you want so you can take the right classes. New students should really keep the 90 credits in mind so they don’t waste it. I think I wasted some of my credits in my first quarter because I took a math class I didn’t need. If students take advantage of the services available to them (like tutors and advisors), they will be more successful. I regret not asking for more support.”* – Second-Year Scholar, 2019 Cohort (focus group participant)

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<sup>6</sup> Because the survey was administered online, it is possible that non-survey respondents experienced technology access barriers at higher rates.

Figure 9: Top Persistence Barriers Identified in Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey

Structural Persistence Barriers	
1. Eligibility Requirement: Full Time Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>49% of scholars rated this requirement challenging to maintain (4+ on a 5-point scale).</li> </ul>
2. Eligibility Requirement: Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37% of scholars rated the requirement challenging to maintain (4+ on a 5-point scale).</li> <li>39% of scholars reported generally struggling academically</li> <li>30% of scholars indicated that they were experiencing challenges passing required English or Math courses</li> </ul>
3. 90 Credit Funding Limit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>27%* of scholars reported that 90 credits were insufficient for them meet one or more of their goals (obtain a degree and/or transfer).</li> <li>14%* of scholars anticipated not being able to complete their associate degree within 90 credits.</li> </ul>
Personal Persistence Barriers	
4. Remote Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>43% of scholars felt that remote learning was a challenge affecting their college experience.</li> </ul>
5. Competing Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>42% of scholars felt that aspects of their personal life were impacting their ability to prioritize school.</li> <li>17% of scholars had limited capacity due to full- or part-time employment.</li> </ul>
6. Indecision about Career Interests or Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30% of scholars felt that indecision about their career interests or goals was a challenge getting in the way of their college progress.</li> </ul>

Data Source: Current Scholar Survey, N=178, administered February 2021. \*Percentage of total excludes 79 respondents who answered “I don’t know yet” when asked about the 90-credit limit.

**Finding 7: The lack of flexible leave options and a pathway back to Promise after losing eligibility created a persistence barrier for those who struggled with full-time enrollment or needed to leave college temporarily for personal reasons.**

Several scholars who participated in focus groups described struggling with the lack of flexibility to reduce credit loads or take a temporary leave due to personal or financial hardship without losing their Promise scholarship. Without these options, scholars who are financially reliant on Seattle Promise to attend college can be forced to choose between addressing health or family emergencies and pursuing a college career.

*“I had a friend who was in Promise and was doing really well, but then things got really tough for him. He was so close to graduating, but he ended up having to take a break for his last two quarters because of family issues. Sometimes things happen that are out of your control, and that could affect the rest of our lives. Having a recovery option for students who are able to come back in would be great.”* – Seattle Promise Graduate, 2018 Cohort (Focus Group Participant)

The need for a pathway back to Promise was heightened by the impacts of COVID-19 on both the learning environment and scholars’ personal lives. Retention Specialists reported that they had observed many scholars they worked with leave college after the switch to remote learning in 2020, either because remote learning was too challenging or inappropriate for their learning style, or to prioritize supporting their family through COVID-related illness or unemployment. Other scholars remained in the program but continued to struggle with persistence and academic progress. For example, a second-year scholar focus group participant shared:

*“Being able to drop a class or take a break for a quarter would be very helpful. I wasn’t planning to take classes this quarter, because I have been going through a really hard time with COVID and personal family matters. I was thinking I could catch up in winter quarter, but if I did this I would be dropped from the program. I don’t know what I would do [for college] if they dropped me.” – Second-Year Scholar, 2019 Cohort*

**Finding 8: Reasons scholars exit Seattle Promise early include loss of program eligibility, graduating early, and needing to take a break for personal reasons; however, more data is needed to identify which reasons are most common.**

While findings 3 – 7 above present common pressures affecting Seattle Promise program eligibility and persistence, this evaluation also aimed to identify circumstances that most often led scholars to exit the program early. In interviews and focus groups, staff and scholars drew on their experiences and observations to identify the following exit reasons:

- Loss of program eligibility
- Using 90 credits of funding before completing a degree
- Graduating early (often due to earning college credits in high school<sup>7</sup>)
- Transferring early to a four-year college or a different community or technical college
- Taking a break from college for personal reasons
- Deciding to not continue college at all

To quantify how common each of these exit reasons were, scholars who exited Seattle Promise between December 2020 and May 2021 were invited to complete a survey. Among survey respondents, the top reason for exiting was needing to take a break from school for personal reasons (60%, N=6). However, the percentage of exiting scholars opting to complete the exit survey was low (N=10), limiting the value of the survey’s findings in understanding the experiences of exiting scholars. For details about scholar responses to the exit survey, see Appendix F: Scholar Exit Survey Results.

## How are Seattle Promise Retention Specialists supporting scholar success?

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### Retention Advising Overview

Beginning in the summer before they enroll in college, Seattle Promise scholars receive ongoing support from Seattle Promise Retention Specialists. Teams of Retention Specialists are based at each of the three Seattle College campuses and manage a caseload of scholars at a student-to-staff ratio of 100:1. Scholars are required to meet with their Retention Specialist a minimum of once per quarter.

Four senior Retention Specialists representing North, Central, and South Seattle college campuses participated in interviews as part of this evaluation to provide context about the structure and scope of the retention advising program. Retention Specialists were asked to describe how they approach their work and what they strive for in terms of quality and intended outcomes of their support. In focus groups, Seattle Promise scholars were also asked to speak to the scope of support they received from Retention Specialists.

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<sup>7</sup> More than one third of Seattle Promise scholars in 2018–2020 Cohorts had earned college credits in high school through programs such as Running Start (see Appendix B, Table B4).



Retention Specialists emphasized that their title reflects the broad scope of support they provide to students, which extends beyond traditional academic advising. Topics covered in quarterly check-ins range from a quick verification of program eligibility and course registration to in-depth support according to student needs. In addition to providing direct guidance, Retention Specialists connect scholars to a variety of support services at the Seattle Colleges and beyond. For details about the scope of support Retention Specialists provide to scholars, including referrals, see Appendix C: Promise Advising Program Details. Through their work, Retention Specialists described a commitment to helping scholars navigate the transition to higher education, maintain Seattle Promise eligibility requirements, successfully complete a degree or transfer, and ultimately pursue their long-term career goals.

*“My priority for students is that ... they have the confidence to tackle anything that comes their way and know how to navigate the higher education system. I want them to know how to self-advocate and get what they need.”* – Seattle Promise Retention Specialist

## Scholar Feedback about Seattle Promise Advising

**Finding 1: Nine in 10 scholars were satisfied with the support they received from Retention Specialists, and most felt that Seattle Promise advising improved their readiness for the rest of college and their career.**

Of the scholars who responded to the Current Scholar Survey, 93% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the support they received from Retention Specialists. Close to two-thirds of survey respondents also felt that the support they had received from Seattle Promise made them more aware of resources available on campus, helped them gain a better understanding of their academic strengths and career goals, and left them feeling more prepared for the rest of their college and career journey (see Appendix Table D14).

*“As a first-generation student with no background in college, I was set with the responsibility to go out and make a mark for myself. It’s extremely confusing, because you can’t ask a family member to help you out with the process. Once I started the Promise program, many students shared the same experience as me, and the scholarship provided me with opportunities to seek out who can support me. I’m happy to say that I’m not in the dark anymore and I feel like I’m in complete control of my destiny.”* -- Seattle Promise Graduate, 2018 Cohort (Focus Group Participant)

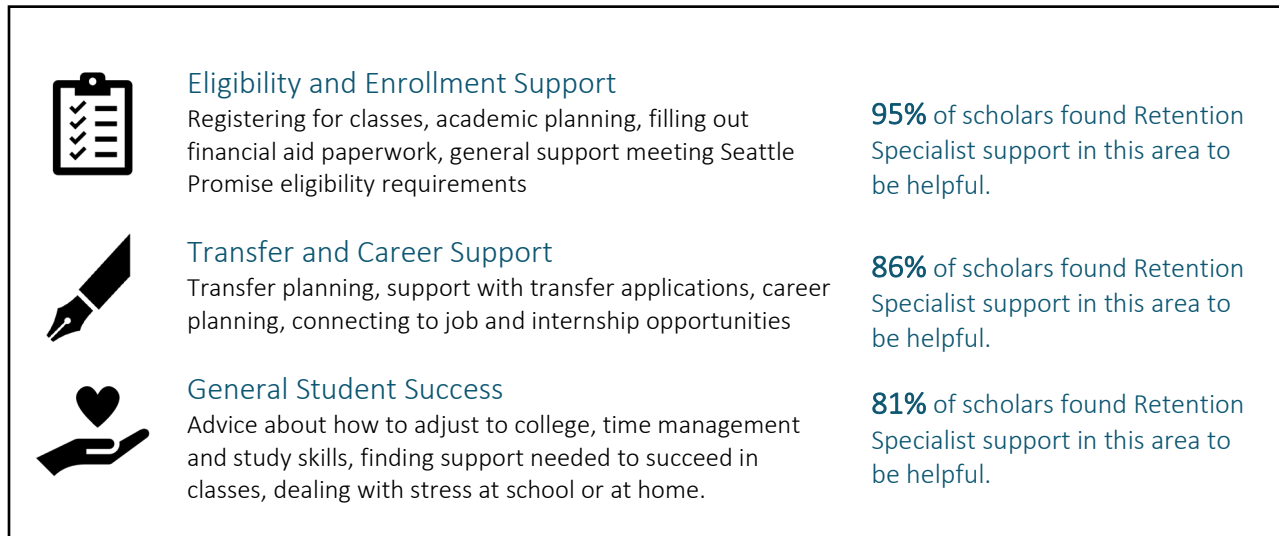
**Finding 2: Scholars found Seattle Promise advising most helpful with enrollment and program eligibility requirements and less helpful when it came to completing the transfer process and generally navigating their higher education experience.**

Scholars surveyed were asked to rate the helpfulness of Seattle Promise advising with 12 supports across three domains: Eligibility and Enrollment Support, Transfer and Career Support, and General Student Success. For each area in which they had received guidance from Retention Specialists, scholars provided a rating on a scale from “not at all helpful” to “very helpful,” or selected “not applicable” if they had not sought out the support.

Ninety-five percent (95%) of scholars rated advising support for eligibility and enrollment processes as somewhat or very helpful (see Figure 10). Supports in these areas included registering for classes, academic planning, filling out financial aid paperwork, and general guidance with Promise eligibility requirements. Beyond these supports, scholars had turned to Retention Specialists for assistance with career and transfer planning and received advice and resources for academic success, adjusting to college, and dealing with stress. However, a lower percentage of scholars (81-86%) found Seattle Promise support in these latter areas helpful.

Scholar feedback about each domain of advising support is summarized in Figure 10. For a detailed breakdown of scholar feedback across 12 advising support topics, see Appendix C, tables C17 – C20.

Figure 10: Scholar Feedback about Seattle Promise Advising Support

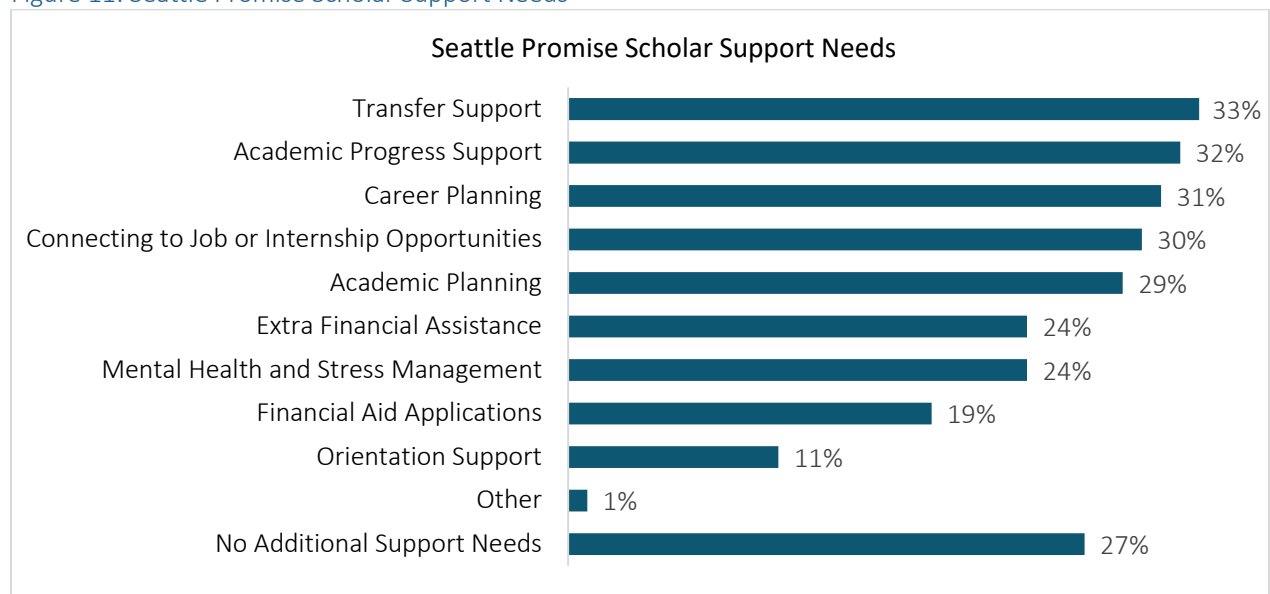


Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered February 2021.

**Finding 3: Three in four scholars demonstrated a need for increased support from Seattle Promise. The most common areas where scholars needed more support were academic and career planning, academic progress, increased financial assistance, and access to counseling for mental health and stress management.**

Seventy-three percent (73%) of scholars surveyed indicated that they had one or more additional support needs (see Figure 11, below). The most common support needs scholars cited were related to academic and career planning, academic progress (passing classes and achieving desired grades), and the transfer process: one third of scholars needed more support in these areas. Twenty-four percent of scholars also demonstrated a need for more wraparound supports such as extra financial assistance and access to counseling for mental health and stress management. For details about support needs from scholar focus group participants, see Appendix G, Table G3.

Figure 11: Seattle Promise Scholar Support Needs



Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered February 2021.

**Finding 4: Retention Specialists strove to center relationship-building and proactive outreach to provide tailored support to scholars, but scholar sentiments about their interactions with Retention Specialists varied.**

Retention Specialists described striving to create a welcoming environment for incoming scholars and provide personalized support through:

- Relationship-building
- Tracking and following up with scholars who need extra support
- Providing practical advice and social emotional support for scholars struggling to adjust to a new institutional setting
- Informal data tracking about scholar progress to inform continuous improvement

Scholars provided a range of perspectives about the nature of the support they received from Retention Specialists, with 90% of current scholars surveyed saying they felt comfortable approaching their Seattle Promise advisor to ask for support. Fewer, however, felt that their advisor cared about them personally (76%) (see Figure 12). Among focus group participants, some scholars described an experience with Seattle Promise advising that mirrored Retention Specialist intentions: they described their relationship with their Retention Specialist as pivotal for their success in college and provided examples of support going above and beyond to meet their individual circumstances.

*“I’ve had the same Retention Specialist for both years. She has been really understanding about all the things that I went through last year. We stay on top of things, and I chat with her a lot. We do Zoom meetings to check in. We’ve been working on a new academic plan for me this quarter since our plan didn’t work out this time around.”* Second-Year Scholar, 2019 Cohort (focus group participant)

Others described their relationship with their Retention Specialist was more of a “check the box” experience or felt that quarterly check-ins were unnecessary. A handful of focus group participants who were also eligible for TRIO Student Support Services<sup>8</sup> were more comfortable seeking support from TRIO, feeling that its advising team was more approachable and had a better sense of their needs.

*In my opinion, I feel like [Seattle Promise advisors] always have something else that they’re doing, and we’re not taken as a first priority. I don’t feel like I can go to them for general advice, just maybe about school.* – First-Year Scholar, 2020 Cohort (focus group participant)

*“I’m also in TRIO. I’m working on my transfer process right now, and I feel like I’m getting more support from TRIO than from my Promise Retention Specialists. This could be because TRIO is a smaller team, I find that they respond to my emails in a more timely manner and I just feel more comfortable talking to them.”* – (Seattle Promise Graduate, 2018 Cohort (Focus Group Participant)

**Finding 5: While most scholars surveyed felt that they were able to reach their Retention Specialist when needed, participant feedback suggests that Retention Specialists need more capacity to provide timely and in-depth support to all scholars.**

Scholars are required to meet with their Retention Specialist once per quarter to register for courses and track progress, but they may seek support from their Retention Specialist as often as needed. Eighty-four percent (84%) of scholars surveyed agreed (either agreed or strongly agreed) that their Retention Specialist was available when needed and 87% agreed that their advisor had enough time to help them with all their questions during check-ins (Current Scholar Survey). However, some scholars reported challenges accessing

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<sup>8</sup> TRIO Student Support Services is a federally funded advising program separate from Seattle Promise that provides outreach, support and assistance to low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

support from Retention Specialists, and 30% (N=8) of focus group participants mentioned generally wanting more support and responsiveness from their Retention Specialist when asked how Seattle Promise could better support their success (see Appendix G, Table G3). Participants who mentioned the limited capacity of Promise advising described issues such as not receiving responses to emails, not being able to handle course registration emergencies because their Retention Specialist had no appointments available, or generally feeling that Retention Specialists seemed preoccupied or rushed.

*“[Retention Specialists] definitely have a lot on their plates, so the response time is sometimes slow. When I do talk to them, I do feel supported and like I can ask them about school planning [and more].”*

-- First-Year Scholar, 2020 Cohort (focus group participant)

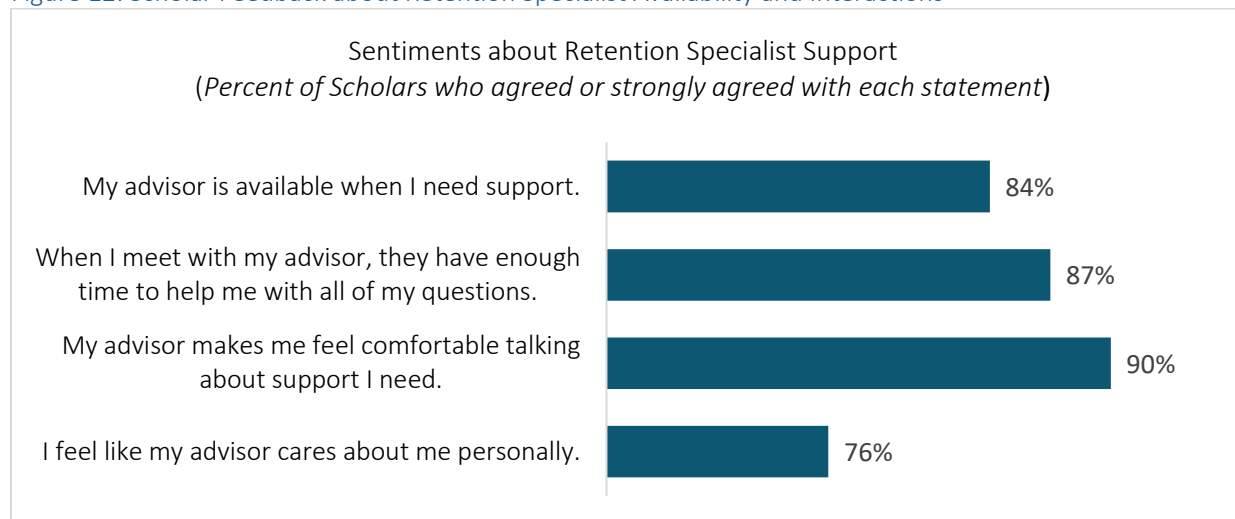
Retention Specialists also identified challenges they were experiencing in their work and expressed concerns about not having enough capacity to support scholars in the manner intended. They cited the following barriers:

- **Rapid growth in enrollment:** Retention Specialists mentioned generally lacking capacity to support all scholars fully but felt stretched especially thin in fall 2020 due to onboarding several new staff while orienting a large new cohort remotely.
- **Pandemic and remote environment:** Retention Specialists described difficulties contacting and building relationships with scholars remotely and expressed concern that incoming 2020 Cohort scholars would struggle to gain their footing in college without extra support. In addition, Retention Specialists reported that tracking scholars over email instead of connecting face-to-face had introduced an unexpected administrative burden.

*“My bandwidth is limited. I feel like Retention Specialists are so stretched that we aren’t always able to provide the level of tailored and equitable support needed by incoming students.”* – Retention Specialist

*“The first year (2019-2020) was way better organized and significantly more helpful. I haven't felt helped or heard at all since the scholarship increase in both students and advisors.”* —Second-Year Scholar, 2019 Cohort (Current Scholar Survey Respondent)

Figure 12: Scholar Feedback about Retention Specialist Availability and Interactions



# Insights and Opportunities

The following section presents recommended policy and program solutions that respond to scholar feedback about their college persistence and the Seattle Promise advising program. Recommendations aim to increase Seattle Promise retention with adjustments to eligibility policies and funding structure and promote successful academic progress, degree completion, and transfers by strengthening the existing advising program and adding new scholar supports. Each of the solutions presented is informed directly by suggestions provided by Seattle Promise scholars and staff during interviews and focus groups. By pursuing these opportunities, the City of Seattle and Seattle Colleges can mitigate scholar persistence barriers and promote equitable postsecondary outcomes for scholars furthest from educational justice.

## Seattle Promise Structure and Policies

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Evaluation findings showed that structural aspects of the Seattle Promise program affected scholar retention, and scholar feedback also suggests that losing funding and advising support from Seattle Promise can negatively impact persistence for scholars who rely on Promise supports the most. The structural adjustments below would ensure that scholars' academic support needs or personal and family circumstances don't lead scholars to lose essential financial support or stop attending college.

- **Expand Part-Time Enrollment Options.** Half (49%) of current scholars surveyed experienced challenges maintaining full-time enrollment, primarily due to academic support needs, personal hardship, or employment. Among scholar focus group participants, flexibility around full-time enrollment was one of the most common recommendations to support scholar success. Suggestions included allowing a lower credit load on a quarter-to-quarter basis when needed to prioritize academic progress, flexibility to spread credit load across quarters (including summer) within a two-year timeframe, and ensuring that all scholars are aware of their part-time enrollment appeal options.
- **Provide Flexible and Accessible Temporary Leave Options.** Suggestions from scholars included allowing short-term or long-term breaks in enrollment when students face personal or financial hardship and creating a path to regain eligibility for Promise.
- **Extend Financial Support Beyond 90 Credits.** Nearly half of Seattle Promise scholars enter college needing developmental (pre-college) courses, and many also struggle academically or experience indecision about their career goals and area of study. These factors limit scholars' ability to complete a degree with 90 credits of coursework or less. Suggested options from scholars for extending Seattle Promise completion funding included making exceptions to cover transfer prerequisites and pre-college courses, allowing scholars to earn more than 90 supported credits within a two-year window, offering scholars more formal connections to scholarships and other funding sources, and offering four years of funding to support transfers for scholars furthest from educational justice.



# Scholar Persistence Supports

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Top persistence challenges scholars identified were academic progress and navigating personal and financial hardship. When asked about their support needs, many scholars identified ways that Seattle Promise could better support academic and career planning and successful transfers. The following recommendations address top persistence barriers identified in this evaluation and support scholar degree completion and long-term postsecondary and career success.

- **Strengthen Academic Progress Supports.** Process evaluation findings indicate that academic progress is one of the top persistence challenges Seattle Promise scholars face. Potential strategies to strengthen academic progress support include a Promise-specific tutoring program and a first-year student success course.
- **Reduce the Need for Developmental Courses.** Nearly half of Seattle Promise scholars are placed in developmental (pre-college or remedial) courses and experience setbacks in academic progress and degree completion as a result. Developing policy and program solutions that reduce scholars' need to complete developmental coursework would reduce the amount of time it takes for scholars to complete a degree and reduce the financial burden on scholars who are unable to complete a degree within 90 credits due to developmental coursework. Potential strategies to consider include transcript-based placements, corequisite courses, or an academic bridge program.<sup>9</sup>
- **Provide Promise-Specific Career and Transfer Advising.** Sixty-eight percent of surveyed scholars entered Seattle Promise intending to transfer, and transfer and career planning were the top areas aside from academic progress where scholars indicated needing more support. Recommended transfer and career advising supports from scholar focus group participants included advisors with subject-matter expertise to help with decisions about career pathways and academic plans; in-depth transfer application support; and building relationships with transfer institutions to generate a smoother transfer pathway for Promise scholars.
- **Expand the Seattle Promise Internship Program.** One-third of surveyed scholars requested additional support connecting to job and internship opportunities. Scholar focus group participants who had participated in the Opportunity Promise program recommended expanding participating industries and types of positions represented and providing scholars with application and interview support to promote equitable access to the opportunity.
- **Extend Wraparound Financial Support.** Twenty-four percent of scholars surveyed during the process evaluation needed additional financial assistance. Solutions suggested by staff and scholars included increasing coverage of fees for equity scholarship recipients and establishing a Promise-specific student emergency fund.
- **Improve Connections to Mental Health Supports.** One in four scholars surveyed requested more support dealing with stress and mental health concerns. Recommendations from staff and scholars included professional development for Retention Specialists to provide mental health supports, workshops for scholars to learn about stress-management strategies, and a strong referral network for scholars seeking mental health counseling.

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<sup>9</sup> CUNY Start is an example of a comprehensive academic bridge program available to scholars in the City University of New York (CUNY) ASAP promise program (Kim et al, 2020 and Scrivener et al, 2018).

## Seattle Promise Advising Implementation

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In addition to requesting improved support with specific topics (addressed in “Scholar Persistence Supports” above), a top theme in advising feedback from scholar focus group participants was a desire for increased responsiveness and overall support from their Retention Specialist. Implementing the recommendations below would enable the Retention Advising program to more effectively support scholars furthest from educational justice, identify and respond to future persistence barriers, and ensure scholars feel welcomed at their college.

- **Increase Retention Advising Capacity.** Retention Specialists cited a need for increased administrative capacity to prioritize high-need scholars and provide personalized support. Added scholar persistence supports (see section above) would also require more staff capacity. Strategies to increase capacity could include a reduced student-to-staff ratio or added administrative support for Retention Specialists at each campus.
- **Introduce Advising and Persistence Data Tracking System.** A formal tracking tool to monitor scholar support needs will enable Retention Specialists to more effectively prioritize high-need scholars, identify and quantify persistence barriers, and support continuous improvement of the program. A tracking system may also be a useful method to provide tiered advising outreach to scholars depending on the level of support they need. Feedback from Retention Specialists interviewed indicates that some data-driven efforts to prioritize scholars are already taking place. Suggested data points include a record of reasons scholars exit Seattle Promise, advising touchpoints, flags for persistence barriers, and other indicators of scholar support needs.

*“I’m grateful and lucky that Seattle is doing [the Seattle Promise Program] . . . It’s just insane how expensive it is in America right now. I hope this can inspire other states to do something similar and provide greater access to higher education.”*

– Seattle Promise Scholar, 2020 Cohort

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# Appendix

## A: Methods

### Sampling and Analysis

Table A1: Sample, Data Collection Timing, and Analytical Method by Data Source

Data Source	Sample	Data Collection Timing	Analysis
<b>Milestone Data</b>	N/A (milestone data is available for all Seattle Promise scholars)	September 2020 and July 2021	Descriptive Statistics
<b>Retention Specialist Interviews</b>	Retention Specialists with at least one year of experience advising Seattle Promise scholars.	October 2020	Inductive qualitative coding
<b>Scholar Focus Groups</b>	Focus groups were conducted with a convenience sample of current and former scholars. Using a screener survey <sup>10</sup> of interested participants the evaluation team grouped and invited scholars to the following four focus group categories: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First-Year Scholars</li> <li>2. Second-Year Scholars</li> <li>3. First-Generation Scholars</li> <li>4. Former Promise Scholars (Scholars no longer in Promise but still enrolled in Seattle Colleges)</li> </ol>	November 2020	
<b>Current Scholar Survey</b>	The anonymous online survey was distributed to all currently enrolled Seattle Promise scholars.	February 2021	Descriptive statistics and subgroup analysis with tests for statistical significance (chi-square & t-tests).
<b>Scholar Exit Survey</b>	The anonymous survey was distributed on a rolling basis to scholars as they exited the Seattle Promise program.	December 2020 – May 2021	Descriptive statistics

#### Subgroup Analysis

Differences in survey responses between subgroups were analyzed for statistical significance using chi-square or t-tests, depending on question structure. For 5-point scale responses (such as Likert scales), each level was

<sup>10</sup> The focus group screener survey asked prospective focus group participants to identify their Cohort, enrollment status (part time or full time), race/ethnicity, whether they were first-generation college students, whether they were heritage language speakers, employment status, and the high school they attended.

converted to a numeric value used to compare differences in average “scores” between groups using t-testing. In some cases, scale responses were also analyzed using a threshold score using chi-square. For multi-select questions (for example, those that asked scholars to select one or more persistence challenges or support needs), a chi-square test was used.

### **Limitations:**

When using and interpreting the evaluation findings, the following limitations should be kept in mind:

- The evaluation findings rely on insights from a convenience sample: scholars volunteered to participate in focus groups or surveys, rather than being randomly selected. Insights from a non-random sample are subject to bias, because scholars who elected to participate in surveys or focus groups may have opinions or lived experiences that systematically differ from scholars who did not participate. For example, scholars who take an online survey may be less likely to be experiencing barriers related to technology access than Seattle Promise scholars overall. As a result, findings provide a snapshot of Promise scholar experiences but are not generalizable to the full student body.
- Due to the low response rate to the scholar Exit Survey, evaluation findings about persistence barriers and the quality of Seattle Promise advising rely almost entirely on feedback from current scholars. Scholars who have remained in the program are less likely to have experienced persistence barriers and may have different support needs than scholars who exited the program. In addition, persistence barriers presented in this report describe challenges or pressures scholars experience but do not capture how often these barriers lead scholars to exit the program.

## Retention Specialist Interview Protocol

**Estimated duration:** 1 hour (1.5 hour scheduled for flexibility)

[Preamble]

The purpose of this interview is to discuss your perspective about how you conduct your work as a Retention Specialist, and to learn from you about common persistence barriers students face.

As a reminder, I am planning to record the interview today and take high level notes during our conversation. I will use the recording as backup in case I need to refer back to something key you said, but I will delete the recording after 30 days. Until then, it will be stored in a City of Seattle secure drive.

I will combine the information you share with me today with feedback I receive from the other Retention Specialists I’m interviewing and report notable themes and takeaways across the interviews in the final report for this evaluation. I will not explicitly connect any identifying information about you to the information you share with me.

Your participation in our interview today is voluntary, so if at any point during our conversation you’d like to take a break, stop the interview, or ask me to stop recording, please feel free to speak up.

Do you have any questions before we start?



## QUESTIONS

### [Seattle Promise Retention Advising Model]

One goal of this process evaluation is to assess whether retention advising is being implemented as intended. What I'm hoping to gain from our conversation today is a clearer picture of the scope of Seattle Promise Advising and what you think makes it successful.

1. **As a starting point, can you provide me with a high-level overview of how you provide advising to your students?**

Prompts if needed:

- What does a typical advising session look like?
- Do students typically reach out to you, or do you spend time contacting students?

2. **What is the scope of the support you provide to Seattle Promise Scholars?**

Prompts:

- Aside from helping students register for classes, what other issues or questions do Promise Scholars come to you with?
- For which issues or topics do you refer students elsewhere?

3. **What do you strive for in your approach to advising? If you could choose indicators that your advising has been successful, what would they be?**

Prompt if needed:

- What would you like students to say about your advising to know it's successful? For example: "My advisor has helped me create an academic plan that I feel good about."

4. **In what ways do you pursue cultural responsiveness in your advising practice?**

### [Promise retention, persistence, and exiting]

5. **Have you seen your advisees face challenges in meeting Seattle Promise eligibility requirements? If so, what were the challenges?**

6. My understanding is that there are a few scenarios for students who exit Seattle Promise. These include: 1) they lose eligibility and decide to stay enrolled at the Seattle Colleges, 2) they lose eligibility and stop attending college, 3) they transfer to another institution. **Do you have experience advising students in one or more of these contexts? If so, can you describe how you support or are involved in the process?**

Prompts, if needed:

- Do you keep track of the reasons each student exits? If so, where and how do you record that data?
- Do you typically meet with or know about students stopping out? What does that contact look like?
- Do you give your students an exit survey?

7. Have you seen your advisees face challenges persisting as college students in general? If so, can you describe some of these challenges?
8. If you could make improvements to the student experience that would help with persistence, what improvements would you make?

[COVID]

9. Has COVID impacted how you deliver retention advising? If so, in what ways?
10. What are the most significant ways you think COVID could affect Seattle Promise students' experiences in college?

## Scholar Focus Group Protocol

**Duration:** 1.5 hours

[Preamble]

I really appreciate you all being here today. The purpose of this focus group is to hear from you about your experience as Seattle Promise Scholars. This is a chance for you to give honest feedback that will help make the program better for current and future Promise Scholars.

As a reminder, I am planning to record the interview today and take some notes during our conversation. I will use the recording as backup in case I need to refer back to something key you said, but I will delete the recording after 30 days. Until then, it will be stored in a City of Seattle secure drive.

The recording will not be shared with anyone at Seattle Promise, and any information you share will be kept completely separate from your identity. I will combine the information I hear from you into overarching themes and recommendations that I will include in an evaluation report next year.

Ground rules:

- We're here today to share our individual perspectives and experiences. All responses are valid – there are no right or wrong answers. Please respect the opinions of others even if you don't agree.
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable. If there is a question you don't want to answer, there won't be any pressure for you to do so.
- Let's all respect each other's privacy. Please do not discuss any details you hear from other students outside this group.
- Your participation in our interview today is voluntary, so if at any point during the conversation you'd like to take a break or stop participating, you can feel free to do so.

Does anyone have questions before we start?

## QUESTIONS

[Introductions]

Let's start off by everyone introducing themselves. Please share your name, what college you attend, and, if you'd like, one fun fact.

[Overall attitudes about college and Seattle Promise]

**1. Overall, how do you feel about your experience as Seattle Promise Scholars?**

Prompts:

- What are the positive aspects about being in Seattle Promise?
- Are there any challenges or questions that have come up for you about your college experience?

[Advising and student supports]

In the next couple of questions, I'd like to hear about your experiences with your Seattle Promise advisor and other ways that you get support in school.

**2. How would you describe your relationship with your Seattle Promise advisor?**

Prompts:

- Do you feel comfortable going to them for advice?

**3. In what ways have your advisors been able to support you with your education or career planning?**

**4. Are there things that your advisor has been less helpful with?**

**5. Do you have other people in your life, either at school or in your personal life, that you go to for advice about your education or career?**

[Retention, Persistence, and Exiting]

**6. I know that there are a few requirements that Seattle Promise scholars need to meet each quarter to make sure they are still eligible for their scholarship. They include meeting with your advisor every quarter, filling out financial aid paperwork, etc. Based on your experience as a student so far, how easy has it been to meet these requirements?**

**7. How much do you know about the process for transferring to another school after your two years at the Seattle Colleges?**

Follow-up:

- How did you learn this information?

**8. If you plan to transfer, what has the process of planning for a transfer been like for you so far?**

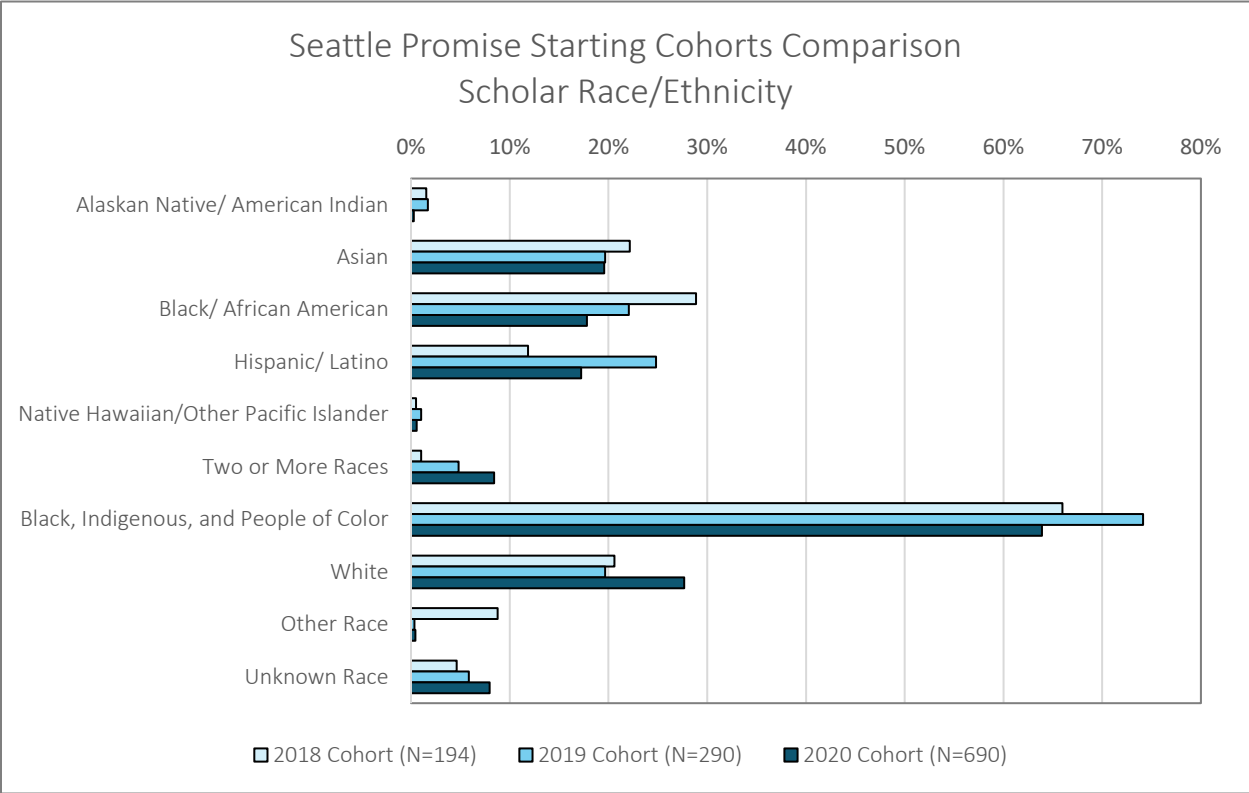
Follow-up:

- How have your Seattle Promise advisors supported you in this process?

9. College can be challenging, and there are a lot of things that can affect whether continuing for the full two years works out. **If you feel comfortable sharing, what barriers or challenges do you feel could stand in the way of you completing a degree or transferring?**
10. **What kind of support could help make these challenges easier to deal with?**
11. **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in Seattle Promise?**

# B: Milestone Data Charts

Figure B1: Race/Ethnicity of Seattle Promise Starting Cohorts



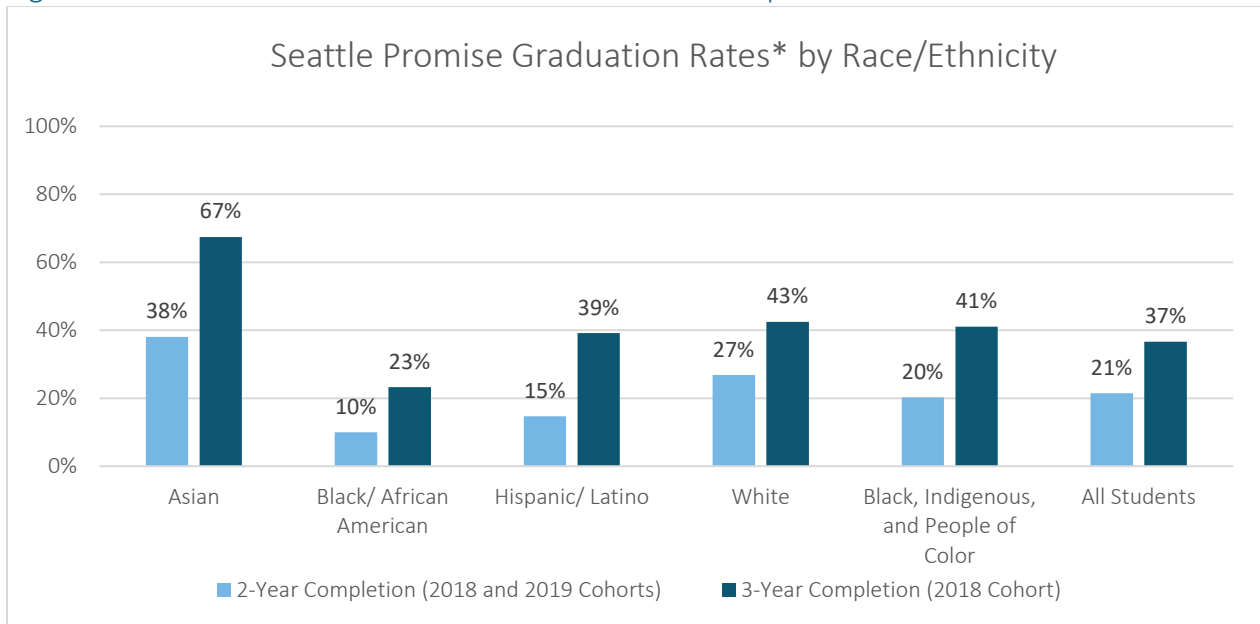
Data Source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data (December 2021)

Table B1: Race/Ethnicity of Seattle Promise Starting Cohorts

Scholar Race/ Ethnicity	2018 Cohort	2019 Cohort	2020 Cohort
Alaskan Native/ American Indian	2%	2%	<1%
Asian	22%	20%	20%
Black/ African American	29%	22%	18%
Hispanic/ Latino	12%	25%	17%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
Two or More Races	<1%	5%	8%
White	21%	20%	28%
Other Race	9%	<1%	<1%
Unknown Race	5%	6%	8%
<b>Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Subtotal)</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data Source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data (December 2021)

Figure B2: Student Characteristics of Promise Scholars Compared to Non-Promise Peers



Data Source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data (December 2021)

\*Included in graduation rate: Scholars who began college enrolled in Seattle Promise and completed a certificate or degree at the Seattle Colleges. Some graduates complete their degree after exiting the Seattle Promise program.

Table B2: Student Characteristics of Promise Scholars Compared to Non-Promise Peers

Student Characteristics	Seattle Promise Scholars (Percent)	Graduates not in Promise (Percent)	Difference
<b>2019 SPS High School Graduates</b>			
Homeless	7%	4%	3%
English Language Learner	20%	8%	12%
Special Education	10%	6%	4%
ELA SBA Met Standard	68%	85%	-17%
Math SBA Met Standard	35%	63%	-28%
<b>2020 SPS High School Graduates</b>			
Homeless	5%	4%	1%
English Language Learner	17%	8%	9%
Special Education	11%	9%	2%
ELA SBA Met Standard	76%	85%	-9%
Math SBA Met Standard	44%	66%	-22%

Data sources: Seattle Promise Milestone Data, and Seattle Public Schools Data analyzed by DEEL (March 2021)



Table B3: Enrollment in Developmental (Pre-College) Courses by Cohort and Race

Scholar Race/Ethnicity	2018 Cohort		2019 Cohort		2020 Cohort	
	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort
All Students	103	53%	129	44%	338	49%
Alaskan Native/ American Indian	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Asian	16	37%	14	25%	50	37%
Black/ African American	37	66%	42	66%	65	53%
Hispanic/ Latino	14	61%	37	51%	82	69%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Other Race	11	65%	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Two or More Races	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	30	52%
Unknown Race	n<10	n<10	11	65%	25	45%
White	16	40%	17	30%	83	43%

Data source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data

\*Includes the number of scholars in each cohort who had attempted to complete any remedial course credits by Fall 2021

Table B4: Scholars Entering with College Credits Earned in High School

Scholar Race/Ethnicity	2018 Cohort		2019 Cohort		2020 Cohort	
	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort	Number of students*	Percent of starting cohort
All Students	68	35%	108	37%	262	38%
Alaskan Native/ American Indian	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Asian	24	56%	20	35%	61	45%
Black/ African American	12	21%	16	25%	45	37%
Hispanic/ Latino	n<10	n<10	26	36%	28	24%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Other Race	n<10	n<10		n<10	n<10	n<10
Two or More Races		0%	n<10	64%	23	40%
Unknown Race	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	18	33%
White	20	50%	29	51%	86	45%

Data source: Seattle Promise Milestone Data

# C: Promise Advising Program Details

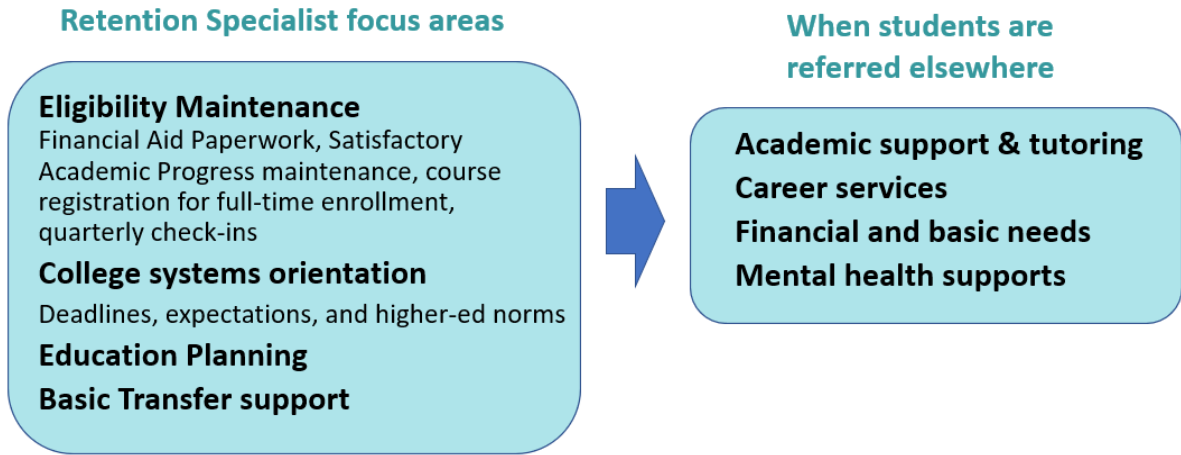
## How Retention Specialists Support Seattle Promise Scholars

The table below contains themes from interviews with Seattle Promise Retention Specialists about the scope of supports they provide. Each theme was described by at least two of the four staff interviewed.

Table C1: Themes from Retention Specialist Interviews: Seattle Promise Retention Advising Program Scope

COLLEGE TRANSITION	
<b>Introduction to Seattle Promise requirements</b>	Facilitating Summer Bridge, and ongoing orientation to program requirements during scholars' first quarter in Promise.
<b>Navigating new institutional norms</b>	Understanding and anticipating deadlines, decoding paperwork, and orienting scholars to new norms such as email communication or implications of not meeting deadlines.
<b>Social-emotional support</b>	Talking scholars through imposter syndrome, encouraging self-advocacy skills, or providing culturally-relevant insights related to navigating a higher education institution as a person of color or first-generation scholar.
ELIGIBILITY MAINTENANCE	
<b>Maintaining SAP &amp; Full-Time Enrollment</b>	Helping scholars understand the nuances of the requirements, checking in with scholars when they are at risk of not meeting a requirement, and supporting scholars through appeals processes.
<b>Financial Aid Paperwork</b>	Due to high scholar need for support with financial aid paperwork, Financial Aid Specialists are available to support scholars with FAFSA/WASFA paperwork and other needs related to financial aid eligibility and maintenance, in addition to Retention Advising.
<b>Quarterly check-ins</b>	Retention specialists use multiple methods of reaching students for quarterly check-ins, including 1-1 sessions, phone calls, and drop-in advising
ACADEMIC ADVISING & CAREER PLANNING	
<b>Education Planning and Course Registration</b>	Helping scholars develop a 2-year education plan and select which courses to take according to their desired area of study, and supporting scholars with course registration. Retention Specialists also described advising scholars on how to organize their credits to meet transfer requirements, and helping scholars navigate full-time enrollment requirements.
<b>English and Math Placement</b>	Helping scholars determine whether they need to complete developmental (pre-college) coursework in Math or English. Retention Specialists reported placement processes that varied by campus, with methods that included placement tests and some transcript-based placement options.
<b>Career Planning</b>	Advising related to career planning included talking students through decisions about how a certain area of study would impact their course requirements, and providing advice for how to build themselves into 21st-century scholars and being effective in any space enter. For in-depth support and services like resume review or job applications, Retention Specialists typically referred scholars to their campuses career center.
BRIDGING & REFERRALS	
<b>Academic and Career Development Support</b>	Referrals to Seattle Colleges career centers, tutoring services, and advice about internship opportunities such as Opportunity Promise.

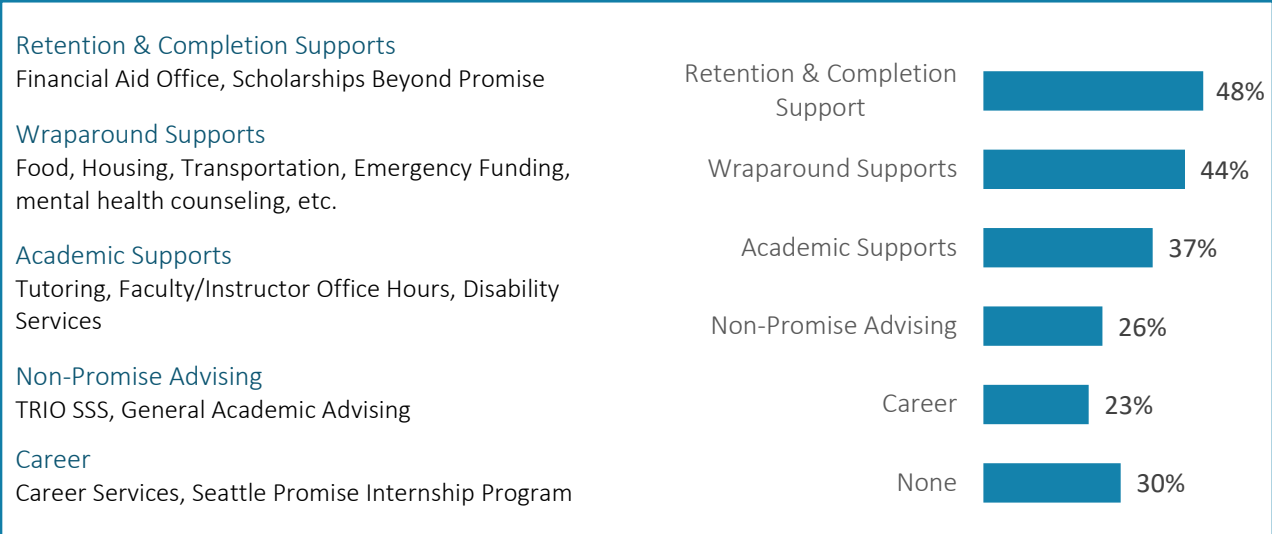
<b>Wraparound Supports</b>	Referrals to resources for financial and basic needs (both Seattle Colleges resources and external sources of support from the City and the County), various emergency funding sources, and connections to health and counseling services.
<b>Support for Exiting Scholars</b>	Connecting scholars to general academic advising and non-Promise funding resources to help ease their transition out of Promise.



## Referrals

Respondents to the Current Scholar Survey (N=178) were asked to indicate supports their Retention Specialist had referred by them to by checking one or more options from a list (or enter their own). The figure below summarizes the referral categories scholars selected most often. A detailed breakdown of 18 individual referral services is available in Appendix D, Table D21.

Figure C1: Referrals Cited by Current Scholar Survey Respondents



Data Source: Current Scholar Survey (N=178), Administered February 2021

# D: Current Scholar Survey Results

## Respondent Demographics

Table D1: Survey Response Rates by Cohort

Cohort	Number of Scholars Enrolled*	Number of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
2019	111	33	30% of 2019 cohort
2020	555	145	26% of 2020 cohort
<b>Total</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>27% of Seattle Promise Scholars</b>

\*Total Seattle Promise enrollment during Winter Quarter 2021, when the survey was administered.

Table D2: Survey Response Rates by College Campus

Seattle College Campus	Number of Scholars Enrolled*	Number of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
North	210	58	28% of North student body
Central	287	83	29% of Central student body
South	169	37	22% of South student body

\*Total Seattle Promise enrollment during Winter Quarter 2021, when the survey was administered.

Table D3: Respondent Gender

Which option best describes your gender identity?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Compared to Seattle Promise Student Body
Female	55%	95	+4%
Male	40%	69	-8%
Non-binary	5%	8	
<b>Total*</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>653</b>

\*Non-responses excluded in total.

Table D4: Respondent Race/Ethnicity

How do you identify?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Compared to Seattle Promise Student Body
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	3	+1%
Asian or Asian American	39%	68	+13%
Black or African American	17%	29	-3%
Hispanic or Latinx	16%	28	-5%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%	1	N/A
White	20%	34	-12%
Two or more races	6%	11	+5%
<b>Subtotal: BIPOC</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<b>Total*</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>570</b>

\*Non-responses excluded in total.

Table D5: Heritage Language Speakers

Is English the primary language you speak at home?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
No	46%	81
Yes	54%	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>177</b>

Table D6: First-Generation College Students

Are you a first-generation college student? (Select “yes” if neither of your parents or guardians received a bachelor’s degree from the United States).	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	47%	83
No	46%	81
I'm not sure	7%	12

Table D7: Seattle Promise Tuition Support

Did you receive Seattle Promise Tuition Support?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	51%	91
I'm not sure	39%	70
No	8%	15

Table D8: Equity Scholarship

Did you receive an Equity Scholarship (help with fees)?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	51%	91
I'm not sure	21%	38
No	11%	19

Table D9: Employment Status

Are you currently employed?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
No, I am not currently employed.	54%	93
Yes, I work part time (fewer than 30 hours each week).	36%	62
Yes, I work full time (more than 30 hours each week).	9%	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>171</b>

Table D10: Enrollment Status

Are you a part-time or full-time student?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Compared to Seattle Promise Student Body*
Full-time (12+ credits)	82%	142	+4%
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits, I filled out a part-time request)	18%	32	-4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>666</b>

\*Total excludes N=4 who were unsure of part-time status

## Survey Results, All Respondents

Table D11: Satisfaction with Seattle Promise

How satisfied are you with your experience as a Seattle Promise Scholar overall?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
<b>Satisfied (somewhat + very)</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>152</b>
Very satisfied	52%	93
Somewhat satisfied	33%	59
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7%	13
Somewhat dissatisfied	7%	12
Very dissatisfied	1%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>

Table D12: Scholar Goals

Which of the options below best describes your current plans for your time in Seattle Promise?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Begin career after earning 2-year degree	12%	22
Transfer	68%	126
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination: 4-year college/university after completing degree</li> </ul>	61%	108
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination: 4-year college/university before completing degree</li> </ul>	7%	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination: 2-year college or technical school</li> </ul>	3%	6
Undecided	16%	28
I don't think I will continue attending college for a full two years.	1%	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>

Table D13: Overall Feedback: Financial Needs, Academic Support, and Campus Environment

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Percent Agree*	Number of Respondents
I have the financial support I need to attend college.	82%	146
I have the support I need to succeed in my classes.	69%	123
I feel welcomed at the college I attend.	71%	127

\*4 + 5 on Likert Scale.

Table D14: Contribution of Seattle Promise to Scholar Growth and Career Readiness

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*	Percent Agree	Number of Respondents
<b>Because of Seattle Promise...</b>		
I am more aware of resources available to me on campus.	63%	113
I have a better understanding of my personal and academic strengths.	66%	117
I have a better understanding of my career goals.	63%	112
I feel more prepared for the rest of my college and career journey.	65%	116

\*Students were asked to consider the support they have received in Promise so far, including one-on-one meetings with Retention Specialist, first year orientation, and workshops or events.




Table D15: Overall Satisfaction with Seattle Promise Advising

How satisfied are you with the support you receive from your Seattle Promise advisor(s)?	Percent	Number
Very dissatisfied	1%	1
Somewhat dissatisfied	3%	6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3%	5
Somewhat satisfied	27%	48
Very satisfied	66%	118
<b>Percent satisfied (somewhat + very)</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>166</b>

Table D16: Frequency of Contact with Seattle Promise Advising

Since school started this fall, how many times have you met with your Seattle Promise advisor?	Percent	Number
<b>I have not met with my advisor.</b>	1%	2
<b>Once</b>	7%	13
<b>Twice</b>	33%	58
<b>Three or more times.</b>	59%	105
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>

Table D17: Areas in which survey respondents were more likely to have received support

SUPPORT AREA	Percent of students who received* support in each area:	
Course registration	93%	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>More Common</b></p>  <p><b>Less Common</b></p> </div>
Academic planning	93%	
Help meeting eligibility requirements	92%	
Connecting to academic support	85%	
Financial aid paperwork	83%	
Advice about college transition	82%	
Transfer planning	79%	
Time management and study skills	78%	
Career planning	74%	
Dealing with stress at school or at home	73%	
Connecting to job and internship opportunities	65%	
Transfer applications	59%	

\*Portion of scholars surveyed who did not select "N/A: I have not needed or asked for support in this area."

Table D18: Helpfulness of Seattle Promise Advising Supports (Eligibility & Enrollment)

Eligibility and Enrollment	Percent who received support	Percent of students who found the support helpful
Registering for classes	93%	99%
Coming up with an academic plan	93%	96%
Helping you meet Promise program requirements	92%	93%
Filling out financial aid paperwork	83%	92%
<b>Average across support area</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>95%</b>

Figure D1:

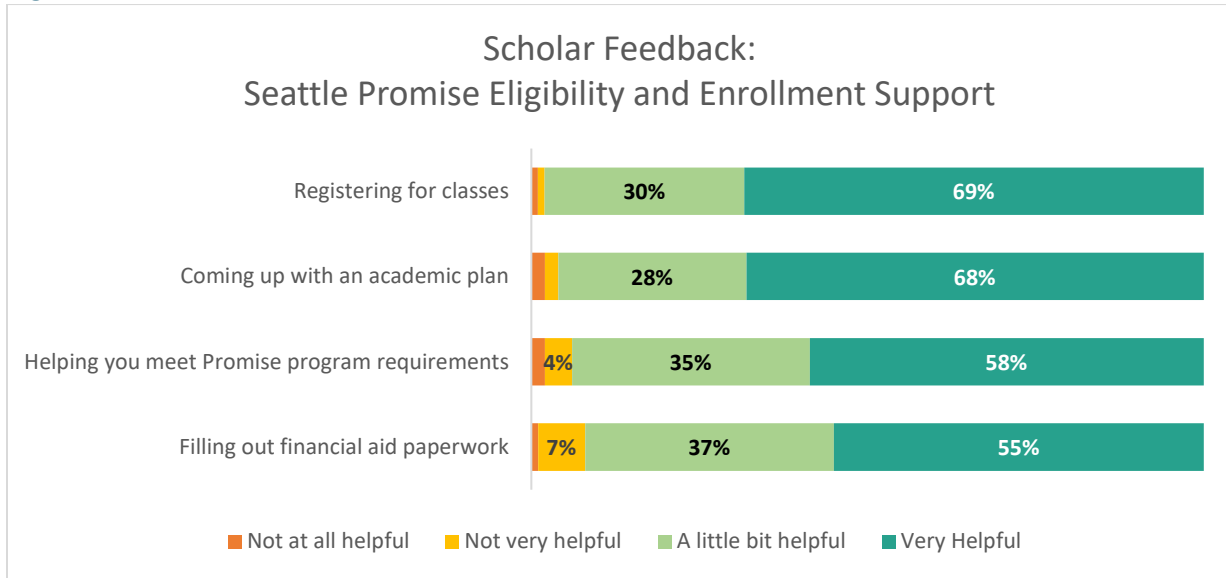


Table D19: Helpfulness of Seattle Promise Advising Supports (General Student Success)

General Student Success	Percent who received support	Percent of students who found the support helpful
Advice about how to adjust to college	82%	87%
Time management and study skills	78%	79%
Finding support you need to succeed in your classes.	85%	86%
Dealing with stress at school or at home	73%	73%
<b>Average across support area</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Figure D2:

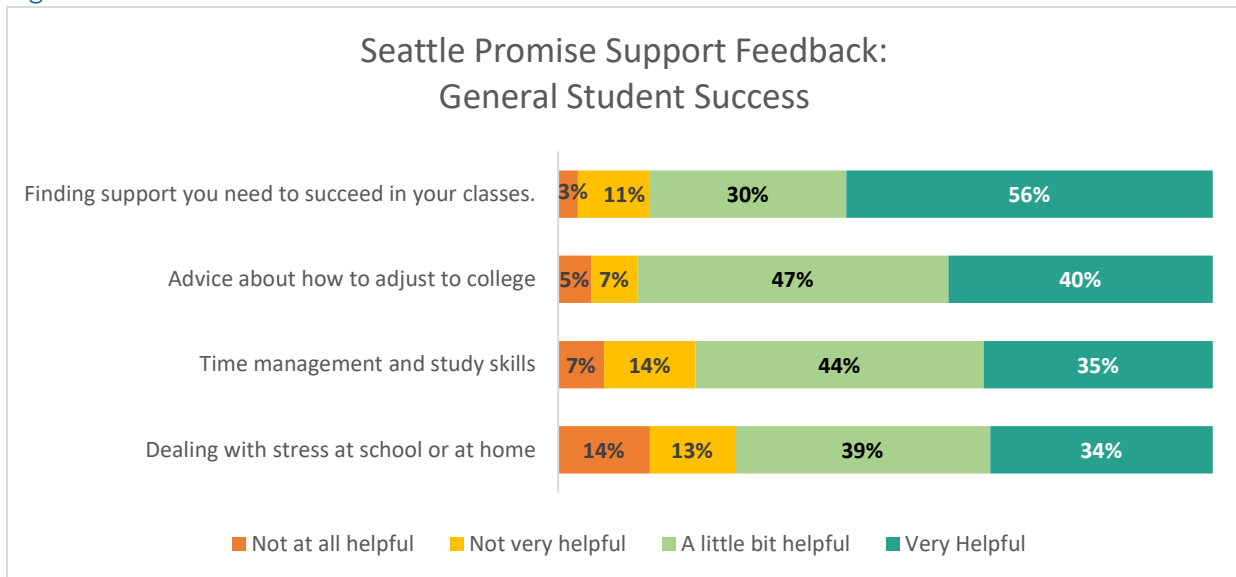


Table D20: Helpfulness of Seattle Promise Advising Supports (Transfer & Career)

Transfer and Career	Percent who received support	Percent of students who found the support helpful
Career planning	74%	91%
Transfer planning (learning about options & prerequisites)	79%	90%
Transfer applications	59%	82%
Connecting to job and internship opportunities	65%	79%
<b>Average across support area</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>86%</b>

Figure D3:

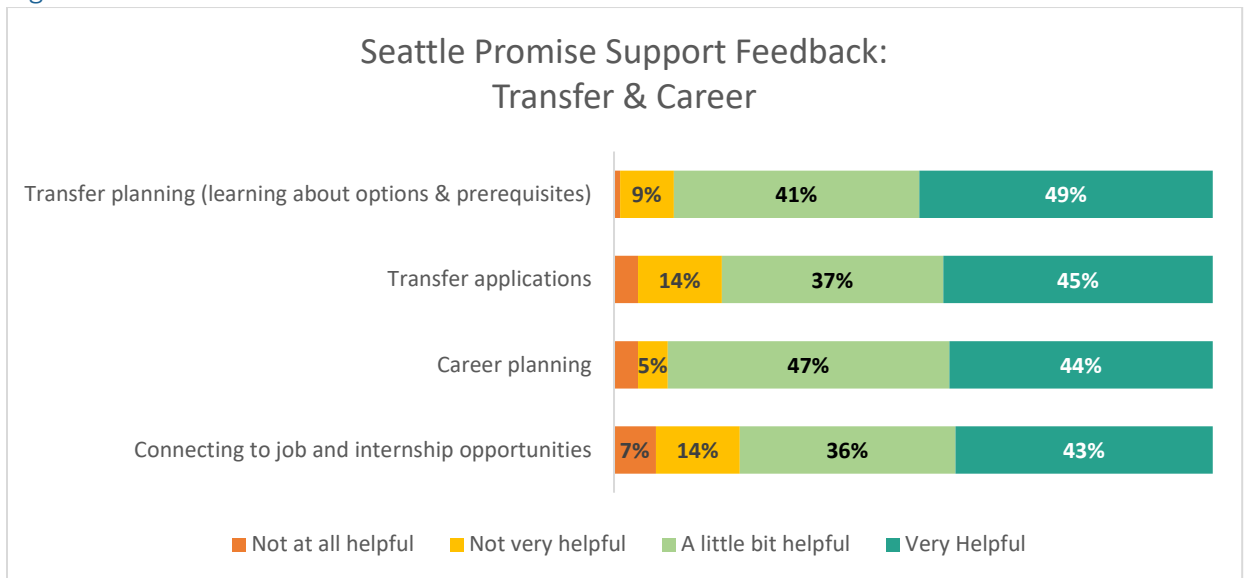


Table D21: Referrals

Aside from Promise Advising, there are other resources on campus that Retention Specialists might refer you to. Has your advisor connected you to any of these resources?	Percent* of Respondents	Number of Respondents
None	30%	54
Financial Aid Office	42%	75
City of Seattle ORCA opportunity cards (transportation)	34%	61
Tutoring	31%	56
Scholarships beyond Promise	22%	40
Faculty/instructor office hours	19%	33
Promise Internship Program	18%	32
TRIO SSS	17%	31
General Academic Advising	13%	24
Technology requests	13%	23
Career Services	10%	17
Emergency Funding	9%	16
Food Support	7%	13
Mental health counseling	7%	12

Other off-campus resources	6%	11
Housing Support	6%	10
Benefits Hub	6%	10
Disability Services	2%	3
Academy for Rising Educators (ARE)	1%	2

\*Percentages exceed 100% total as students had the option of making multiple selections.

Table D22: Seattle Promise Advising Relationships and Access

Thinking about your experience meeting with your Seattle Promise advisor(s), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Agree or Strongly Agree
I feel like my advisor cares about me personally.	76%
My advisor is available when I need support.	84%
My advisor makes me feel comfortable talking about support I need.	90%
When I meet with my advisor, they have enough time to help me with all of my questions.	87%

Figure D4: Seattle Promise Advising Relationships and Access

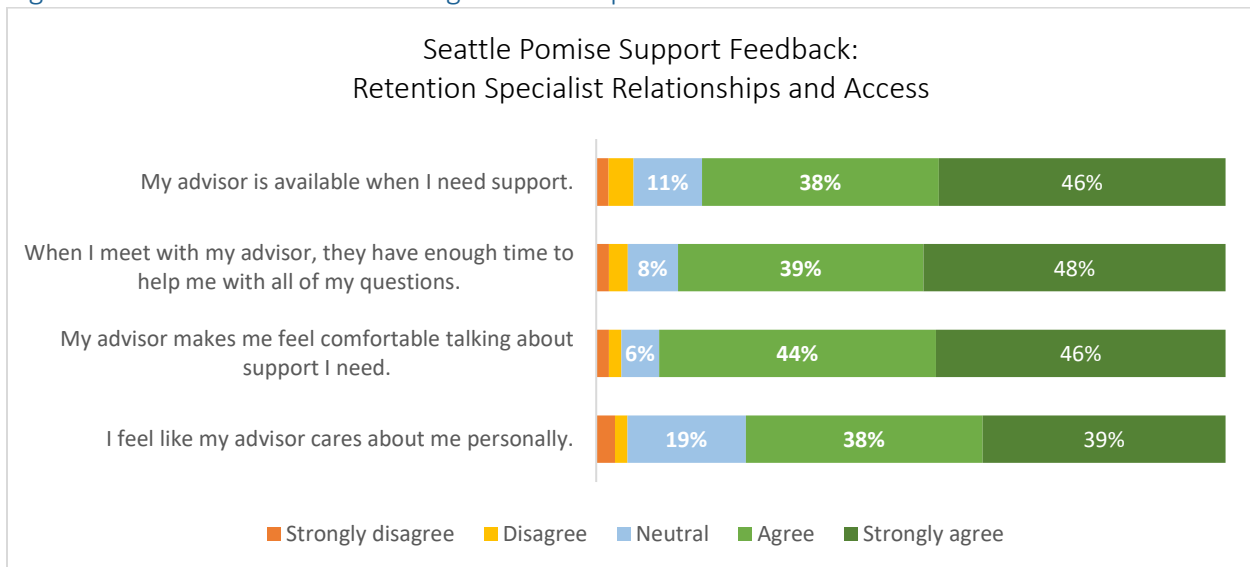


Table D23: Seattle Promise Eligibility Requirement: Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

Seattle Promise requires scholars to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress to stay in the program. This usually includes: • Maintaining a 2.0 GPA each quarter • Completing (not withdrawing from) the classes you register to take.

Please rate the level of difficulty you've experienced maintaining Satisfactory Academic progress on a scale from 1 to 5.	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
1 (not at all challenging)	13%	24
2	15%	26
3	35%	62
4	22%	39
5 (very challenging)	15%	27
<b>Percent challenging (4+)</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>66</b>

Table D24: Seattle Promise Eligibility Requirement: Full-Time enrollment

Responses are limited to scholars who were enrolled full time.

Please rate the level of difficulty you've experienced staying enrolled full time (12+ credits).	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
1 (not at all challenging)	7%	10
2	14%	20
3	30%	44
4	24%	35
5 (very challenging)	25%	37
<b>Percent challenging (4+)</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>72</b>

Table D25: 90-Credit Limit

Seattle Promise supports students with 90 credits of college courses. Based on your education plan, is 90 credits enough for you to graduate or transfer?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes, 90 credits is enough for me to reach all my goals.	38%	72
90 credits is enough for my degree but not all my transfer prerequisites.	6%	13
No, 90 credits is not enough to complete my associate degree.	7%	14
I don't know yet.	49%	79
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>

Table D26: Reasons 90-Credit Limit Insufficient

Students who responded that 90 credits would not be enough to complete their associate degree or transfer requirements were asked a follow-up question about reasons 90 credits were not sufficient.

	Percent*	Number	Total
I failed or had to retake a class (or classes)	48%	13	27
Taking developmental courses (Math and English requirements below 100 don't count toward degree)	33%	9	27
My degree requires more than 90 credits	30%	8	27
Taking classes outside education plan to meet full-time enrollment requirement	26%	7	27
Took extra classes because undecided	26%	7	27
Transfer prerequisites that don't count toward degree	26%	7	27
Other (Open-Ended)	4%	1	27

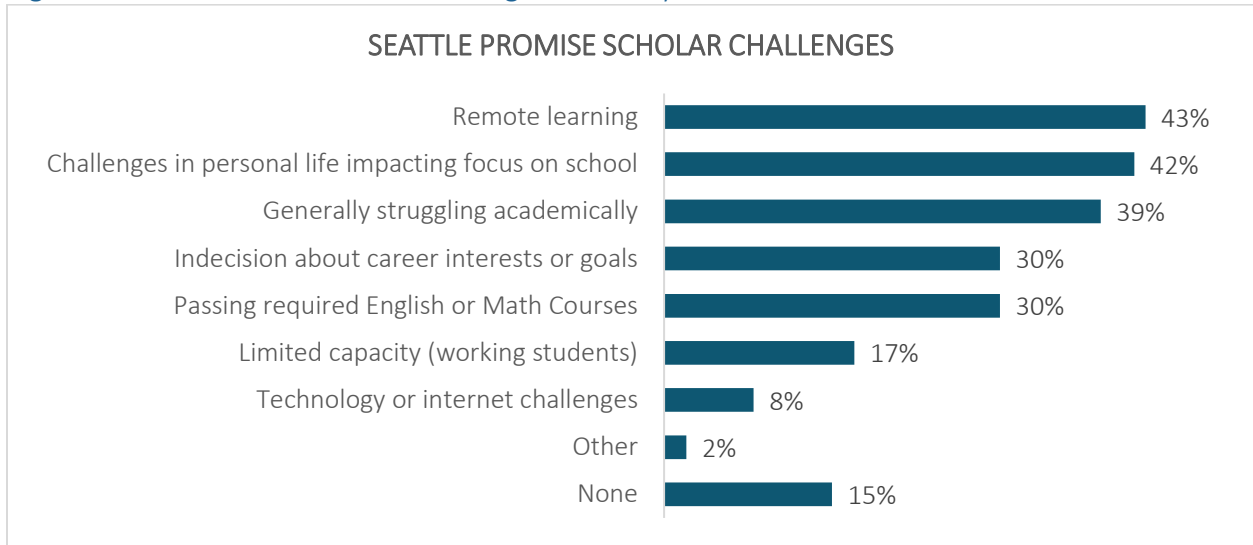
\*Percent of students for whom 90 credits was not enough to meet one or more goals.

Table D27: Scholar Challenges

Are you experiencing any of the following challenges in your college journey?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Remote Learning	43%	77
Personal or Family issues that make it harder to focus on school	42%	74
I am having a hard time doing well in my classes in general.	39%	69
I'm undecided about my career interests or goals	30%	53
Passing Required Math Courses	23%	41
I don't have much time for school because I work	17%	30

Passing Required English Courses	11%	20
I don't have reliable internet	6%	11
I don't have my own computer to use for coursework	2%	4
Other (Open-Ended)	2%	3
None	15%	26

Figure D5: General Persistence Challenges of Surveyed Scholars



Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered February 2021.

Table D28: Pre-College Course Placement

At the beginning of college, all students are placed into a math or English level to start out. Did you place into a math or English class with course numbers less than 100?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes: Both Math and English	18%	32
Yes: English only	6%	11
Yes: Math only	26%	46
No, all my classes have been 100 or higher.	42%	74
I don't know	8%	15
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>

Table D29: Pre-College Course Feedback

Thinking about the first math and English courses you've taken, how would you describe your experience in the classes?	English (N=66)	Math (N=88)
Class was too easy (repeat content)	6%	15%
Class was just right	70%	52%
Class was too hard	20%	25%
I don't know yet	5%	8%

Figure D6: Feedback about Developmental (Pre-college or Remedial) Courses

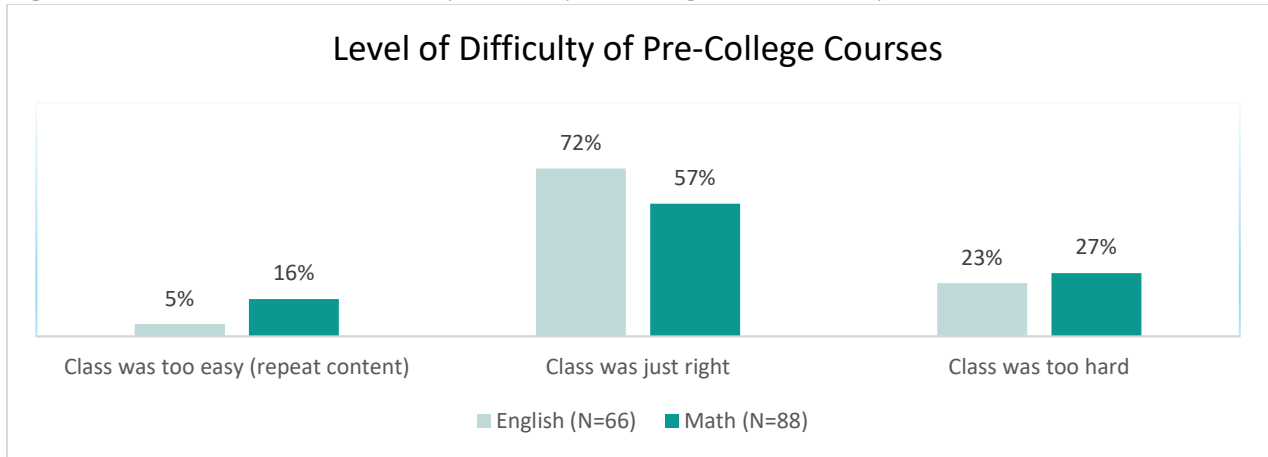


Table D30: Scholar Support Needs

	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
None	27%	48
Transfer Support	33%	59
Academic Progress (more support with grades and passing classes)	32%	57
Career Planning	31%	56
Job or internship opportunities	30%	53
Academic Planning	29%	51
Extra Financial Assistance	24%	43
Mental Health and Stress Management	24%	43
Financial Aid Applications	19%	33
Orientation Support	11%	20
Other	1%	1



# E: Current Scholar Survey Subgroup Comparison

Current Scholar Survey feedback about persistence challenges and advising support needs were disaggregated by race, English language learners, and whether scholars were first-generation college students to better understand the experiences of scholars furthest from educational justice. To explore how persistence barriers may compound on one another, scholar feedback about eligibility requirements were also compared according to whether they were employed, placed into pre-college courses, and reporting struggling academically. Key, statistically significant findings are summarized below:

**Scholar experiences and persistence barriers:**

- Scholars who identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (scholars of color) rated full-time enrollment and SAP eligibility requirements more challenging to maintain on average than white scholars (Table E2).
- Scholars placed in developmental courses (Math and English courses below the 100 level) and scholars who self-identified as struggling academically were more likely to experience challenges with SAP and full-time enrollment requirements (Figure E1 and Table E2).

**Seattle Promise advising feedback:**

- Scholars of color were more likely to agree that Seattle Promise supports had made them feel more aware of resources available to them on campus and gave them a better understanding of their personal and academic strengths (Table E4).
- While satisfaction with Seattle Promise advising did not vary significantly across race/ethnicity and primary language, First Generation scholars felt slightly less satisfied on average with Retention Advising support (Table E3). First generation scholars were also less likely to agree than non-first generation scholars that their advisor was available when needed and that their advisor made them feel comfortable and cared for personally when seeking support (Table E5).
- Black/African American scholars were less likely than scholars of other races to agree that their Retention Specialist made them feel comfortable seeking support and had time to answer all their questions (Table E6).

**Scholar support needs:**

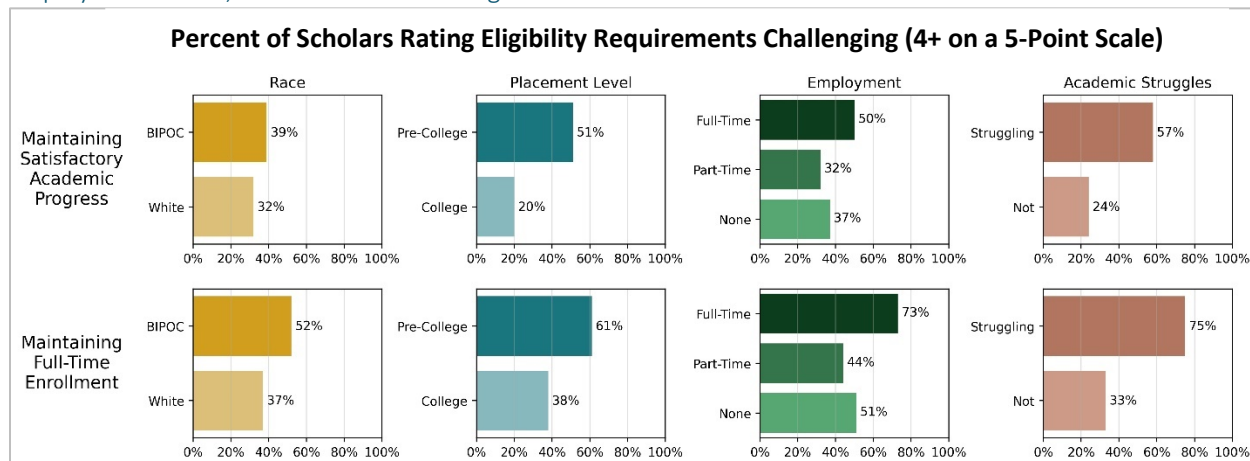
- Scholars of color were more likely to indicate needing support in the following areas than white scholars and scholars who spoke English as a primary language: Academic Planning, Transfer Support, Job and Internship Opportunities, and Extra Financial Assistance (see Table E6 and Figure E2).
- Scholars who primarily spoke a language other than English at home were more likely to indicate needing support with Financial Aid Applications and Transfer Support (see Table E6 and Figure E3).

Table E1: Financial, Academic, and Social Support Feedback by Race/Ethnicity

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	BIPOC Respondents	White Respondents
	<i>Numeric Likert Scale Average (1=Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)</i>	
I have the financial support I need to attend college.*	4.0	4.3
I have the support I need to succeed in my classes.	3.8	3.8
I feel welcomed at the college I attend.	4.0	4.0

\*Difference statistically significant at p<0.10

Figure E1: Scholar Feedback about SAP and Full-Time Enrollment Requirements by Race, College Placement, Employment Status, and Academic Challenges



Source: Seattle Promise Current Scholar Survey, 178 respondents, administered by DEEL February 2021. Pre-college placement: survey respondents who reported taking any developmental (pre-college) courses when enrolled in Seattle Promise.

Table E2: Eligibility Requirement Feedback by Scholar Demographics

Average Challenge Meeting Requirement from 1 (Not at all Challenging) to 5 (Very Challenging)

Scholar Demographics ( <i>Comparison Group</i> )	Satisfactory Academic Progress	Full-Time Enrollment
	Average Challenge Level ( <i>Diff. from Comparison Group</i> )	
BIPOC ( <i>White</i> )	3.3 (0.7***)	3.6 (0.7***)
Non-English Primary Language ( <i>English Primary Language</i> )	3.2 (0.2)	3.6 (0.3)
Employed Full Time ( <i>Not employed</i> )	3.4 (0.3)	3.9 (0.4)
Employed Part Time ( <i>Not employed</i> )	3.0 (-0.1)	3.4 (-0.1)
Placed in developmental Math ( <i>College level</i> )	3.4 (0.9***)	3.8 (0.7***)
Placed in developmental English ( <i>College level</i> )	3.7 (1.2***)	3.9 (0.8)
Placed in both developmental Math and English ( <i>College level</i> )	3.7 (1.2***)	3.9 (0.8***)

Difference Statistically Significant at \*p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

Table E3: Scholar Satisfaction with Seattle Promise Advising

Average Satisfaction from 1 (Not at all Satisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied)

Scholar Demographics ( <i>Comparison Group</i> )	Average Satisfaction Rating ( <i>Difference from Comparison Group</i> )
BIPOC ( <i>White</i> )	4.6 (0.1)
Black or African American ( <i>non-Black/African American</i> )	4.4 (-0.2)
Non-English Primary Language ( <i>English Primary Language</i> )	4.6 (0.1)
First Generation Scholar ( <i>non-First Generation</i> )	4.4 (-0.3**)

Difference Statistically Significant at \*p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

Table E4: Seattle Promise Advising Support Gains by Race/Ethnicity

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  Because of Seattle Promise...	BIPOC Respondents	White Respondents
	Numeric Likert Scale Average (1=Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
I am more aware of resources available to me on campus.*	3.8	3.4
I have a better understanding of my personal and academic strengths.**	3.8	3.4
I have a better understanding of my career goals.	3.8	3.5
I feel more prepared for the rest of my college and career journey.	3.7	4.0

Differences statistically significant at \*p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

Table E5: Seattle Promise Advising Feedback, First-Generation Scholars

Thinking about your experience with Seattle Promise Advising, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	First Generation Scholars	Non-First Generation Scholars
	Numeric Likert Scale Average (1=Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
My advisor is available when I need support.***	4.0	4.3
My advisor makes me feel comfortable talking about support I need.***	4.1	4.5
When I meet with my advisor, they have enough time to help me with all of my questions.***	4.0	4.5
I feel like my advisor cares about me personally.**	3.9	4.3

\*Statistically significant at p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

Table E6: Seattle Promise Advising Feedback, Black/African American Scholars

Thinking about your experience with Seattle Promise Advising, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Black or African American Scholars	Non-Black/African American
	Numeric Likert Scale Average (1=Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
My advisor is available when I need support.	4.0	4.3
My advisor makes me feel comfortable talking about support I need.*	4.0	4.4
When I meet with my advisor, they have enough time to help me with all of my questions.**	3.9	4.3
I feel like my advisor cares about me personally.	3.9	4.4

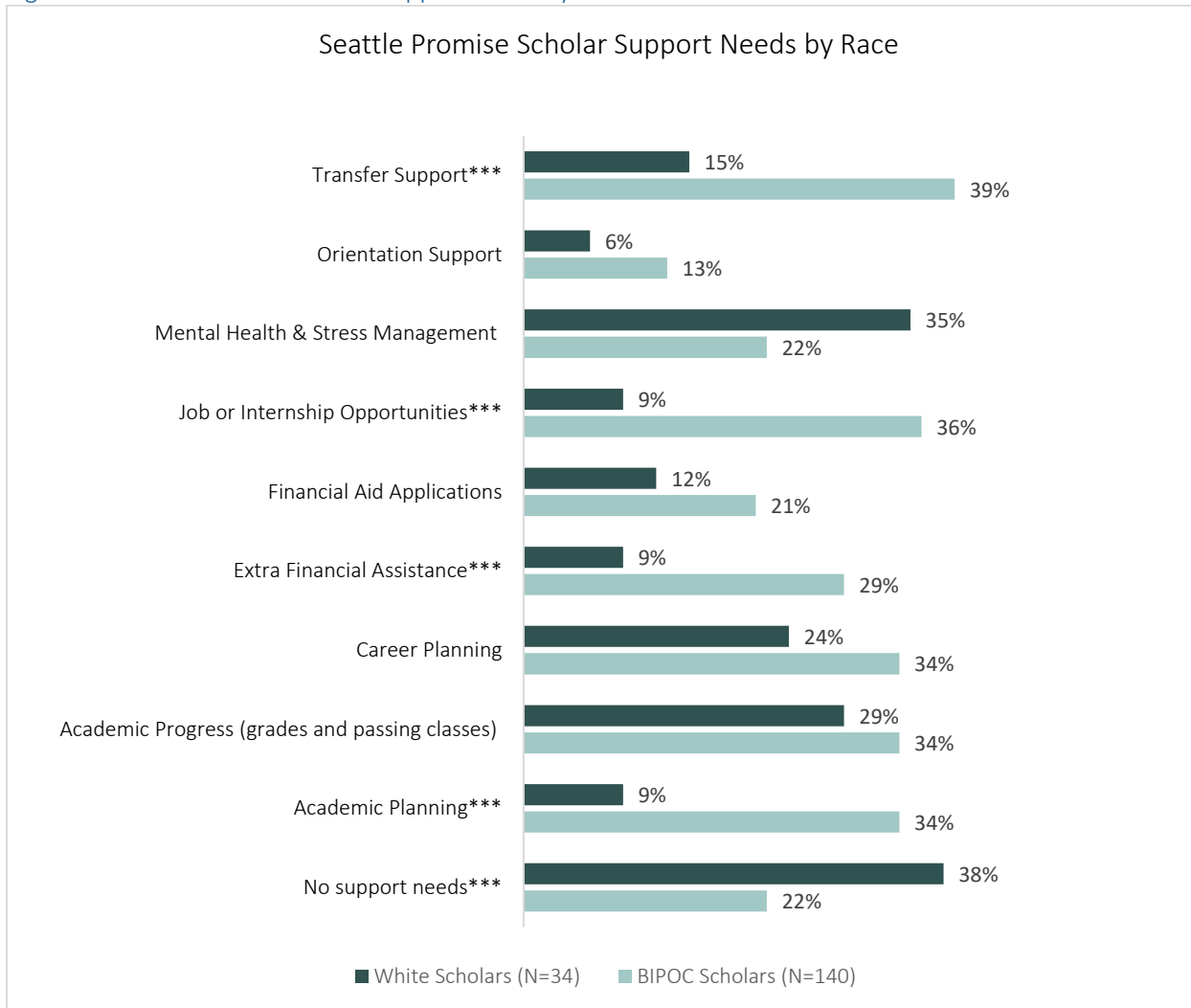
\*Statistically significant at p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

Table E7: Summary of Differential Scholar Support Needs by Race, Primary Language, First-Generation Status

Scholar Demographics (Comparison Group)	Areas where group reported needing support at a higher rate than comparison group*
BIPOC scholars (White scholars)	Academic Planning, Transfer Support, Job and Internship Opportunities, Extra Financial Assistance
Non-English Primary Language (English Primary Language)	Transfer Support, Financial Aid Applications
First Generation scholars (Non-First-Generation)	N/A

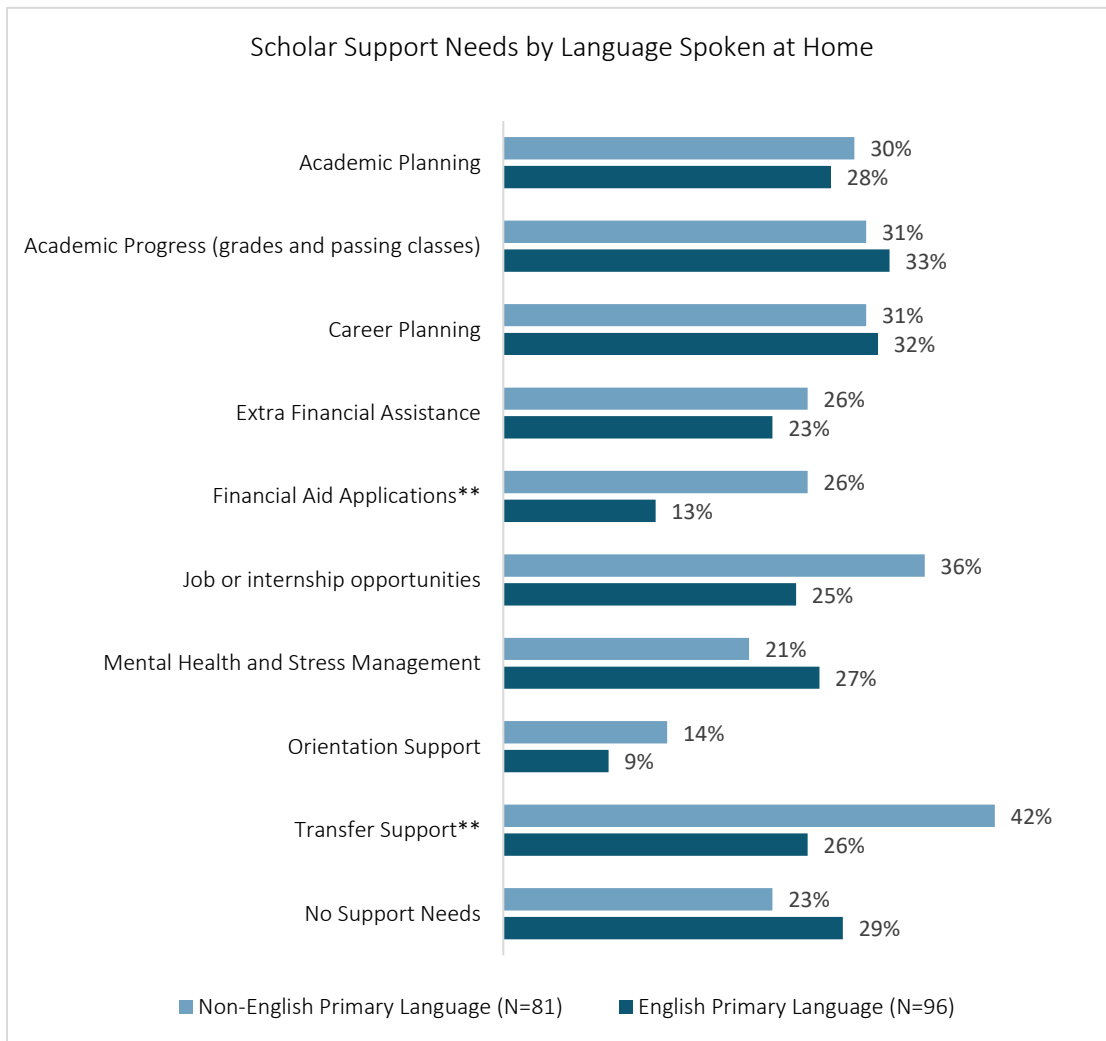
\*Differences are only included here when statistically significant at a minimum of  $p < 0.10$

Figure E2: Seattle Promise Scholar Support Needs by Race



Statistically significant at \* $p < 0.10$  \*\* $p < 0.05$  \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Figure E3: Seattle Promise Scholar Support Needs by Primary Language Spoken at Home



Statistically significant at \*p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

## F: Scholar Exit Survey Results

The tables below include select results from the Exit Survey. Due to the low response rate and several questions relying on skip logic, only questions that received 10 responses are included. In addition to the feedback provided below, some exiting scholars provided open-ended feedback about their experience.

*“It was a rocky and frustrating ride, but I truly appreciate everything that was given to me as an opportunity, and I know for sure that this is something that I won’t be able to obtain again.”* – Exit Survey Respondent

Table F1: Reasons Scholars Exited Seattle Promise

What is the main reason you are not going to be in Seattle Promise anymore?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
I lost my Seattle Promise scholarship because I missed an eligibility requirement.	10%	1
I finished my 90 credits of Seattle Promise but still need to take more classes.	-	-
I graduated.	10%	1
I am transferring early.	-	-
I would prefer to be a part time student.	-	-
I need to take a break from school for financial reasons.	10%	1
I need to take a break from school for personal reasons.	60%	6
I decided I do not want to attend college right now.	10%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

Table F2: Exiting Scholar plans after leaving Seattle Promise

What are your plans for after you leave Seattle Promise?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Keep taking classes at the college I am attending now.	10%	1
Transfer to a different 2-year college		
Transfer to a 4-year college/university	10%	1
Work instead of going to school	60%	6
Join the military	-	-
Take a break or gap year from school	10%	1
I’m not sure	10%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

Table F3: Exiting Scholar Satisfaction with their Seattle Promise Experience

Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience as a Seattle Promise Scholar?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Very satisfied	20%	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20%	2
Somewhat satisfied	30%	3
Very dissatisfied	30%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

Table F4: Exiting Scholar Satisfaction with their Retention Specialist

How satisfied were you with the support you received from your Seattle Promise Advisor (Retention Specialist)?	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Very satisfied	80%	8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10%	1
Very dissatisfied	10%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

Table F5: Retention Advising Feedback

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Percent agree or strongly agree	Number
I felt comfortable going to my advisor with questions.	90%	9
It was easy to get in touch with my advisor.	70%	7
My advisor cared about my success.	70%	7
My advisor was helpful.	80%	8



# APPENDIX G: Scholar Focus Group Highlights

Figure G1: Scholar Sentiments about Retention Advising, Fall 2020 Scholar Focus Groups

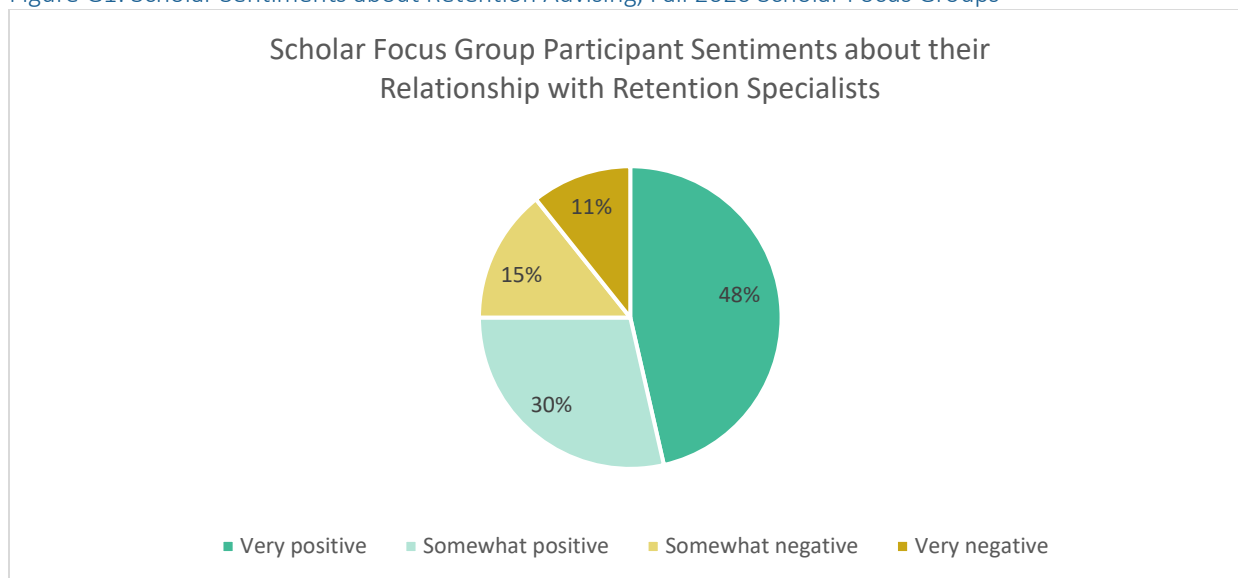


Table G1: Scholar Sentiments about Retention Advising, Fall 2020 Scholar Focus Groups

Overall Sentiment about Promise Advising	Number of Focus Group Participants	Percent of Focus Group Participants
Very positive	13	48%
Somewhat positive	8	30%
Somewhat negative	4	15%
Very negative	3	11%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table G2: Themes from Scholar Focus Groups: Access to Retention Specialist Support

Degree of ease of accessing Retention Specialist support	Details	Number	Percent
Easy to connect	Scholars found it easy to contact and meet with advisor	6	30%
Hard to get in touch	Scholars who either referenced generally slow response times, couldn't get an appointment early enough to handle pressing issues, or hadn't heard back from their Retention Specialist at all.	12	60%
Completely disconnected	Scholars who didn't know who their Retention Specialist was.	2	10%
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>	

Table G3: Themes from Scholar Focus Groups: Scholar Needs & Suggestions

Themes in scholar needs and suggestions to improve their Seattle Promise experience.

Need or Suggestion Theme	Details	Number of Scholars	Percent of Scholars*
Advising Program Logistics	Scholars recommended logistical improvements such as streamlining and reducing the number of emails from Seattle Promise, soliciting scholar feedback to make workshops or group advising more relevant to scholar needs, and introducing a community discussion tab on Canvas for scholars to connect with peers about Promise-related questions if Retention Specialists weren't available.	9	33%
More Advising Support	Scholars expressed wanting increased responsiveness from Retention Specialists, more available advisors, or opportunities to meet with Retention Specialists more frequently throughout the quarter.	9	33%
Full-time requirement flexibility	Allowing scholars to reduce their course load when needed to prioritize academic progress or deal with temporary personal/financial concerns, or allow scholars to spread their 90 credits across two years including summer quarter.	7	26%
More Transfer Support	Scholars expressed a need for more specialized and in-depth support with the transfer process, and suggestions included 1) Retention Specialists or transfer advisors with knowledge of specific fields of study who could help scholars make informed choices about transfer institutions and degree programs, 2) Direct connections or collaborations with advisors from transfer institutions to help understand degree-specific transfer requirements, 3) More in-depth support with applications (personal essays and other paperwork), and 4) clearer options for transfer planning earlier on in their college career.	6	22%
Mental health/personal support	Comments in this category mentioned struggling with stress or mental health and either wanting more informal support with self-care and stress management from Promise or wishing there were more readily available counselors when they received a referral.	5	19%
More than 90 Credits	Scholars expressed a need for more than 90 credits to enable scholars to both explore their career interests and complete a degree, and to allow enough credits for degree completion in cases where scholars relied entirely on Promise for college access.	5	19%
Summer quarter coverage	Scholars mentioned paying out of pocket to take summer courses in order to meet transfer requirements or stay on track to complete a degree	4	15%

	in two years, and wanted the option to use Promise credits for summer courses.		
Internship Program	Scholars who had participated in the internship program mentioned that there were very few companies and industries available and limited support with navigating the interview and placement process. Scholars suggested expanding the program and making it more equitable by supporting scholars through the interview process, or generally providing more support with career development and links to internships.	4	15%
Pathway back	Scholars shared hardships experienced by peers who lost their scholarship and couldn't return and recommended a pathway back or short-term leave options for scholars with special circumstances that helped them retain their scholarship.	3	11%
Education & Career Planning	More support with education planning, especially comprehensive planning related to exploring professional skills or connecting to long-term transfer and career goals.	3	11%
Extend to 4 years	Scholars who recommended extending financial support to 4 years mentioned that some scholars couldn't find funding for four-year degrees and relied on the support.	2	7%
Other	Other suggestions included wanting opportunities to connect socially, recommending that Promise promote the program more to high school students.	8	30%

\*Percent of focus group participants providing suggestions related to each topic. Percentage totals exceed 100%, because some scholars made more than one suggestion.